Visions of Unity:
Philosophical Realism in Late Fourteenth-Century
English Dream-Vision Poetry

by

Ryan Allen

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Abstract

Over the past half-century literary critics have frequently depicted late fourteenth-century Middle English poetry, including dream-vision poetry, as endorsing nominalism. Scholars defending this claim have often started from a construal of nominalism now considered obsolete, yet it remains commonplace to find authors including Chaucer and Langland described as affirming nominalist views. This is unfortunate, for it is now known that late fourteenth-century English philosophers normally rejected nominalism. To the contrary, especially extreme forms of realism, the position opposed to nominalism, became preponderant. This thesis aims to restore late fourteenth-century English dream-vision poetry to its correct intellectual context. More fully, it contends that taking realism to underwrite the dream visions Pearl, Langland’s Piers Plowman, and Chaucer’s House of Fame unlocks insights foreclosed by the assumption that these poems presuppose nominalism.

This thesis first clarifies the character of realism and nominalism in fourteenth-century England. Realism and nominalism have been mistaken for theological outlooks, and nominalism has been equated with skepticism. But medieval nominalists did not advocate skepticism, and realism and nominalism are fundamentally philosophical stances. I show that realism and nominalism centre
on incompatible views about how language is related to reality and that, secondarily but not less importantly, realism and nominalism entail incompatible views about whether or not individuals are metaphysically interconnected by common properties. Another position, idealism, also enters the debate insofar as realists held that nominalism leads to idealism. I then turn directly to *Pearl*, *Piers Plowman*, and *The House of Fame*. My readings of *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* propose that they present, respectively, heavenly delight and human nature in a realist light—i.e., as common properties. My reading of *The House of Fame* offers that this text casts nominalism as leading to idealism. All three interpretations further understand these works’ authors, like contemporaneous realist philosophers, as deeming realism essential for ascent to the divine. Realism emerges as an important underpinning of poems which, by virtue of this realist basis, I consider *visions of unity*. 
For my forever loved Hermes Trismegistus, longest-tailed and softest-bellied Pharaoh of Felines, whose wise, purrfect whiskers, throughout all the years of this project, infallibly pointed the way.
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INTRODUCTION

Philosophy and Poetry in Fourteenth-Century England

Medieval poets, like poets of all periods, were not normally philosophers. Their project was not scientific, but imaginative. Nonetheless, James Wimsatt rightly notes “that at any particular time literature and philosophy do not float free of each other” and that, furthermore, there existed “a particularly solid basis for the connection in the fourteenth century, when philosophical studies were basic in advanced education and major philosopher-theologians like Walter Burley and John Wycliffe were prominent public figures” (“John Duns Scotus” 633). In fact, authors writing in English in the late fourteenth century appear especially likely to have been aware of the major scholastic issues of the day, including philosophical and theological issues, since most vernacular poetry composed under Richard II (1377–99) was “produced by university-trained scholars” or at least “by men familiar to some degree with the language and topics of the schools” (Courtenay, Schools 374). Additionally, although almost nothing is known of the Pearl poet,¹ several studies have attested to William Langland’s familiarity with contemporaneous university thought,² while

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¹ Israel Gollancz famously speculated that the Pearl poet may have been Ralph Strode (46–50). He suggested that the Strode to whom Chaucer dedicates Troilus and Criseyde was a poet as well as a philosopher, and added that political vicissitudes in which Strode was involved may have given rise to St Erkenwald, which, for Gollancz, was written by the Pearl poet (40–1). However, Gollancz’s identification of the Pearl poet with Strode has found little support. In the absence of robust evidence regarding the poet’s identity, we must probably rest content with general observations. For instance, “most scholars” now agree that Pearl was written quite late in the fourteenth century, “during the later years of Richard II’s reign (1377–99)” (Meyer 138), and it is probable that “the author of Pearl was an inspired participant in the court culture of Richard II” (Meyer 156). Thus the Pearl poet likely “belonged to a cultural orbit” similar to Chaucer’s (Spearing, Dream-Poetry 111). Philip O’Mara goes so far as to claim that the poet “spent his youth” in the household of Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham 1333–44, to which philosophers including Thomas Bradwardine, Thomas Holcot, and Richard FitzRalph belonged (102). Whether or not O’Mara’s thesis is valid, the poet does seem to know something about scholastic thought or method, for his character the Pearl maiden, according to J. J. Anderson, “adopts techniques of scholastic analysis” in her theological discussions (33).

² For example, on the basis of Langland’s “conception of the human soul” and free will (“Langland” 134), A. V. C. Schmidt affirms that Langland “was in contact with the philosophical speculation of his day” (“Langland” 149).
Geoffrey Chaucer—who names the fourteenth-century realist philosopher Thomas Bradwardine in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (3242); dedicates *Troilus and Criseyde* to the “philosophical” realist Ralph Strode (5.1857), a friend of Chaucer’s also amicable with the realist philosopher Wyclif; and was himself “employed by John of Gaunt during the early 1380’s” alongside Wyclif, with whom he “might have exchanged ideas” (Eldredge, “Poetry and Philosophy” 449)—undeniably had both interest in and access to the philosophical currents of his time.

*Again,* John Bowers, discerning in *Piers Plowman* “the inflammatory [theological] questions debated in the schools” (12), finds that Langland “shows at least an arm’s-length acquaintance with the major scholastic controversies of his day” (21), even if he “did not climb to the highest rung of the university ladder” (20). Bowers thinks it most likely that Langland attended a cathedral school and—effectively agreeing with W. A. Pantin’s contention that university topics reached cathedral schools though cathedral schools’ recruitment of Oxford scholars (112–7)—suggests that, “in a sort of ripple effect, scholastic controversies might have emanated from the epicenter at Oxford until reaching the cathedral schools throughout England” (21). Others scholars also link Langland, in one way or another, with English universities. William Courtenay sees “[f]amiliarity with Oxford” in passages of *Piers Plowman* as indicative of Langland’s having been “influenced” by Oxford’s “personalities and ideas far more than has been recognized,” although he stops short of declaring that Langland was university-trained (Schools 376). He adds that “it would have been unlikely… for any observant person not to have brushed the edges of scholastic debate” (Schools 378), and thus prompts Denise Baker, in her review of *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England*, to conclude that “even if Langland never attended university, he had sufficient opportunity to be introduced to the issues and methods of English scholasticism” (158). Nicholas Orme infers, from academic terminology and allusions to particular scholastic positions in *Piers Plowman*, that Langland “certainly shared in the world of university learning” (“Langland” 261), even though Langland also criticized that world (“Langland” 265–6). And Gervase Mathew, effectively concurring with Orme that Langland “writes in the university categories of the ‘quaestio’, the ‘distinctio’ and the ‘quodlibet’,” not only confirms Langland’s connection to a university, but goes on to posit actual university attendance: Langland “must have been trained in the schools,” Mathew tells us, very “possibly at Oxford” (86). More recently, Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway have contended that Langland’s “reflections on astronomy as a kind of divine mathematics point to his likely awareness of the so-called ‘Oxford Calculators’ associated with Merton College—Bradwardine, William Heytesbury, John Dumbleton, Walter Burley, and Richard Swineshead” (158), adding that Langland imaginatively “elaborates some of the fundamental ideas that developed vigorously in the late medieval universities” (159). And most speculatively, David Fowler takes the “apocalyptic ending of *Piers the Plowman*” and the “anti-mendicant” views it embodies to reflect “the events of the long hot summer of 1382 at Oxford, where a battle between the seculars and the regulars was fought for the issue of academic freedom…” sparked by the condemnation of Wyclif’s opinions in the Blackfriars Council of late May, 1382” (715). Setting the poem in this context, Fowler determines that Langland “was a deeply committed member of the arts faculty in their struggle with the friars,” staunchly situated on the pro-Wyclif side of the debate (718).

3 As we shall see in Chapter 1, moderate realism lost ground to extreme realism in fourteenth-century England after William of Ockham’s critique of John Duns Scotus. William Courtenay’s portrayal of Strode as a “strong realist” (Ockham 125) thus seems more plausible than Rodney Delasanta’s description of Strode as a “moderate realist” (“Chaucer and Strode” 216). Whatever form of realism he embraced, however, Strode was certainly a realist.

4 Wyclif and the Strode disagreed on several religious topics (e.g., predestination and the right role of the clergy), as appears from Wyclif’s “Respioniones ad argumenta Radulfi Strod.” However, Wyclif’s naming Strode an “amicus veritatis” (“Respioniones” 175) and a “magister reverende et amice precariousime” (“Respionio” 398) convincingly attests to the “friendly” nature of their relationship (Benson 1058; Bennett, “The Men of Merton” 64).

5 Orme cites the “tradition that [Chaucer] attended Oxford himself” but admits that such a claim remains “unproven” (“Chaucer” 50). He also notes that Chaucer’s “son Lewis was sent to study” at Oxford and that Chaucer was familiar “with the topography of both Oxford and Cambridge” (“Chaucer” 50). In any case, J. A. W. Bennett—who suggests
No fourteenth-century philosophical topic surpasses, in either importance or visibility, those over which realists and nominalists contended. Against a nominalist faction that included William of Ockham, Robert Holcot, and Adam Wodeham—who, although no longer believed to comprise a uniform school of thought, alike rejected real (i.e., mind-independent) universals, admitted only two real Aristotelian categories, and denied that mental sentences name real states of affairs—such philosophers as Walter Chatton, Burley, Richard Brinkley, Wyclif, and the Oxford Realists influenced by Wyclif lined up on the side of realism. In broad strokes, much of this has long been known. Yet many of the picture’s particulars have emerged only gradually, especially since the 1980s, and their revelation has necessitated considerable revision of prior scholarly opinions. As Paul Spade remarks, “it was only with the edition and simultaneous English translation of his Tractatus de universalibus in 1985 that Wyclif’s metaphysical views began to be seriously treated at all” (“The Problem of Universals” 112). Shortly thereafter, William Courtenay’s 1987 Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England demonstrated the falsity of the “standard
assumption throughout the first half of [the twentieth] century that many, perhaps most, Oxford scholars in the two generations after Ockham were influenced by Ockham and that nominalism, initiated by him, was the prevailing current of thought” (216). Courtenay firmly established that nominalism “was hardly dominant” in England even at its height in the second quarter of the fourteenth century, and moreover that it decisively “lost out to realism” after 1350 (Schools 218).

Historians have subsequently confirmed Courtenay’s conclusions. Ian Levy argues that “realists long formed the majority at fourteenth-century Oxford” and that “realism continued to dominate the scene in Wyclif’s… day,” i.e., in the late fourteenth century (John Wyclif 48). J. Catto states that the “logicians of Wyclif’s and the previous generation, together with such senior theologians of his youth as Nicholas Aston, had on the whole professed or implied a realist position on universals” (192). Alessandro Conti, whose work on Wyclif, Burley, and the Oxford Realists has contributed invaluably to present understandings of fourteenth-century thought, maintains, against nominalism’s once-alleged eclipse of realism, that most medieval philosophers after Ockham were firmly “convinced that realism as a whole… was defensible” (“Categories” 380–1). Laurent Cesalli attests to realism’s post-1350 intellectual hegemony in England when he states that Brinkley “survit… au nominalisme de milieu de siècle” (Le réalisme 241). (Indeed, only the fact that realism displaced nominalism in the second half of the fourteenth century in England can explain why Brinkley, after 1350, allows common terms to stand for real

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9 Stephen Knight succinctly expresses the assumption to which Courtenay refers: “By the end of the 14th century,” he declares, “there were very few universities in Europe which were not dominated by nominalist masters” (40). Knight’s “Chaucer—A Modern Writer?” (1965) may represent the first instance of the literary-critical paradigm known as “literary nominalism,” to which we shall shortly turn. Yet even as late as 1992, Delasanta still insists that, “[b]y the late fourteenth century, the nominalism of William of Ockham had overwhelmed both Augustinian exemplarism and Thomistic moderate realism” (“Nominalism” 124).

10 Conti mentions the “noteworthy exception of Ockham’s followers, such as John Buridan, Albert of Saxony, Henricus Totting de Oyta, and Marsilius of Inghen” (“Categories” 380), but it should be remarked that all of the “followers” Conti names are Continental rather than English philosophers.
“as though the issue... was not problematic” [Fitzgerald 20].11) And Zénon Kaluza concurs, finding that “the mainstream of English philosophy after 1350 was realist” (430). Kaluza observes that, in particular, “the University of Oxford became an important centre for realist philosophy” after 1349–50 (427), and he adds that, “as a general rule,” English thinkers in the second half of the fourteenth century broadly “rejected Ockham’s teaching” (430).

Thanks to the labours of these and other historians of philosophy, we are now uniquely well positioned to appreciate the contours of late-fourteenth-century England’s philosophical climate, and consequently to assess the era’s poetry against this philosophical backdrop. Accordingly, the current study—proceeding from the fact that the “spirit of the age in England was clearly in the direction of realism” and heeding Courtenay’s observation that contemporaneous philosophical influences on late fourteenth-century English poetry “should probably be sought in realism” (Courtenay, Schools 379)—explicates late-fourteenth-century English poetry in terms of philosophical realism. More precisely, it focusses on dream-vision poems: Pearl, Langland’s Piers Plowman, and Chaucer’s House of Fame. By contrast with the literary-critical paradigm now called “literary nominalism,” which pursues “the project of explicating medieval poetry in terms of nominalism” (Watts and Utz 147), the present approach may be named “literary realist.”

In fact literary realism can already claim several exponents, including Wimsatt, Carolynn Van Dyke, Gerald Morgan, Edgar Laird, and Robert Myles.12 Nonetheless, it remains a comparatively

11 Fabienne Michelet and Martin Pickavé point out that “Brinkley’s realist perspective can... be seen in his treatment of the semantics of propositions. Unlike nominalist philosophers, he denies that that which is signified by a proposition (significatum propositionis) can simply be reduced to the ‘significates’ (significata) of a proposition’s constitutive parts (e.g., subject and predicate)” (5, italics theirs).
12 Wimsatt (“John Duns Scotus, Charles Saunders Peirce, and Chaucer’s Portrayal of the Canterbury Pilgrims”), Morgan (“The Universality of the Portraits in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales”), and Laird (“Grosseteste, Wyclif, and Chaucer on Universals”) focus exclusively on Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales. Van Dyke, in
The current study represents the first thoroughly literary-realist reading of late-fourteenth-century English dream-vision poetry. Hitherto, a few scholars have explicated one or more dream-vision poems in “mixed” manners, that is, as resonating with realism to some extent and with nominalism to some extent. Yet J. Stephen Russell expresses what has remained the dominant critical view: “the late medieval dream vision,” he claims, required “a revolution in metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology”—and “[t]he revolution is nominalism” (109). Many scholars

“The Intangible and Its Image” but especially in her influential study The Fiction of Truth, develops realist readings of medieval allegorical dramas. Robert Myles sets out an ambitious literary-realist agenda in Chaucerian Realism, but unfortunately defines and deploys a sense of “realism” so broad that, according to his way of speaking, even “scholastic nominalists are realists” (6). His work helps to dispel mistakes in previous literary criticism, but fails to elaborate a literary-realist program centered on scholastic realism.

In The Language of Allegory, Maureen Quilligan tells us that “allegory always presupposes at least a potential sacralizing power in language, and it is possible to write and to read allegory intelligently only in those cultural contexts which grant to language a significance beyond that belonging to a merely arbitrary system of signs. Allegory will not exist as a viable genre without this ‘suprarealist’ attitude toward words; that is, its existence assumes an attitude in which abstract nouns not only name universals that are real, but in which abstract names themselves are perceived to be as real and as powerful as the things named” (156). She then applies this construal of allegory to Piers Plowman (and to non-medieval works), at one point speaking pointedly of “Langland’s realism” (165). Much of her argument, however, proceeds by contradistinguishing realism from a view of spoken and written language as “a merely arbitrary system of signs”—and hence by treating realism in general as a position, sometimes called “Cratylic realism” (Myles 2), that late medieval realists no less than nominalists overtly rejected. Accordingly Quilligan, though she does provide some valuable insights into Piers to which we shall return in Chapter 3, does not explicate the poem in terms of contemporaneous realism. Notably, despite her mention of “universals that are real,” she does not explain how acceptance of real or mind-independent universals illuminates any element of Piers.

Jay Ruud argues that Chaucer’s Parliament of Fowls contains both realist and nominalist elements and that, on balance, “Chaucer the poet doesn’t tell us” which philosophical paradigm he prefers (27)—but merely “presents us with the alternatives” (27). Reaching a similar conclusion, Laurence Eldredge, in “Poetry and Philosophy in The Parlement of Foules,” admits that Chaucer “is moving toward a position of moderate realism” in the Parliament of Fowls (459). However, Eldredge stops short of affirming that realism underpins the Parliament, holding instead that the poem’s “inconclusive nature” reflects the poet’s hesitation between realism and nominalism (“Poetry and Philosophy” 459). Eldredge also reads the House of Fame in a mixed manner in “Chaucer’s Hous of Fame and the Via Moderna”; cf. footnote 4 of Chapter Four. Similarly, Delasanta finds a “tension” between realism and nominalism in Chaucer’s works, including Chaucer’s dream-vision poems (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 160). Delasanta even suggests that Chaucer may feel a certain “sympathy” for Wyclif and the Lollards (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 159). Yet despite this, he ultimately believes that Chaucer tends mainly in the direction of nominalism, and accordingly Delasanta tells us that “universal types do not readily emerge” in Chaucer’s poetry (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 149). Finally, Barbara Newman applies her intuition “that medieval allegory—not always and everywhere, but more often than not—had its grounding in philosophical realism” (God and the Goddesses 30) to certain personification figures in Piers Plowman (especially Lady Holy Church, whom she numbers among the figures in medieval literature meeting “most or all of the criteria for Realistic or Platonic personification” [God and the Goddesses 35]). Nevertheless, Newman does not explicate, or suggest an explication, of Piers Plowman in consistently realistic terms. To the contrary, she cites James Paxson’s description of personification in Piers as nominalistic and replies: “While I see elements of both forms of personification in Langland, I would agree that the non-Realist type predominates” (God and the Goddesses 339).
have examined Chaucer’s dream-vision poems, and in particular *The House of Fame*, literary-nominalistically,\(^{15}\) while others have asserted *Piers Plowman*’s affinity with nominalism;\(^{16}\) for its part, *Pearl* has yet to be explicated either in terms of realism or in a “mixed” way.\(^{17}\) At least one critic has read late fourteenth-century English dream visions *in general* in terms of nominalism.\(^{18}\) And even Kathryn Lynch, who holds that *high* medieval dream-vision poetry presupposes “a philosophically realist paradigm” (*Dream Vision* 16), approaches later medieval dream visions nominalistically.\(^{19}\) By placing *Piers Plowman*, *Pearl*, and *The House of Fame* in a historically accurate philosophical context and analyzing them accordingly, then, the present project hopes both to militate against mistaken impressions created by previous scholarship and to illuminate key aspects of these works—e.g., the status of the pearl of price in *Pearl*, and of humanity in *Piers Plowman*, as real universals; the nightmarish evaporation of objective truth and knowledge in *The House of Fame*. These topics comprise the central subjects of Chapters Two through Four.

Chapter One lays the groundwork for Chapters Two through Four by examining the nature of realism and nominalism in fourteenth-century thought. Yet even before considering what these philosophical stances *are*, we should specify what they are *not*. First, philosophical realism is not

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\(^{15}\) To offer just one example, Hugo Keiper declares that “Chaucer’s dream visions, but particularly *Parliament of Fowls* and the… *House of Fame*… come very close to” the “hypothetical idea of a nominalist ‘text’” (“‘I wot myself best’” 232). For additional examples, see Chapter Four, especially Section 1. On the contrary, the sole scholar to initiate or even imply a realist approach to *The House of Fame* is Van Dyke, who remarks, regrettably briefly and cryptically, that “Fame is… a constructed universal, made by everyone but controlled by no one” (*Chaucer’s Agents* 48)—a being somehow “unquestionably real” despite its dependence on human innovation (*Chaucer’s Agents* 52)—and furthermore that, by the end of the labyrinth episode, “[flats and soth were not merely fanciful personifications, we realize, but universals: they have acted here the way they always act” (*Chaucer’s Agents* 50, Van Dyke’s italics).

\(^{16}\) Cf. Chapter Three, especially Section 1.

\(^{17}\) Paul Piehler states that the *Pearl* maiden constitutes “a perfect balance between realistic concept and nominalistic actuality,” but does not elucidate this suggestion (162). Keiper suggests the appropriateness of a realist approach to *Pearl*, but does not pursue the idea (“‘I wot myself best how y stonde’” 230–1).

\(^{18}\) McNamara: *Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the “Pearl”*—Poet, Langland, and Chaucer

\(^{19}\) For example, she finds it “hard to see [Chaucer] as an advocate of any kind of pure realism in the *House of Fame*” (*Philosophical Visions* 78), a poem that “becomes the very inverse of the classic dream vision” based on realism (*Philosophical Visions* 62). Lynch even goes so far as to admit her “preference for seeing Chaucer as a nominalist” (*Philosophical Visions* 15).
stylistic realism, i.e., “realistic” or naturalistic, as opposed to idealized, representation of subject matter (though stylistic realism and philosophical realism are of course compatible). The current study does not explore the degree to which medieval dream visions are or are not realistic in this stylistic sense. Second, philosophical realism does not amount to Lollardy—not even in the form developed by Wyclif and promulgated by the Oxford Realists. Wyclif’s realism could stand apart from his heretical religious views, \(^{20}\) and it was in separation from those views that it flourished at Oxford even after Wyclif’s withdrawal from the university in 1381 and after the condemnation in 1382 of some of his positions at the Blackfriars or “Earthquake” Council (Lahey 7). \(^{21}\) Third and most emphatically, philosophical nominalism is a philosophical—not a theological—perspective.

To be sure, medieval philosophy inevitably includes theological aspects; that is well and good. In works of philosophical history from the 1960s and 1970s by or influenced by Heiko Oberman, \(^{22}\)

\(^{20}\) For example, Stephen Lahey shows that Wyclif’s realism—even insofar as it leads to refuting “the possibility of annihilation” (128)—precludes just one way to account for transubstantiation. Another way was closed to him, not in virtue of his realism, but only in virtue of his belief that “time is composed of indivisibles” (Lahey 130). Hence a philosopher could accept Wyclif’s realism, but not his denial of transubstantiation, by rejecting Wyclif’s temporal atomism. Moreover, it appears that the Oxford Realists who followed Wyclif cannot have subscribed to his view of the Eucharist in any straightforward way, inasmuch as, according to Ian Levy, Wyclif’s position on the Eucharist depended on his “theory of predication,” and in particular upon his claim that Christ, at the Last Supper, identified the bread with His body via habitual predication (John Wyclif 252). For as Conti explains, the Oxford Realists, modifying Wyclif’s theory of predication, uniformly rejected habitual predication (“Johannes Sharpe’s Ontology” 161). In this respect as in others, Oxford Realists including “Alington and Sharpe,” who remained “prominent masters in the faculty of arts where Wyclif’s works were standard authorities, differed from his and his [Lollard] followers’ views on religious questions” (Catto 227).

\(^{21}\) As Cesalli says, “Il existe… une tradition wycliffite oxonienne et purement philosophique. Il s’agit de l’école des réalisistes oxoniens dont nous savons… que ses membres ont repris et développé certaines idées du maître anglais” (Le réalisme 314, his italics). It does indeed seem that religious “Wycliffism soon gave up the ghost at Oxford” after the Blackfriar’s condemnation (Lahey 27) (although Wyclif was not officially declared a heretic until “the Council of Constance in 1415” [Lahey 29]): few schoolmen thereafter followed Wyclif in “denying the efficacy of the mass, denying transubstantiation, denying papal authority, and… denying a priest’s capacity to carry out his office should he not be in a state of grace” (Lahey 26). Yet philosophical Wycliffism endured and prospered: Wyclif proved to be “the most influential of the later scholastic realists” (Conti, “Realism” 655), his philosophy exercising “an enormous influence on the forms of later medieval realism” (Conti, “Realism” 657). That Wyclif’s realism remained strong even after its author’s condemnation testifies to its powerful resonance with the philosophical climate of the time.

\(^{22}\) Oberman’s magnum opus is The Harvest of Medieval Theology, but he more explicitly details his notion of nominalism in “Some Notes on the Theology of Nominalism.” In 1989, Courtenay summarized Oberman’s role in the history of philosophy thus: “The historiography on nominalism took an important shift in the early 1960s through the work of Heiko Oberman. Oberman accepted the view that a nominalist movement existed in the late
however, as well as in literary-critical studies inspired by those works,\textsuperscript{23} one encounters a curious beast named “Nominalist theology” (Oberman, “Some Notes” 50). Oberman concedes that the term “nominalism” was “originally… meant to circumscribe a philosophical movement which accepted a divergence of the logical and the ontological order of things” (“Some Notes” 48)—an asymmetry between signs and entities—yet he proposes a novel understanding. For Oberman, nominalism is not essentially a philosophical position at all, but a theological one. Its “hallmark” is “the potestia absoluta-principle” (“Some Notes” 75, Oberman’s italics), or in other words the axiom that the “omnipotence of God… makes deductive theology impossible” and “undercuts any rules theologians want to draw up on the basis of God’s historical acts” (“Some Notes” 51).

Nominalist theology, by emphasizing God’s absolute (and absolutely contingent) power over His

\textsuperscript{23} For example, Baker, who refers her readers to several of Oberman’s works (“From Plowing to Penitence” 717–8), speaks of “a theological dispute waged throughout the fourteenth century between the Augustinians and the Nominalists” (“From Plowing to Penitence” 717). Similarly, Janet Coleman, in Piers Plowman and the Moderni, explicitly follows Oberman’s notion of “nominalism” (197), identifying “the moderni, otherwise known as nominalists or terminists” (21) with advocates of a theological position combining covenantal theology with the views of the “new Pelagians” (22) and centred around “the modern dialectic of the two potentiae: the absoluta and the ordinata” (23, her italics). Cf. also McNamara’s Responses to Ockhamist Theology in the Poetry of the “Pearl”-Poet, Langland, and Chaucer; Richard Utz’s “‘As Writ Myn Auctour Called Lollius’: Divine and Authorial Omnipotence in Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde”; and Sheila Delany’s Medieval Literary Politics. Delany proclaims that, “For the nominalist, not only human will but God’s will too is perfectly free. God’s actions cannot be constrained by what he has already done, or by what he has promised to do. Since God is not bound by any principle or precedent, he could theoretically will other worlds like ours, or the reversal of present moral values, or the opposite of present physical laws. This vision of a pervasively contingent universe is one of the most important contributions of nominalist theory, for it points to a radical revision of traditional relations between humanity and the world, humanity and God” (Literary Politics 40).
ordained power, implies an “attitude of skepticism which leans toward secularization” (“Some Notes” 56), sunders faith from reason (“Some Notes” 57), and stresses the “contingent character of our world” as produced by God (“Some Notes” 65). It stands opposed to a necessitarian or rationalist theology, which, by contrast with nominalist theology, critics have labelled “realist.”

Oberman’s assessment of nominalism as fundamentally theological has not, however, endured among historians of philosophy. In *Schools and Scholars*, Courtenay observes that “Ockham’s theology is not nominalistic but only comfortably compatible with nominalism. Its origin lies in… the creation of a covenantal theology that by Ockham’s time had become favored among the Franciscans, most notably by Duns Scotus,” a realist (210). In other words, Oberman’s so-called “nominalist theology” represents an originally Franciscan stance common in fourteenth-century England—not a specifically or exclusively nominalist one. Again subsequent historians have concurred with Courtenay, and almost no works of philosophical history subsequent to the 1980s attach the label “nominalist” to a distinctively theological view. Accordingly, analyses of

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24 For instance, Utz—who tells us that “the nominalists’ most formidable weapon against rationalistic theories was to demonstrate the utter inadequacy of human rational thought to plumb the mysteries of God’s free will” and that, deploying this weapon, nominalists “cut the central connections high medieval philosophers had developed between earth and heaven” (“Negotiating” 20)—contrasts this theological and anti-rationalistic nominalism with a no-less-theological “realism/determinism/necessitarianism” (“Negotiating” 13).

25 As Michelet and Pickavé remark, “this view… is now considered obsolete among historians of philosophy and theology” (14).

26 By the fourteenth century, some non-Franciscan English thinkers—notably including Holcot, a Dominican—also held (and developed) this theological position. Accordingly, Katherine Tachau, adopting a phrase Courtenay suggests in *Schools and Scholars*, prefers to speak of a “New English Theology” shared by Holcot and many of his contemporaries (“Introduction” 3). Tachau avoids describing the “New English Theology” as nominalist.

27 The sole exception of which I am aware is Louis Dupré’s broad historical study *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (1993). In his (brief) discussion of “theological nominalism,” Dupré, as his endnotes make clear (277), explicitly depends on Oberman. In one endnote, Dupré also mentions a work by Courtenay on divine power (*Capacity and Volition: A History of the Distinction of Absolute and Ordained Power*); however, Dupré admits that this book “came too late” to his attention for him “to fully profit from it” (277). By contrast with historians of philosophy, literary critics have been less willing to detach the name “nominalism” from a fundamentally theological position. To provide just three examples, Delasanta still speaks, in 1992, of “fourteenth-century nominalist theology” and its “emphasis on *potentia absoluta*: that is, on an omnipotent God whose freedom is absolutely unconstrained and subject to no law, not even to his own” (“Nominalism” (209, his italics), while Edward Vasta, in 1998, states that God’s will, at the end of *Patience*, “is free, unpredictable, and uninterpretable—as
fourteenth-century poetry in light of the topic of divine power and radical contingency (possibly) resulting from divine power, while perhaps appropriate in themselves, ought not to proceed under the heading of “nominalism.” The present study does not focus on this topic.

We may add a final caveat. Like “nominalist theology,” philosophical nominalism has often been linked to skepticism—by Oberman, for instance (as noted above), and perhaps most famously by Etienne Gilson. Insofar as nominalism can appear to threaten objective knowledge, there may be some justice to the association—although, as we shall see in Chapter One, it would be more accurate to associate nominalism with idealism, since nominalism seems to endanger objective knowledge or the objectivity of knowledge rather than knowledge tout court. But however that may be, fourteenth-century English nominalists certainly do not endorse skepticism. As Marilyn Adams emphasizes, “Ockham never seriously questioned the possibility of human knowledge in general or of our ability to acquire knowledge of necessary truths and of contingent truths about the physical world and of our own mental acts” (William Ockham 626). He, and those adopting

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free, in other words, as the medieval Nominalists maintained it to be” (“Denial” 27). And as recently as 2001, Jim Rhodes refers to “Ockhamist theology” (3) and, citing Oberman, speaks of “the nominalist anthropology of the via moderna, whereby human beings act ‘as the appointed representatives of God, responsible for their own life, society, and world, within the limits of the covenant stipulated by God!’” (19, his italics).

28 In some cases, “covenantal theology” might offer a more appropriate handle. In others, “Pelagianism” (or “semi-Pelagianism”) might serve (insofar as thinkers stressing God’s absolute power often correlatively insinuated that “man was exalted in the realm of nature, to the point of working his own salvation through the exercise of his free will. Man was seen as caught in the ordinata, within creation, but God was ‘absolutely’ beyond and free from it” [Coleman, Piers Plowman and the Modern 23, her italics]). In fact, some writers have preferred to speak of “Pelagianism” or “semi-Pelagianism,” rather than nominalism, in this context. For instance, see Lawrence Beacons’s “The ‘Pearl’-Poet and the Pelagians” and Carleton Brown’s 1904 study, “The Author of The Pearl, Considered in the Light of His Theological Opinions.”

29 In the chapter of The Unity of Philosophical Experience called “The Road to Scepticism,” Gilson asserts that the “first result” of Ockham’s philosophy “is to destroy, together with the rationality of science, its very possibility” (87) and that “[m]ediaeval thought entered [upon the road to skepticism] as soon as Ockham’s philosophy took deep root in the European universities of the fourteenth century. Scholastic philosophers then began to mistrust their own principles, and mediaeval philosophy broke down” (90). A Thomist realist himself, Gilson may perhaps be best understood as developing an account of nominalism and medieval philosophy from a decidedly realist perspective.
or adapting his nominalist perspective, did not intend to undermine knowledge. But as Richard Lee points out,

one cannot be a skeptic accidentally, nor can one ‘fall into’ skepticism. Rather, skepticism is the positive assertion that the world is not knowable. If one proposes a theory which accounts for knowledge of the world, then even if that theory fails one is not a skeptic but a failure as an epistemologist…. [M]ost, if not all, modern authors who charge medieval nominalists with skepticism mean by this charge that nominalism fails in its epistemological goals and not that medieval nominalists held that the world is in principle unknowable. (4, his italics)

Skepticism, then, was no part of medieval nominalists’ philosophical program. Literary-critical efforts to attribute ‘skeptical’ elements of medieval poems to nominalist attitudes or assumptions are misguided. To the contrary, in fact, those thinkers who have connected nominalism with the destruction of objective knowledge, both in the Middle Ages and more recently, have typically favoured realism and aimed to challenge nominalism. Hence skeptical (or better, idealist) aspects of medieval poems, if related to the debate between realists and nominalists at all, attest, not to nominalist sympathies, but rather to realist antipathy toward nominalism and its supposed results.

Because misunderstandings like those above persist in the literary-critical sphere and continue to cloud the true character of realism and nominalism in the fourteenth century, Chapter One offers a fresh look at the nature and ramifications of the realist-nominalist conflict. This philosophically oriented chapter serves not only to furnish a foundation for the chapters on poetry that follow,

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30 As Claude Panaccio and David Piché, discussing “Ockham’s stance toward skepticism” and the interpretation of Ockham as a skeptic (97), remark, “the current consensus is that the traditional readings of Ockham in the first half of the twentieth century were generally misguided” (98).

31 For instance, John Gardner’s belief that “nominalism… denies that knowledge can be achieved” (Poetry 43) underlies his claim that “Chaucer would make [nominalism] the very heart of his comedy, dramatizing the nominalist position by means of his squinting, dim-witted narrator in the House of Fame or such later ‘unreliable narrators’ as the Physician, Prioress, and Manciple in the Canterbury Tales” (Poetry xvii–xvii). In the same vein, Delasanta repeatedly refers to Chaucer’s “nominalist skepticism” (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 160, “Nominalism” 127). More recently, the misunderstanding of nominalism as skeptical has appeared in Jessica Barr’s Willing to Know God: Dreamers and Visionaries in the Later Middle Ages (2010). Barr speaks of “the skepticism that arose out of Ockham’s views” (239), arguing that Piers Plowman “echoes nominalist concerns regarding the transmittal of knowledge” (240) and in a nominalist fashion implies “the inadequacy of language to signify a shared reality” (240).
but also to display the several stands of the debate—i.e., the questions, such as whether or not universals exist outside of the mind, too often treated in isolation and as if the realist-nominalist controversy hinged on that topic only—as one coherent tapestry. In brief, it elucidates realism as expressing a philosophical vision of unity, and nominalism as expressing a philosophical vision of division, in two related ways. Chapter One thereby positions us, when we turn to dream-vision poems in the chapters that follow, to understand such texts as imaginative visions of unity rooted in the realist philosophical vision.

Chapters Two and Three read *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman* respectively as underpinned by realism. Chapter Two centres on the *Pearl* narrator’s revelation of the blessed, including his daughter, as bound together, like pearls on a string, by supernal joy. More fully, it maintains that the heavenly bliss for which the pearl of price stands in the text is most plausibly taken to represent a common property, i.e., a mind-independent universal. Accordingly, Chapter Two argues that taking *Pearl* to presuppose realism enables a straightforward understanding of the narrator’s vision, and of the poem’s main symbol, unavailable on the assumption that nominalism underwrites *Pearl*. Chapter Three then develops a similar analysis, suggesting that the humanity that shines out in and seems to unite Piers Plowman and Christ over the course of the narrator’s visions is best construed as a common property or mind-independent universal. However, this chapter goes on to propose that, if realism indeed informs *Piers*, then Langland’s personification characters appear to stand for a wealth of entities granted by realists but denied by nominalists—not just common properties, but also, for instance, actions and states of affairs. And in turn, this range of beings, or the symmetry between language and reality that it bespeaks, helps guide the narrator on his quest for beatitude.
(the universal bliss of Chapter Two) through identification with Christ in un tarnished humanity. The poem’s presupposition of realism may thus facilitate the narrator’s visionary journey to God.

Chapter Four brings us to Chaucer’s *House of Fame*. In fact, I think that realism underwrites *all* of Chaucer’s dream visions; however, I have elected to focus on *Fame* because this work, more than any other dream-vision poem of fourteenth-century England, has served as the go-to text for literary-nominalist critics. The argument of Chapter Four is rather different from that of Chapters Two and Three. Here the realist conviction that nominalism entails idealism comes into play, for Chapter Four proposes that *Fame* pokes fun at the nominalist vision of division and the idealism that realists believe follows from nominalism—and in this way, ultimately affirms a realist view. Hence if in *Piers* realism facilitates a visionary approach to God, in *Fame* nominalism undercuts visionary ascent and even, in accordance with idealism, precludes objective truth and knowledge.

The parameters of our project having been sketched, let us now turn directly to philosophical and imaginative visions of unity.
CHAPTER ONE

Realism and Nominalism in Fourteenth-Century England: Two Philosophical Visions

1. Vision of Unity, Vision of Division

At the heart of the controversy between realists and nominalists in fourteenth-century England lie incompatible philosophical views of the relation between language and reality.¹ Here “reality” means the extramental world and its ontological furniture, while, of the three types of language accepted by medieval philosophers—mental, spoken, and written language²—mental language, which is composed of concepts, was of primary interest to both sides. Since spoken and written languages presupposed mental language, they were of secondary concern.³ In the first instance,

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¹ Calvin Normore, in “The Tradition of Mediaeval Nominalism,” argues persuasively that, from the twelfth century through the fifteenth, the clash between realists and nominalists fundamentally involved opposed positions regarding language’s relation to reality. He shows that the key difference between twelfth-century nominalists and twelfth-century realists lies in the fact that nominalists “believe the truth-makers of sentences to be fewer than the sentences themselves,” whereas realists believe that each true sentence mirrors and depends on some extramental thing unique to it (211). Normore then shows that this fundamental opposition in realists’ and nominalists’ views later “reappears in the claim that realists posit as many things as terms while nominalists suppose fewer” (“Tradition” 211). In fact, the claim that language parallels reality distinguishes even latter-day realist positions from those of their nominalist counterparts; for example, in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* Bertrand Russell asserts that “there is an objective complexity in the world… mirrored by the complexity of propositions” (25).

² In the Middle Ages, “most logicians held that there are three kinds of terms” belonging, respectively, to three types of language: “written, spoken, and mental (or conceptual). Concepts or mental terms are the most basic; they signify ‘naturally’. Spoken terms signify only derivatively, by a conventional (*ad placitum*) correlation with concepts; written terms are related to spoken terms in the same way” (Spade, “Semantics” 189, his italics).

³ Some literary critics have regarded the relation between spoken or written language and reality as paramount to medieval realist-nominalist disputes. Julian Wasserman, for instance, rightly identifies “the province which is the ultimate battleground for the philosophical debate” between realists and nominalists as “language,” but wrongly proceeds to specify the language in question as “both written and spoken” (33). In the same vein, Hugo Keiper takes as distinctively “realist” the idea “that verbal signs and language in general are capable of reflecting, and therefore of faithfully representing, the actual structure and set-up of reality, or of certain fundamental aspects of it” (“A Literary ‘Debate’” 47). These portrayals go astray. It would be more accurate to say that, for realists, *mental signs and mental language in general* are capable of reflecting the structure of reality. Spoken and written language lack the same level of isomorphism with reality which mental language enjoys because spoken and written language introduce equivocation (the same spoken or written sign can be imposed to signify multiple things that are naturally
then, realists and nominalists clashed about the relation between our concepts and reality—how
our concepts (mental language) map onto the world outside of the mind. This issue clearly has a
semantic dimension. Yet it also has an ontological dimension, since how our concepts map onto
reality has much to do with what reality contains. In brief, realists, by contrast with nominalists,
believed that our concepts conform much more closely to the world’s ontological contours—and
correlatively, realists maintained that the world contains many more sorts of things.4

Three questions central to the debate help to illustrate realists’ and nominalists’ opposed views of
the relation between mental language and reality and about the sorts of things the world contains.
The questions may be formulated: (1) Do common concepts properly name things?5 (2) Do all of
the following—concepts of substances, concepts of qualities, concepts of quantities, concepts of
relations, concepts of places, concepts of times, concepts of positions, concepts of states,
concepts of actions, and concepts of passions—properly name things?6 and (3) Do mental
sentences, which are complex concepts,7 properly name things? So phrased, these questions draw
attention to the semantic side of the disputes between realists and nominalists. They focus on our
concepts and how they fit the world. But the questions can also be phrased to draw attention to
the controversies’ ontological side: the world our concepts fit. Call anything properly named by a

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4 Unless otherwise indicated, I shall use “thing” in the broad sense of “being” or “entity,” i.e., the sense matching Latin “aliquid” rather than Latin “res.”
5 Cf. Alessandro Conti’s way of framing the “semantic question” about universals: “is there something in re which corresponds to the common terms of our language in the same way as individuals correspond to proper names?” (“Ontology” 137, his italics). It should be noted that at least some realists required only that natural common terms, e.g., “humanity” as opposed to “Torontonian,” properly name corresponding things in re, that is, extramental things.
6 JoëI Biard describes the controversy about categories as concerning “which categories of terms properly and directly correspond to things” (370, my emphasis), i.e., as proper names corresponds to their bearers.
7 Ockham, for instance, indicates that mental sentences are complex concepts: “a proposition [i.e., sentence] that is only conceived is put together out of things conceived or understood, [or of concepts or understandings] of the soul” (Spade, Five Texts 136, first brackets mine and second brackets Spade’s) (“propositio tantum concepta componitur ex conceptis sive intellectis sive conceptibus sive intellectibus animae” (Ord. I d. 2 q. 4 p. 134)).
common concept a “real universal”; any non-empty class containing all and only things properly named by concepts of substances, concepts of qualities, concepts of quantities, concepts of relations, concepts of places, concepts of times, concepts of positions, concepts of states, concepts of actions, or concepts of passions a “real category”; and anything properly named by a mental sentence a “real state of affairs.” We can now ask: (1’) Are there real universals? (2’) Are there ten real categories? and (3’) Are there real states of affairs? However we put the questions, realists in effect answered each affirmatively; nominalists, each negatively.

If realists are right that common concepts; concepts of substances, qualities, quantities, relations, places, times, positions, states, actions, and passions; and mental sentences properly name things, then mental language faithfully mirrors reality to a considerable extent. To clarify, each and every proper name signifies only one thing, and does so in a simple or straightforward way—reflecting its bearer, so to speak, without multiplication or refraction.8 Realists contended that, just like proper names, common concepts; substance-, quality-, quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, or passion-concepts; and mental sentences straightforwardly signify or reflect exactly one thing each. It follows that several linguistic domains stand isomorphically to ontological ones. The domain of common concepts stands isomorphically to a domain of real universals. The ten domains of substance-, quality-, quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts stand isomorphically to ten real categories. Finally, the

8 Marilyn Adams notes that “a proper name signifies only one thing” (“Things” 176). (She adds “per imposition”; however, this qualification applies only to spoken or written names, not to mental ones—since, again, concepts are not imposed at all but signify naturally. We may safely ignore it when considering whether such-and-such concepts properly name.) At the same time, John Boler observes that names, including proper names, signify in a simple or direct way. More precisely, he explains—in the course of discussing Ockham’s distinction between absolute and connotative terms (see Section 2.2)—that only “[t]he simple way absolute terms signify things can fairly be called ‘naming’: absolute terms are common (generic or specific) or proper names” (22). These considerations, together, make it clear that a given proper name signifies exactly one thing and does so in a simple or non-connotative way. I shall understand proper naming in accordance with these considerations throughout this and the subsequent chapters.
domain of mental sentences stands isomorphically to a domain of real states of affairs. All of these conceptual realms parallel regions of reality; overall, extensive symmetry obtains between language and the world. But this can be so only since, realists say, real universals, things of ten real categories, and real states of affairs exist. Ontological richness characterizes realism.

By contrast with realists, nominalists believed that language and reality are markedly distinct—that “language can describe the world without being in any way isomorphic with it” (Normore, “Tradition” 216). Regarding as “one of the most fundamental errors in philosophy the notion that distinctions in concepts must be mirrored by distinctions in reality” (Adams, “Universals” 432), nominalists considered many items in realists’ ontologies spurious, mere products of gratuitous hypostatization. Ontological frugality or parsimony characterizes their own systems: fourteenth-century English nominalists claimed that “unaided natural reason” compelled one to countenance only singular substances, singular qualities, and God (Adams, William Ockham 215). Instead of admitting that there are things “out there” to be properly named by common concepts; quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, or passion-concepts; or mental sentences, they insisted that such concepts signify things either non-uniquely (signifying many rather than one), non-straightforwardly (signifying obliquely or as being certain ways), or not at all.

Realists and nominalists thus upheld incompatible philosophical visions concerning the relation between language and reality. Realists perceived extensive symmetry between language and

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9 Some Continental nominalists also posited quantities; see footnote 33. With respect to relations, Ockham concedes that, in special cases in which “the authority of Sacred Scripture and the Church” conflicts with the conclusions reached by natural reason, “it is necessary to assume that some relations are real things really distinct from absolute things” (Adams, William Ockham 215). However, such instances are rare (and, one cannot help but feel, reluctantly granted) exceptions to Ockham’s overarching ontological program.

10 I do not mean, of course, that realists and nominalists contended that different things connect language and reality, but rather, as said above, that they upheld incompatible philosophical visions about how language maps onto reality.
the world—and indeed, as we shall see in Section 2.3, some even promoted a kind of semantic-ontological unity. To the contrary, nominalists insisted upon considerable asymmetry between reality and language. But this primary difference between realists’ and nominalists’ respective philosophical visions also implies a secondary, and for our purposes equally crucial, distinction. For insofar as realists accepted and nominalists rejected real universals, realists and nominalists defended *incompatible philosophical visions concerning metaphysical interconnection*: realists permitted individuals to conjoin metaphysically by means of common properties, but nominalists did not. To clarify, real universals, if they exist, are properties common to multiple individuals. Some are common natures, like universal humanity, while others are common accidents, such as universal redness. All humans share a common nature, i.e., universal humanity; likewise, all red things join in a common accident, i.e., universal redness. In this way, individuals metaphysically connect or coincide in various respects. Individuals are like metaphysical peninsulas—united by common, metaphysical mainlands although also unique in their own rights. But if real universals do not exist, as nominalists held, then individuals are like metaphysical islands: inasmuch as they have nothing real in common, they are metaphysically isolated and disjoined from one another.\(^\text{11}\)

Let us further explore the two major differences between the philosophical visions of fourteenth-century English realists and nominalists, beginning with how each side saw the relation between language and reality and proceeding to the two camps’ views on metaphysical interconnection.

\(^{11}\) Nominalists as well as realists were still free to maintain, of course, that individuals are metaphysically related to one another in various ways, e.g., causally or by resemblance. Only realists, though, allowed that individuals can be metaphysically connected, in the sense that individuals’ metaphysical make-ups can converge or (partially) coincide. This is the sense in which I will speak of metaphysical connection throughout this and subsequent chapters.
2. Language and Reality

2.1 Real Universals

Realists and nominalists famously parted ways regarding the significance of common terms, and primarily of common concepts. Now a singular concept, of course, is a concept signifying one singular thing (e.g., a concept of this person, Socrates, or a concept of this redness, the apple’s). Yet what does a common concept, a concept undetermined to a this—say, a concept of humanity or a concept of redness—signify? For a realist, a common concept signifies a common thing, a property shared or participated in by multiple singular things (e.g., the humanity of all humans or the redness of all red things). It can seem necessary to posit common things—in other words, real universals—because, after all, common concepts figure importantly in our knowledge. As Paul Spade says, “our knowledge seems to proceed in general terms” (“Introduction” xiv). However,

if knowledge proceeds in general terms, must there not be some general features really common to all the things to which the general term applies? Must there not, in other words, be universals answering to those general terms and concepts? Otherwise, is not our so called knowledge merely a fabrication on our part, an arbitrary, conventional, and ultimately quite subjective grouping without any foundation in reality? In short, does not the objectivity of human knowledge require the existence of real universals? (Spade, “Introduction” xiv)

The realist thus deems real universals indispensable to objective knowledge. To clarify why this is so, suppose I know that Socrates and Plato are human but Brunellus is not. Presumably, in so knowing, I group Socrates and Plato, but not Brunellus, under the common term “humanity”—

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12 Spade regards the denial of real universals as the defining characteristic of nominalism (Thoughts 165). However, he admits that “[n]ominalism is many things for modern-day readers” and that, originally, nominalism may have “had nothing whatsoever to do with universals” (Thoughts 166). He then refers to Normore’s “The Tradition of Mediaeval Nominalism” which, as already noted (see footnote 1), argues that the core difference between medieval realists and nominalists involves their incompatible views of the relation between language and reality. Alain de Libera substantially agrees with Normore when he says that “le problème des universaux n’est pas le seul terrain d’affrontement du nominalisme et du réalisme, mais la nature du différend reste la même: un désaccord profond sur le fondement réel de la connaissance,” i.e., a disagreement regarding the extramental things signified by concepts and serving to found knowledge (La querelle 401, his italics).
or, better, under the common concept of humanity. Moreover, I group truly, because knowledge is factive. Hence Socrates and Plato, but not Brunellus, truly count as human. However, why is this so? In virtue of what do Socrates and Plato truly count as human, while Brunellus does not? In other words, what founds the truth of my knowledge? Two answers seem available. Either the truth in question rests on something extramental—a mind-independent factor bringing it about that Socrates and Plato count as human, although Brunellus does not—or it rests on something mental: my very conceiving of Socrates and Plato, but not Brunellus, as human. In point of fact, nominalists as well as realists wished to embrace the first answer, though in a different way. But realists believed one could not plausibly do so without accepting real universals, and accordingly they held that nominalists, whatever they might claim, were ultimately committed to the second.

On the second answer, my concept of humanity collects and signifies Socrates and Plato entirely in virtue of itself or of my mind. This amounts to the philosophical position which is today called “idealism,” on which significance and truth, and therefore also knowledge insofar as knowledge involves significance and truth, are subjective rather than objective, founded on the mind instead of on the world. If idealism holds, then knowers are, in an important sense, imprisoned in their subjective thoughts, unable to reach through them to the extramental world. Accordingly, if one does not wish to endorse idealism—and medieval philosophers did not—then one must grant the first answer instead. One must admit a mind-independent factor bringing it about that Socrates and Plato count as human though Brunellus does not. But surely, the realist reasons, such a factor

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13 In Laurent Cesalli’s words, “si une position philosophique tombe sous la notion d’idéalisme dès lors qu’elle explique la signification, la vérité, et, dans les cas les plus extrêmes, l’existence même du monde en termes d’entités immanentes (i.e. existant dans l’esprit)” (Le réalisme 422, his italics). This sense of “idealism” should be carefully distinguished from others. In particular, it should not be confused with so-called “Platonic idealism,” i.e., realism positing Platonic Forms or divine Ideas subsisting separately from concrete individuals and from all minds.

14 Assuming there is an extramental world! A wide range of possible idealist positions exists, as is evident from the thought of idealists as diverse as George Berkeley and Immanuel Kant.
can only be a property, humanity, had by Socrates and Plato but not by Brunellus. And if there is such a property, then there is something really common to multiple things—i.e., a real universal.

Realists writing after William of Ockham’s rejection of real universals deployed this very line of thought against him, arguing that the nominalism he advanced and others took up amounted to idealism. As Alain de Libera observes, “Une partie notable des polémiques anti-nominalistes du réalisme tardif tente de faire apparaître, avant la lettre, une dimension idéaliste de l’ockhamisme” (“Questions” 95). For instance, the Oxford Realist John Sharpe contended that, whenever one conceives of multiple things under one “specific concept,” i.e., as members of the same species, those things fall under that concept objectively only in virtue of a “species really in things,” a real universal.  

For if, to the contrary, there were no real universals, then the “intellect would cause

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15 All Sharpe quotations are from his *Quaestio super universalia*, p. 43. The complete argument runs as follows:

Every two persons really agree in some essential thing in which a person and an ass do not agree. This, however, can be nothing other than a most specific species. Therefore there is a species really in things, and, consequently, species are not only signs.

The consequence is clear. And the major premise is proved: a specific concept can naturally be abstracted from any two persons which cannot be abstracted from a person and an ass, but no essential concept can be abstracted from a person and an ass that cannot be abstracted from two persons. Therefore, two persons more agree in reality than do a person and an ass. But this could not be, if they did not really agree in something before such an abstraction; therefore, etc.

The argument is confirmed thus: some things naturally agree specifically before there exists any such intention or sign common to them; therefore, they naturally have a species common to them beforehand, etc. Consequently, such a species is not a sign or an intention. The consequence is clear. And the assumption is proved, because some sign or intention can be common to some things for this reason: because these things really agree in such-and-such a respect. Therefore, specific agreement naturally precedes agreement in a sign or intention.

And this is confirmed thus: because if not, then the intellect would cause the specific agreement. The consequent is false. And the falsity is clear because, if the intellect could cause agreement of this kind, then things different to whatever degree could agree in whatever manner through the operation of the intellect alone. But the consequence is proved because, if things do not agree specifically except because they can be signified by the same specific concept—but such unity of the concept depends on the intellect—then specific agreement, at least, depends completely on the intellect; etc.

([O]mnes duo homines conveniunt realiter in aliquo essentiali in quo non conveniunt homo et asinus; sed hoc non potest esse nisi species specialissima; ergo species realiter inest rebus; et per consequens non sola signa sunt species.

Patet consequentia. Et maior probatur: ex quibuscumque duobus hominibus naturaliter potest abstrahi conceptus specificus qui non potest abstrahi ab homine et asino; sed nullus conceptus potest abstrahi ab homine et asino essentialis quin ille possit abstrahi a duobus hominibus; ergo duo hominibus magis sunt unum ex natura rei quam homo et asinus. Sed hoc non posset esse nisi in aliquo realiter ante talem abstractionem convenirent; ergo etc.)
the specific agreement.”¹⁶ In that case, things would fall under the same specific concept not because of how the world is, but just in virtue of being “signified by the same specific concept—but the unity of this concept depends on the intellect.” In other words, they would fall under it subjectively. It follows that, whenever and insofar as a concept of multiple things as members of the same species figures in one’s knowledge, one’s knowledge would in that case be subjective.¹⁷

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¹⁶ Or as John Wyclif alleges against the nominalists, the “predicability of signs” (Kenny 9) (“praedicatio signorum” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 49]) would be “the reason for the resemblance of extramental things” (Kenny 9) (“causa / convenientia rerum extrarum” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 49]). But Wyclif, like Sharpe after him, adamantly opposes the idealism that he takes to flow from nominalism. For as he explains: “even though no created nature did any thinking, none the less there would be species and genera truly shared by their suppositis; thus it does not depend on any created intellect that it is common to every fire to be fire and so with the other substances” (Kenny 23) (“etsi nulla natura creata intelligere et non eos minus forent species et genera communicata vere suis suppositis, ut non dependent ab intellectu creato quod communde est cilubit igni esse ignem et sic de aliis substantiis” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 3, p. 79]).

¹⁷ To mention one further example, Walter Burley takes it for granted that the absence of real universals would destroy objective knowledge when he straightforwardly concludes, from Aristotle’s assertion that “science is about universals” (Spade, History 79) (“scieniec sunt de universalibus” [Tractatus p. 10; note that Spade translates the plural “sciencie” as the singular “science”]), that “universals have to have being in reality” (Spade, History 79) (“oportet quod universalia habeant esse in rerum natura” [Tractatus p. 10]). His thought is that, since science is about universals, science can be about extramental things only given real universals. If universals were only (or primarily) concepts, science would be about concepts—in which case the objectivity of scientific knowledge would vanish. As we shall see, Ockham does maintain that universals are primarily concepts, so he has to concede that, insofar as science is about universals, science is about concepts. (He says that science is in one sense about the “parts of what is known” [Spade, Five Texts 138] (“partes illius quod scitur” [Ord. I d. 2 q. 4 p. 137]), where “what is known” means sentences, especially mental sentences, the parts of which are concepts—often universal concepts. In “this sense, real science does not have to be about external things” [Spade, Five Texts 138] (“sic non oportet scientiam realem esse de rebus extra” (Ockham, Ord. I d. 2 q. 4 p. 137)). However, he insists that science is not only about concepts. It is also about “what the parts of the known suppose for,” i.e., stand for (Spade, Five Texts 138) (“pro quibus partes sciti supponunt” [Ockham, Ord. I d. 2 q. 4 p. 137]). To this extent, or in this sense, “real
No less than fourteenth-century realists, however, nominalists rejected idealism; they effectively denied that nominalism leads to idealism. Ockham, for example, believed as realists did that individual things fall under common concepts in virtue of extramental factors. He did not think, though, that such factors were universals. Rather, he identified them with the individual things themselves. According to Ockham, that is, individual things fall under common concepts just in virtue of themselves and immediately—not mediately or in virtue of common properties which they possess and which common concepts properly name. For example, the common concept of humanity signifies each and every human: Socrates, Plato, etc. However, it signifies them only because (as a matter of mind-independent fact) Socrates, Plato, etc. are human. To clarify, individual humans do not possess common humanity, for Ockham, since there are no common things. Ockham is adamant that “[e]very thing outside the soul is really singular and numerically

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18 It must be said that, if the literary-nominalist critic Russell Peck is right that “[n]ominalistic thought makes one aware of… the likelihood of one’s being prisoner to his own ideas” (757), then one is reacting to “nominalistic thought” not as a nominalist would, but rather in the manner of a realist—namely, by taking nominalism to lead to idealism. Similarly, despite the literary-nominalist critic John Gardner’s allegation, nominalists did not believe “that quite possibly all truth is relative” or “that quite possibly, there can be, in the end, no real communication between human beings” (Poetry ix). Rather than supposing that one is trapped in one’s thoughts or “prisoner to his own ideas,” cut off from genuine contact with the outer world or objective truth and thus barred from genuine communication with other persons, nominalists as well as realists were sure that our concepts signify things in the extramental world because of those things’ extramental features. For example, Ockham insists that, “where concepts such as ‘man’ are concerned, the fact that Socrates and Plato can be signified by it depends on features they have quite apart from any activity of the intellect” (Adams, William Ockham 114).

19 For Adams and Normore, Ockham’s nominalism amounts to a kind of resemblance nominalism. Adams tells us that Ockham appeals to “comparative similarity” to account for what individuals fall under what common concepts: “Ockham’s proposal is that general concepts such as ‘animal’ and ‘man’ naturally signify the things they resemble most; more precisely and schematically, a general concept C signifies a thing x, if and only if there is nothing else y which C resembles more than C resembles x” (William Ockham 125, her italics). Likewise, Normore asserts that “a sufficient degree of natural similarity between the mental term and what it signifies is a necessary condition for signification on Ockham’s view” (“Ockham on Mental Language” 57).

20 Cf. Ockham’s statement that “one has to grant that the name ‘man’ equally primarily signifies all particular men” (Spade, History 153) (“concedendum est, quod hoc nomen ‘homo’ aequo primo significat omnes homines particulares” [Summa logicae I c.17 p. 54]).
one” (Spade, *Five Texts* 171)—thereby endorsing, with other nominalists, what Joël Biard calls “the ontological thesis of the singularity of being” (666). On this thesis, the world is “radically individual,” devoid of real universals (Maurer 30). Or in Paul Vignaux’s words, the “real appears immediately and entirely singular” (168). Nonetheless, Ockham grants that, as a matter of mind-independent fact, Socrates, Plato, etc. do have each a singular humanity. His position is thus that each and every individual having a singular humanity, and accordingly each human, falls under the common concept of humanity by her- or himself or (what is the same) by her or his own singular nature. And in keeping with this, he claims that Socrates and Plato truly count as human in virtue not of one, but rather two extramental factors: Socrates and Plato themselves.

By contrast, Brunellus, by himself or by his own singular nature, would not count as human.

Because nominalists like Ockham clove to the ontological thesis of the singularity of being, they denied that anything is metaphysically common. On their view, something can be common or universal only in the linguistic sense of being “apt to be predicated of many” (Spade, *History* 148). So only common signs can be called “universal”; as Vignaux says, the universal “is a sign and nothing more” (169). First and foremost, common concepts are universals; secondarily and derivatively, spoken and written common terms are universals, too. To put nominalists’

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21 “[O]mnis res extra animam est realiter singularis et una numero” (*Ord. I* d. 2 q. 6 p. 196).
22 As Ockham succinctly says, “Socrates’ humanity is other than Plato’s” (Spade, *History* 149) (“alia est humanitas Sortis et alia Platonis” [*Summa logicae* I c. 16 p. 55]).
23 Adams makes this equivalence explicit: “if humanity is thought of as a particular thing (Ockham’s own view), it is not one essential part of Socrates as distinct from others; rather the thing that is Socrates and the thing that is his humanity are altogether one and the same” (“Things” 178).
24 Ockham describes Socrates’ and Plato’s specific agreement in humanity thus: “Literally it should not be granted that Socrates and Plato agree in something or somethings, but that they agree by somethings, because they agree by themselves” (Spade, *Five Texts* 181, his italics) (“de virtute sermonis non debet concedi quod Sortes et Plato conveniunt in aliquo nec in aliquibus, sed quod conveniunt aliquibus, quia se ipsi” [*Ord. I* d. 2 q. 6 pp. 211–2]).
25 “nata praedicari de multis” (Ockham, *Summa logicae* I c. 15 p. 48)
26 Ockham explains, “there are two kinds of universal. One kind is a universal naturally, namely, one that is naturally a sign predictable of several [things], in the way (analogously) in which smoke naturally signifies fire, and the groans of the sick [signify] pain, and a laugh signifies inner delight. Such a universal is nothing but an intention of the
position in perspective, medieval realists also admitted that common signs are universals. Yet for realists, common signs, or universals “by representation,”\(^27\) are post rem universals—universals “after the thing,” logically posterior to real universals. Post rem universals represent or name real universals. By contrast, real universals are in re universals—universals “in the thing.” These real or in re universals, also called universals “by community,”\(^28\) are the universals that realists took to be metaphysically common—and it is these that nominalists denied. Realists furthermore held that post rem universals count as universals only in a derivative and equivocal way, i.e., because they name real universals. As the Oxford Realist William Milverley explains, “the universal by representation… is a universal only equivocally, namely because it signifies a real universal. So too a painted man is not called ‘man’ except because it is a sign of a true man.”\(^29\) Realists’ view of post rem universals as universals in this weak sense only contrasts sharply with nominalists’ view of common signs as the truest—because the only—universals.

The above considerations make plain the difference between realists’ and nominalists’ respective visions concerning the relation between common concepts and things in the world. For realists, each common concept or post rem universal properly names one in re universal. For nominalists,

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\(^{27}\) “repraesentatione” (Wyclif, Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 16)

\(^{28}\) “communicatone” (Wyclif, Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 15)

\(^{29}\) “[U]niversale repraesentatione… non est universale nisi aequivoce, scilicet quod significat universale reale. Sic homo pictus non dicitur ‘homo’ nisi quia signum veri hominis” (Compendium p. 159). Cf. Wyclif: “universals in signs are derived from universals in reality in such a way that there is no such thing as a universal sign except in virtue of a corresponding real universal” (Kenny 89) (“sic ab universalibus ex parte rei capituntur universalia in signo sic quod non est universale signum nisi quia correspondet universali reali” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 9 pp. 204–5]).
though, each common concept immediately signifies not one common, but many singular things. And since common concepts signify non-uniquely, they do not properly name; as Adams notes, “any general term contrasts with a proper name in that it can signify many with equal primacy” (William Ockham 320). Hence the following is clear. For realists, common concepts correlate one-to-one with things. For nominalists, they correlate one-to-many. For realists, symmetry or isomorphism prevails between common concepts and reality. For nominalists, asymmetry reigns.

2.2 Ten Real Categories

Ockham was convinced that, by allowing common concepts to stand asymmetrically to things, he bypassed the apparent need (arising from the concern about idealism) to posit real universals. He thus applied the generally accepted “rule of economy or simplicity of thought”—i.e., that “a plurality should not be posited without necessity” (Maurer 7)—against real universals, slicing them from his ontology as unwarranted baggage. Similarly, Ockham regarded most alleged real categories as superfluous. To clarify, Ockham, and after him other fourteenth-century English nominalists including Adam Wodeham and Robert Holcot, held that the only category-concepts that name things are substance- and quality-concepts. Rather than naming things, on this view, quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts only signify, in different ways, the things named by substance- and quality-concepts: substances and qualities. And correlatively, fourteenth-century English nominalists maintained that quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts “add nothing new to the ontology”

30 “Sometimes called ‘Ockham’s Razor,’ although there is nothing unique to Ockham about it” (Spade, Thoughts 166, footnote), the rule was “in general use by the schoolmen” (Maurer 7).
31 It should be noted that Ockham’s rejection of real universals was not founded solely on his application of the rule of economy of thought. Fundamentally, he considered realist theories of universals unintelligible (Adams, William Ockham 13).
32 Rega Wood explains that Wodeham accepts only substances and qualities (79). Hester Gelber makes the same clear of Holcot (Par. 2.1).
(Spade, *Thoughts* 197). They dispensed with quantities, relations, places, times, positions, states, actions, and passions as so much ontological excess not required in order to evade idealism.\(^{33}\)

The realist-nominalist debate about categories centred on different ways of reading Aristotle. In Chapters Four through Nine of the *Categories*, Aristotle sets forth his “categorical table” (Conti, “A Realist Interpretation” 317) in a way amenable to more than one interpretation. He associates the world’s fundamental ontological furniture with ten most general terms—namely “substance,” “quality,” “quantity,” “relation,” “place,” “time,” “position,” “state,” “action,” and “passion”—or, better, with the corresponding most general concepts. Each of the ten most general concepts defines a hierarchy descending from it with increasing specificity.\(^{34}\) For example, under the most general concept of substance comes the more specific concept of body or corporeity, and under that come still more specific concepts until we reach the most specific substance-concepts, such as the concept of humanity. Both general and specific concepts are common concepts. Below the most specific common concepts come singular concepts, such as that of Socrates’ humanity. And similar hierarchies descend from the other nine most general concepts. The complete taxonomy makes up the categorical table. So far, so good. Yet Aristotle, regrettably, is not very clear about how the ten most general concepts are associated with things. Does each uniquely mark out a basic sort of things, a class ontologically contradistinguished against the other nine? Realists thought so. In their estimation, Aristotle classifies “things… on the basis of ontological criteria” (Conti, “A Realist Interpretation” 317). As Wyclif matter-of-factly asserts, “what Aristotle has in

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\(^{33}\) On the Continent, the nominalist John Buridan thought that reason demanded particular quantities, too (Klima, “John Buridan” 345). All fourteenth-century nominalists, however, concurred in rejecting all creatures other than individual substances, qualities, and quantities.

\(^{34}\) At least according to medieval understandings of Aristotle, under the influence of Porphyry.
mind are extramental realities” (Kenny 11). Nominalists, however, took Aristotle to delineate, not ten classes of things, but only ten classes of signs or ten ways of signifying things—things that might, for their parts, fall into fewer than ten basic classes. For nominalists, in other words, the table classifies “terms on the basis of semantic criteria” (Conti, “Realism” 647).

If the categorical table classifies things, as realists thought, then the world contains substances, qualities, quantities, relations, places, times, positions, states, actions, and passions. So there are things “out there” to be properly named by substance-concepts (e.g., by the concept of this person, Socrates), namely substances, and these things make up one real category: substance.

35 “Intelligit… Aristoteles de rebus extra” (Tractatus de universalibus c. 2 p. 55).
36 Ockham makes this clear, for instance, when he takes the categories to classify answers to ten types of questions that can be asked about things. He explains: “The different questions which can be asked about a substance can be answered by different simple terms, and a simple term falls under a category accordingly as it can be used to answer this or that question about substance. Thus, all such simple terms as can be used to answer the question ‘What is it?’ (asked of some individual substance) fall under the category of substance…. Those which are used to answer the question ‘Of what quality is it?’ (asked of some substance) fall in the genus of quality…. Those, on the other hand, which can be used to answer the question ‘How much?’ (again, as posed of a substance) are contained in the genus of quantity…. But those which can be used to answer the question ‘Of whom?’ or some similar question (for here we have no one general interrogative word) are in the category of relation. Those which can be used to answer the question ‘Where?’ are in the category of where [i.e., place]. However, one cannot answer this question except by means of adverbs and prepositions with their objects…. Likewise, one can respond to the question ‘When?’ only by means of adverbs and prepositions with their objects…. It is precisely such terms which belong in the genus of when [i.e., time]. Likewise, to the question raised by asking ‘What does Socrates do?’, one can respond by way of verbs saying, ‘Warms’ or ‘Walks’. Such parts of speech, then, belong in the category of action. The same sort of account holds for the remaining categories, although there are not general interrogatives appropriate to all the categories because of the poverty of our language” (Loux 130) (“secundum quod ad diversas quaestiones factas de substantia per diversa incomplexa respondetur, secundum hoc diversa in diversis praedicamentis collocantur. Unde omnia incomplexa, per quae conferenientur respondetur ad quaestionem factam per ‘quid est’ de aliquo individuo substantiae, sunt in praedicamento substantiæ… Illa autem, per quae respondetur ad quaestionem factam per ‘quale’ de substantia, sunt in genere qualitatis…. Illa autem, per quae respondetur ad quaestionem factam per ‘quantam’ de substantia vel substantiæ demonstrativis, continentur in genere quantitatis…. Illa autem, per quae respondetur ad quaestionem factam per ‘cuius’ vel per consimile, quia forte ibi deficit nobis unum interrogativum generale, sunt in genere relationis. Illa autem, per quae conferenientur respondetur ad quaestionem factam per ‘ubi,’ sunt in genere ubi; et quia numquam ad quaestionem factam per ‘ubi’ conferenientur respondetur nisi per adverbium vel præpositionem cum suo casuali…. Similiter ad quaestionem factam de substantia demonstrator per ‘quando,’ numquam respondetur nisi per adverbia vel per praepositiones cum suis casualibus…. [P]raecise talia sunt in genere quando. Similiter ad quaestionem factam per hoc totum: ‘Quid facit Sortes?’ conferenientur respondetur per verba, sicut quod caelefactit, vel ambulat. Ideo talia sunt in genere actionis. Et sic proportionaliter est de aliis, quamvis forte propter penuriam nominum aliquando interrogativa propria praedicamentis et generalia nobis deficiant” [Summa logicae I c. 41 p. 116]). Actually, Ockham’s explanation is misleading in two ways. First, abstract qualitative terms, according to Ockham’s own account, signify only qualities, and not substances at all; second, at least some of the ten questions above can be asked meaningfully of qualities as well as of substances (Loux 18).
Likewise, there are also things “out there” to be properly named by quality-concepts (e.g., by the concept of this redness, the apple’s), and these things make up a second real category: quality. Proceeding in the same way with respect to quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts, we arrive, at last, at ten real categories.37

But precisely what substances, for realists, are properly named by substance-concepts, what qualities are properly named by quality-concepts, and so on? Certainly singular substances, qualities, etc.—for example, this person, Socrates, this redness, the apple’s, etc.—are properly named by singular substance-concepts, quality-concepts, etc. Yet realists went further. Since each hierarchy in the categorical table includes common as well as singular concepts, and since realists claimed that common concepts properly name things (see Section 2.1), they held that the common concepts in the table as well as the singular concepts in the table properly name things. Hence the ten real categories contain universal things (real universals) as well as singular things (individuals). And just like the concepts properly naming them, the real universals in each real category range from general to specific.38 Accordingly, each real category is as hierarchical as its matching partition in the categorical table. It follows that the table’s ten linguistic hierarchies stand isomorphically to ten ontological hierarchies, concepts at all levels in each of the table’s

37 It should be noted that, for medieval realists and nominalists both, whatever accidents exist are properly named by abstract rather than concrete signs. For example, Burley’s opinion that “concrete accidental terms, like ‘album’ or ‘pater,’ do not refer to simple objects, but to aggregates compounded by a substance and the form connoted by the term itself,” coincides with standard realist doctrine (Conti, “Ontology” 129, his italics). Moreover for Ockham, the concrete term “white”—unlike the abstract term “whiteness”—would signify not only a (singular) whiteness, but also a substance in which that whiteness inheres (Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 36). In this respect, his nominalist view and the realist view differ only in that (as we shall see) Ockham denies that even abstract accident-terms (except quality-terms) name things.

38 For instance, Burley maintains: “universals—that is, genera and species—are in a category, since in every category there is a most general genus and a most specific species and intermediate genera that are genera and species with respect to different [things], as is clear from Porphyry. But everything in a real category is a real being. Therefore, genera and species… are real too” (Spade, History 79–80, his brackets) (“universalia, videlicet genera et species, sunt in praedicamento, quoniam in omni praedicamento sunt species specialissima et genus generalissimum et genera intermedia, que respectu diversorum sunt genera et species, ut patet per Porphyrium. Sed omne, quod est in praedicamento reali, est ens reale. Et ideo genera et species… sunt encia realia” [Tractatus p. 10]).
hierarchies correlating in a one-to-one manner with things in the world. It further follows that the table, as a whole, mirrors the created world *qua* comprised of these ten ontological hierarchies.

Nominalists would have none of this. On their appraisal, realists’ view of the categories stemmed from “a radically mistaken conception of how our words and the concepts that render them meaningful are related to the things they represent” (Klima, “Ockham’s Semantics” 118–9). Naïvely thinking that each significant concept must properly name something, realists had failed to draw a firm dividing line “between things as they exist in the extra-mental world and the notions and schemata by means of which we grasp and signify them” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 70). They had let concepts in the table spring forth into reality without due rational restraint, and had wound up with overpopulated ontologies. For his own part, Ockham thought that “natural reason will support only a belief in particular substances and particular qualities” (Adams, *William Ockham* 143). Hence on this basis, he admitted only particular substances and qualities. And since he believed that substances and qualities are the only things “out there” to be properly named, he claimed that there are not ten real categories, but just two: substance and quality.

As for the other concepts in the categorical table, Ockham and other fourteenth-century English nominalists maintained that they too signify singular substances and qualities. However, these thinkers alleged that category-concepts other than substance- and quality-concepts do not signify substances and qualities in a purely absolute or straightforward way, and thus do not name them.

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39 Cf. Spade’s comment in “Ockham’s Nominalist Metaphysics”: “Ockham is not at all happy with the practice of metaphysicians who freely form nominalizations out of… ways of speaking and then assume such nominalizations pick out new kinds of entities in the ontology. Their ontologies end up being populated not only by substances and qualities but also by quantities, relations, actions, ‘passions’ (being acted upon), places, times, motions, points, instants, and so on. For Ockham, language is not such a simple and reliable guide to ontology” (103–4).

40 In Adams’ words, “terms in the last eight categories do not,” on Ockham’s account, “signify distinct quantity-things, relation-things, action-things, etc., but substances and qualities different ways” (“Things” 179).
Rather, quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, or passion-concepts signify substances and qualities obliquely, i.e., under eight connotations: as quantified, related, placed, timed, positioned, in a state, active, or passive. And for fourteenth-century English nominalists, this is just what the categorical table classifies—eight basic connotative, and two basic absolute, classes of signs of or ways of signifying substances and qualities.

But nominalists, by reducing the number of real categories, could seem bound for idealism. For suppose I know that Socrates sits instead of stands. Presumably, in knowing this, I truly conceive of Socrates under a certain position-concept, i.e., a concept of sitting. But in virtue of what does

41 Ockham makes it clear that quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts signify substances or qualities obliquely in Book I, Chapter Ten of the Summa logicae, where he distinguishes between absolute and connotative signs. Absolute signs “do not signify some thing principally and another thing (or the same thing) secondarily” (Loux 69) (“non significant aliquid principaliter et alius vel idem secundario” [Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 35]). Whatever an absolute sign signifies, whether one thing or many, “is signified primarily” (Loux 69) (“primo significatur” [Summa logicae I c.10 p. 35]). By contrast, connotative signs do signify something principally and another thing—or often the same thing—secondarily (Loux 70–1) [Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 36]). And because connotative signs have secondary significates whereas absolute signs do not, connotative signs signify obliquely whereas absolute signs do not. To clarify, Ockham explains that a connotative sign signifies whatever it secondarily signifies—in other words, whatever it connotes—“in an oblique case” (Loux 70) (“in obliquo” [Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 36]). (Of course, the Latin cases themselves are features of written and spoken language, but Ockham clearly asserts that, somehow, “case and number belong to mental and spoken names alike” [Loux 53] ("Accidentia communia nominibus vocalibus et mentalibus sunt casus et numeros" [Summa logicae I c. 3 p. 12]).) He gives this example. The connotative sign “continuous quantity” (Loux 71) (“quantitas continua” [Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 37]) may be (nominally) defined as “[a] thing having its parts lying at a distance from one another” (Loux 71) (“res habens partem distantem a parte” [Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 37]). This definition reveals what “continuous quantity” signifies. “Continuous quantity” principally signifies what the definition’s nominative component, “thing,” signifies. It secondarily signifies what the obliquely cased remainder of the definition signifies. But these significates turn out to be the same thing, namely a substance or quality. “Thing” signifies that substance or quality in a direct or straightforward way. The rest of the definition obliquely signifies it as having spread-out parts. Accordingly, Ockham holds “that the concept of quantity is a connotative concept that signifies a substance or quality directly and connotes that their parts exist in a certain way” (Adams, William Ockham 176). And he adds that “those who claim that every entity is either a substance or quality”—as he himself does—“must hold that all the expressions in the categories other than substance and quality,” namely quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-terms or concepts, “are connotative” (Loux 71) (“qui ponunt quod quaelibet res est substantia vel qualitas, habent ponere quod omnia contenta in alis praedicamentis a substantia et qualitate sunt nomina connotativa” [Summa logicae I c. 10 p. 35]). It follows that, on Ockham’s view, quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts signify things obliquely insofar as they connote them or signify them secondarily. Moreover, the things obliquely signify by quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts must always be substances and qualities because again, for Ockham, only these exist.

42 Adams frames the objection that Ockham’s position on categories leads to idealism thus: “If Ockham steadfastly resists any hypostatization of modes of being or how things are, to mirror the various modes of signifying, does he not thereby jeopardize the correspondence theory of truth and render claims that substances and/or qualities are quantified, related, active, passive, etc. arbitrary and subjective?” (“Things” 186).
Socrates fall under this position-concept (and not, for instance, under the concept of standing)? He must count as sitting in virtue either of a mind-independent factor or a mind-dependent one. In the latter case, my knowledge is subjective. But in the former case, Socrates counts as sitting, or falls under the position-concept of sitting, in virtue of something in the world. And what could this be but a position, i.e., Socrates’ sitting itself? The objectivity of my knowledge thus seems to require positions. Similar considerations tend to establish quantities, relations, etc.

Ockham endeavoured to defend his position from idealism by insisting that given substances and qualities fall under given position-concepts, quantity-concepts, etc. in virtue—not of mysterious entities like positions, quantities, etc.—but in virtue of themselves. For example, Ockham would say that, if Socrates falls under the position-concept of sitting, then he does so just because he is sitting. In other words, the world in fact contains things like Socrates which, independently of being thought about, sit or stand, and these sitting or standing things immediately fall under our concepts of sitting or standing. Or to take a further example, if the whiteness of a given wall is eight feet long, then by itself this whiteness (which is a quality) falls under my quantity-concept of being eight feet long. Generalizing the point, substances and qualities, for Ockham, fall under connotative category-concepts if and only if those substances and qualities are certain ways, that is, if and only if they are as connoted to be by those concepts (e.g., sitting, standing, eight feet long). And that is all there is to the matter. There is no need to posit “sittings,” “standings,” “lengths,” and the like, as realists did, to safeguard objective knowledge. It is sufficient that there be mind-independently sitting things, standing things, lengthwise extended things, and so forth.

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43 Correlatively, Ockham treats “all terms in categories other than substances and qualities as connotatives that signify particular substances and/or particular qualities existing one way or another” (Adams, William Ockham 313).
44 Ockham “joins his ‘realist’ opponents in affirming that certain things exist and are… quantified, related, etc. prior to and independently of their being signified by anyone or anything” (Adams, William Ockham 312–3).
We may summarize fourteenth-century English realists’ and nominalists’ opposed stances on the categories thus. For realists, there are ten hierarchical real categories of things paralleling the ten hierarchies in the categorical table. For nominalists, there are only two real categories, substance and quality, and each includes only singular members—not also common ones. Correspondingly, no category-concepts except singular substance- and quality-concepts properly name: these alone signify things uniquely and straightforwardly, without multiplication or refraction. By contrast, all common concepts in Aristotle’s table signify things non-uniquely, and all quantity-, relation-, place-, time-, position-, state-, action-, and passion-concepts signify things obliquely or as being certain ways. Thus overall, for nominalists, the categorical table stands asymmetrically to reality.

2.3 Real States of Affairs

We have examined two areas of close contact for realists, and relative division for nominalists, between language and the world. Yet only by considering a third subject—the relation between mental sentences and extramental reality—can we complete our picture, for it is with respect to this topic that the fundamental contrast between the two sides’ philosophical visions most starkly appears. For nominalists, the relation between mental sentences and the world offers just another instance of semantic-ontological asymmetry. For realists, on the contrary, or at least for English realists toward the end of the fourteenth century, it involves a semantic-ontological symmetry so profound that extramental reality itself becomes importantly linguistic.

Late-medieval philosophers disputed the signification, not only of the simple concepts that go to make up mental sentences, but also of mental sentences themselves. A major question of the day
was, Do mental sentences “signify anything over and above the ‘things’… signified by their component terms?” (Spade, Thoughts 165). That is, do mental sentences qua sentences signify things? Fourteenth-century English nominalists said they do not. According to two nominalists, Ockham and Holcot, mental sentences signify only what their terms, taken piecemeal, signify. For instance, the mental sentence which corresponds to “Socrates is human” signifies only (1) Socrates and (2) all humans (since the concept of Socrates signifies Socrates, the concept of the copula does not signify anything, and the concept of a human signifies all humans). It does not signify anything further. In particular, this sentence does not signify a state of affairs.

But many philosophers, including some nominalists, rejected Ockham and Holcot’s account. One reason to oppose it involves ultimate objects of knowledge or belief. When one knows or believes

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45 Spade speaks of sentences in general, not just mental ones, but his point applies primarily to mental sentences and only secondarily to spoken and written ones.
46 According to Dominik Perler, Holcot endorses a “complexum-theory” on which a spoken or written “sentence signifies the composition (complexum) of mental terms, which corresponds to the composition of spoken or written terms. So the spoken or written sentence ‘Socrates is white’ signifies the mental sentence ‘Socrates is white’ which, as a whole, does not have a signifcate. It is only the mental subject term ‘Socrates’ that signifies the extramental Socrates, and the mental predicate term ‘white’ that signifies extramental whiteness” (“Late Medieval Ontologies” 149–50, first two instances of italics his and third mine). Perler adds that “Ockham also alluded to this position by claiming that a proposition denotes a complexum” (“Late Medieval Ontologies” 165, his italics). Spade agrees that, for Ockham, mental sentences do not signify anything “as a whole,” anything beyond what their terms signify piecemeal: Spade sees Ockham as committed to an “Additive Principle” on which “[a] proposition signifies just exactly the sum total of what its categorematic [i.e., subject or predicate] terms signify” (Thoughts 166, his italics). Yet it should be remarked that Holcot criticizes Ockham on at least one point pertaining to the question of ultimate objects of knowledge and belief (discussed below); Holcot is no mere follower of Ockham’s view. More precisely, Holcot refuses “to construe the word ‘proposition’ (and hence the word ‘true’) as designating anything other than particular complexes of terms or concepts actually formed by particular men at particular times. To admit that a proposition is something which particular sentences of the same (or similar) design ‘have in common’ or ‘express’ would for Holcot be an inadmissible concession to… realism, involving admission of an abstract entity. In modern parlance, Holcot uses the word ‘proposition’ (and hence the word ‘true’) as designating anything other than particular complexes of terms or concepts actually formed by particular men at particular times. To admit that a proposition is something which particular sentences of the same (or similar) design do have something in common or express the same thing. For this reason, Holcot “claimed that Ockham was being inconsistent with his own principles” (Moody 69).
47 The copula is a syncategorematic sign or term, as opposed to a categorematic one, and Ockham maintains that “a syncategorematic term does not, properly speaking, signify anything” (Loux 55) (“syncategorema proprie loquendo nihil significat” [Summa logicae I c. 4 p. 15]). More exactly, a syncategorematic sign does not signify anything in its own right. So, taking the terms of the sentence “Socrates is human” piecemeal, the concept of the copula does not signify anything. Instead of signifying in its own right, a syncategorematic sign is like a logical particle, functioning to modify the signification or the reference (supposition) of another term in the same sentence.
48 Cf. Spade’s example: “the cat is on the mat” signifies only (1) all cats and (2) all mats (Thoughts 166–7).
a mental sentence, what does one ultimately know or believe? Only the mental sentence itself—i.e., the complex concept?—or some further object, beyond it? It is tempting to equate ultimate objects of knowledge or belief with the *significates* of mental sentences. After all, it appears that knowledge of any given sentence entails knowing what that sentence signifies. Yet as we have seen, Ockham and Holcot claimed that sentences signify only individual things (e.g., Socrates, humans). And they also believed, as did other fourteenth-century English philosophers,\(^49\) that individual things “are not the kind of things that can be assented to, and consequently not the kind of things that can be known or believed” (Karger, “William of Ockham” 185).\(^50\) Instead, fourteenth-century thinkers held that only sententially structured things—obviously including sentences themselves, which have a subject, a predicate, and a copula, and perhaps also including

\(^49\) According to some historians, one philosopher—the realist Walter Chatton—did maintain that individual things signified by sentences can be known or believed. Elizabeth Karger interprets Chatton thus: “what is apprehended or signified” by a given mental sentence “reduces to what is apprehended or signified by the intellective acts of which the sentence consists, in particular by those which form its subject and predicate… Chatton’s theory, then… amounts to this: the objects of an act of assent, and hence of an act of knowledge or belief, are the things which are apprehended or signified by the terms of the mental sentence” (“William of Ockham”184). Gabriel Nuchelmans likewise takes Chatton to hold that individual things signified by sentences can be known or believed, but, unlike Karger, Nuchelmans reads Chatton as claiming that “the significate of a complex apprehension [or as Nuchelmans also says, ‘apprehensive proposition’] is the thing signified by the subject-term” only, not also by the predicate-term (182). In fact, it is far from clear that either explication is correct. According to Rondo Keele, Chatton, writing about sentential significance, focuses only on undermining Ockham’s position—not on developing an articulated, positive view of his own (40). Certainly Chatton paints his account of sentential significance in broad strokes, often speaking of “the thing signified by the mental sentence, or the things signified, if there should be many” (“res significata per complexum, vel res significatae, si plures sint” [q. 1 a. 1 p. 21]) without specifying what sort of thing or things he means. And given such open-ended language, Chatton can be read as endorsing sentential significates equivalent, not to individuals, but to states of affairs. Indeed, Ernest Moody makes this very point: “Whether Chatton meant by *res significata per complexum* the concrete individual or individuals denoted by the subject term of the proposition, or whether he meant something analogous to what is nowadays described as the ‘state of affairs’ or the ‘being the case,’ is not wholly clear” (67, his italics). And in fact Chatton sometimes writes in a way that does strongly suggest the states-of-affairs interpretation. For instance, he asserts in one place that assent to a sentence “presupposes assent to the thing signified by the sentence, because I assent to *being thus in reality as is signified by the sentence* before I will assent that the proposition is true” (“praesupponit assensum rei significatae per propositionem, quia prius assentio *sic esse in re sicut significatur per propositionem* quam assentiam quod propositio sit vera” [q. 1 a. 1 p. 27, my emphasis]). It here appears that a sentence signifies, and that one subsequently assents to, a *sic esse in re*—i.e., a state of affairs. And if Chatton does suppose that mental sentences signify states of affairs, then he certainly regards these states of affairs as the ultimate objects of knowledge or belief. For as he says, “assent [involved in knowing or believing] has for its object the extramental thing or things signified by the mental sentence” (“assensus habet pro obiecto rem vel res extra significatas per illud complexum” [q. 1 a. 1 p. 27]).

\(^50\) Karger applies this remark to Ockham alone. However, Holcot certainly concurs: in a quodlibetal question, he explicitly cites and endorses Ockham’s claim that “only a complex [i.e., a mental, spoken, or written sentence] is known” (“tantum complexum est scitum” (Courtenay, “Revised Text” 3). Of course, complexes are not individuals themselves, but aggregates of individuals (namely, individual terms).
extramental objects the parts of which somehow appropriately correlate with subject, predicate, and copula—can be known or believed. But are there any sententially structured objects in the extramental world? Ockham and Holcot thought there are not, and accordingly they concluded that only sentences can be known or believed. Ockham states, “only propositions are known” (Spade, Five Texts 136); Holcot declares that the ultimate “known, believed, or opined object is the mental sentence and not the signified things.”

If the ultimate objects of knowledge and belief are mental sentences, complex concepts, then one ultimately knows or believes only concepts—mental things. However, does this not amount to idealism? Does it not leave knowers (and believers) trapped in their minds, unable to know (or believe) extramental things? And if so, does it not destroy objective knowledge? In Ockham’s opinion, objective knowledge rested secure. He reasoned that, even if the ultimate objects of knowledge, that is, the ultimate things known, are mental sentences, still one can know about extramental things by knowing mental sentences. In that sense, knowledge remains objective.

51 For example, Ockham flatly says, “there is no proposition except in the mind, in speech, or in writing” (Spade, Five Texts 148) (“propositio non est nisi in mente vel in voce vel in scripto” [Summa logicae I c. 15 p. 54]).
52 “[S]ola propositiones scientur” Ord. I d. 2 q. 4 p. 134.
53 “[O]bjectum scitum, creditum vel opinatum est complexum et non res significata” (Courtenay, “Revised Text” 7).
54 Ockham and Holcot’s position could seem to lead to idealism in another way, too. If a given mental sentence is true, one may ask in virtue of what it is true. What is its truth-maker? Is it something in the world, or something in the mind? Ockham explains that, for the truth of a sentence, “it is necessary and sufficient that the subject and predicate supposit for [i.e., stand for] the same thing” (Freddoso 86) (“sufficit et requiritur quod subiectum et praedicatum supponant pro eodem” [Summa logicae II c. 2 p. 250]). Thus a true sentence is made true by its terms—by its subject’s standing for some being x and its predicate’s standing for the same x. But the terms of mental sentences are concepts in the mind. Therefore, it would appear that true mental sentences are made true by the mind.
55 Ockham puts the relation of aboutness in terms of supposition or standing-for. He explains: “the known propositions and all their parts are truly spoken words. Nevertheless, because the parts of some of them supposit and stand not for themselves (that is, for the words), but for external things (that is, for their substances), therefore the knowledge of such propositions is called ‘real science’” (Spade, Five Texts 137–8) (“ista scita et omnes partes istorum vere sunt voces. Quia tamen partes aliquarum supponunt et stant non pro se ipsis, scilicet vocibus, sed pro rebus extra, puta pro subjectis, ideo illarum propositionum scientia dicitur realis” [Ord. I d. 2 q. 4 p. 136]). And he adds: “analogously, it is the same way for propositions in the mind…. All the terms of those propositions are only concepts and not the external substances themselves. Yet because the terms of some mental propositions stand and supposit personally for the external things themselves… therefore there is said to be ‘real’ knowledge of such propositions” (Spade, Five Texts 138) (“eodem modo proportionabiliter est de propositionibus in mente…. [O]mnes
Ockham considered it unnecessary to posit things signified by mental sentences *qua* sentences in order to avoid idealism, and accordingly resisted such allegedly superfluous ontological clutter.

However, Ockham’s answer left his fellow nominalist Wodeham cold. Wodeham argued that, if Ockham were right, every science would be a science of signs; there would be no “real science” of things.\(^{56}\) His intuition was this. Some branches of knowledge, e.g., physics, are more objective than others, e.g., logic, by virtue of having extramental rather than mental objects. Logic deals with signs, especially mental signs (concepts); by contrast, physics does not. But if all ultimate objects of knowledge were concepts, then all branches of knowledge would ultimately deal with concepts. Thus, sciences such as physics would turn out to be less objective than they plainly are.

Against the position Ockham and Holcot held, Wodeham advanced his “theory of the ‘complex significabile’” or ‘complexly signifiable’ (Gál 66). According to Wodeham, mental sentences as such *do* have significates in the world, namely complexly signifiables. A complexly signifiable is or resembles a state of affairs. It is a way things stand, a being-thus-in-reality ("sic esse in re" [Gál 78]).\(^{57}\) For example, the sentence “God is God,” or its conceptual counterpart, signifies the...
complexly signifiable *that God is God*; “the person is white” signifies *that the person is white*.\(^{58}\)

Complexly signifiables are extramental, and they would exist even if mental sentences did not.\(^{59}\)

Moreover, although they are not themselves sentences,\(^{60}\) their structure recapitulates that of the sentences signifying them. In other words, complexly signifiables are sententially structured—and therefore *are* the kinds of things that can be known or believed.\(^{61}\)

Or at least, complexly signifiables *would* be the kinds of things that can be known or believed if they were things at all! Yet Wodeham, hoping to sidestep ontological commitment to states of affairs, emphatically denies this. He explicates complexly signifiables as *ways things stand* or *how things are*—not things, not nothings, not “whats” of any sort, but merely “being-whats”:

You may say: that a person *is an animal* is either something or nothing. I say that neither should be granted, but that it is not something but is that a person *is something*. And so I may ask you: Is a people a person or a non-person? Neither should be granted, but that it is not a person but persons.—You may say: If it is not nothing, then it is something. And so I may argue, on the other side: If a people is not a non-person, then it is a person. And you deny each consequence.—You may say: What then is *that a person is an animal*? It must be answered that it is *that a rational animal is a sensible animate substance*. Yet it is more properly answered that *that a person is an animal* is not a *what*, but it is a *being-what*. And therefore the question is inept, just as that question would be ill formed and impudent by which it would be asked, “What is *a person is an animal*?”

For a person is an animal in reality with every sentence set aside. And it must not be granted that *a person is an animal* is a substance, nor that it is an accident, nor that it is anything, nor that it is nothing, because none of these answers would be intelligible…. \(^{62}\)

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\(^{58}\) The “object of this [sentence] ‘God is God’ is *that God is God*; and the significate of this one, ‘the person is white’ or ‘whiteness is in the person’ is *that the person is white or that whiteness is in the person*” (“objectum huius ‘Deus est Deus’ est ‘Deum esse Deum’; et huius ‘homo est albus’ vel ‘hominem inest albedinem’” [Gál 87]).

\(^{59}\) Even “if there were no sentence in the nature of things, nevertheless God would be God, and the person would be white” (“si nulla propositio esset in rerum natura, nihilominus Deus esset Deus, et homo esset albus” [Gál 87]).

\(^{60}\) “Nor are they sentences” (“Nec hae sunt propositiones” [Gál 87]).

\(^{61}\) As Perler (“Late Medieval Ontologies” 161–3), Keele (38), and Brower-Toland (622) affirm, Wodeham further holds that a mental sentence is true if and only if the world actually is, or things actually are, as that sentence signifies—that is, if and only if a complexly signifiable answering to it obtains. Thus, for Wodeham, complexly signifiabes function as truth-makers.

\(^{62}\) “Dices: ‘hominem esse animal’ aut est aliquid aut nihil. Dico quod neutrum est dandum, sed quod non est aliquid sed est hominem esse aliquid… Ita quaeram a te: populus aut est homo aut non homo? Neutrum est dandum, sed quod non est homo sed homines.—Dices: si non est nihil, igitur est aliquid. Ita arguam ex alia parte: si populus non est non homo, igitur est homo. Et utramque consequentiam [negas].—Dices: quid igitur est? Respondendum [est]
Other fourteenth-century philosophers probably found Wodeham’s refusal to take seriously the question of the complexly signifiable’s ontological status puzzling, as few or none adopted the complexly signifiable theory without attempting to clarify this point. Still, Wodeham’s strategy is fairly plain. To escape idealism, he insists that mental sentences have extramental significates (complexly signifiables) which, being structured like sentences, can and do function as ultimate objects of knowledge and belief. Thanks to complexly signifiables, the knowledge or belief of someone who knows or believes a given mental sentence extends beyond that sentence to “what the world is like or how things are, not something, but that something is the case” (Nuchelmans 184). Knowers and believers are not imprisoned in their minds. Yet even as he grants this much, Wodeham, to avoid inflating his ontology, refuses to hypostatize complexly signifiables.

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quod est ‘animal rationale esse substantiam animatam sensibilem.’ Magis tamen proprie respondetur quod ‘hominem esse animal’ non est ‘quid,’ sed est ‘esse quid.’ Et ideo quaeestio inepta est, sicut illa quaeestio incongrua [et] proterva esset quia quareretur ‘quid est: homo est animal?’ Nam homo est animal a parte rei omni propositione circumscripta. Et non est dandum quod ‘homo est animal’ sit substantia, nec [quod] sit accidens, nec quod sit aliquid, nec quod sit nihil, quia nulla illarum responsionum esset intelligibilis…..” (Gál 89, his brackets).

63 On the Continent, nominalists including André de Neufchâteau and Hieronymus Prado embraced the complexly signifiable but sought to clarify its status, while still avoiding ontological commitment to states of affairs, by “arguing that complexly signifiables could be reduced to individuals” (Gaskin 75). Another attempt to clarify the status of the complexly signifiable was offered by Gregory of Rimini, who admitted that a complexly signifiable is a being in one of two (out of three) senses of “being” (“ens”) (Perler, “Late Medieval Ontologies” 154–6)—but continued to insist that a complexly signifiable is “no entity at all” (Perler, “Late Medieval Ontologies” 156). Wodeham’s key notion that sentences signify ways things stand may have been anticipated in the twelfth century by Abelard’s theory of the dictum (Normore, “Tradition” 207–10).

64 That Wodeham identifies complexly signifiables with objects of knowledge is clear from the fact that—having asked “whether the act of knowing has for its immediate object things or signs, that is, a sentence in the mind or the things signified by the mental sentence” (“utrum actus sciendi habeat pro obiecto immediato res vel signa, id est complexum in mente vel res significatae [sic!] per complexum” [Gál 72])—he concludes that “the immediate object of the act of assenting [involved in knowing] is the total object of the mental sentence,” namely the complexly signifiable (“immediatum objectum actus assentiendi est objectum totale complexi” [Gál 86]). The same sort of act of assenting involved in knowing is also involved in believing, however, so it is clear that Wodeham identifies complexly signifiables with objects of belief as well as with objects of knowledge.

65 It is possible that Ockham eventually came to hold a theory similar to Wodeham’s. In the Quodlibets, a relatively late work, Ockham admits cases in which “[w]hat one knows or believes is that something exists or is such-and-such; that something exists or is such-and-such, however, is not a thing” (Nuchelmans 185).
Wodeham on the one hand, and Ockham and Holcot on the other, defend very different accounts. Nevertheless, all three nominalists agree in this: mental sentences, as such, do not signify things. It follows that mental sentences do not properly name things, and hence that they do not correlate one-to-one with things. For Ockham and Holcot, this is because mental sentences, as such, do not signify at all. For Wodeham, it is because mental sentences signify complexly signifiables—which do not count as things. Either way, asymmetry between the domain of mental sentences and the world’s ontological furniture follows from nominalist views.

By contrast with nominalists, realists were happy to admit that mental sentences correlate one-to-one with things. Cesalli defines “une théorie réaliste de la proposition” as one that “pose qu’une proposition mentale a un signifié propre et non-conceptuel” (Le réalisme 15, his italics), and he elsewhere clarifies that the proper significates of mental sentences are, on a realist view, “things” (“Theories” 88). In other words, realists insisted that mental sentences properly signify things—that each mental sentence, qua sentence, signifies only one thing. This proper signifying may justly, moreover, be considered proper naming. Realists therefore held that mental sentences properly name things. But realists furthermore maintained that the things properly named by

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66 Realists also held that things serve as truth-makers—so that, in Gyula Klima’s words, “a proposition is true if and only if what it signifies exists” (“Nominalist Semantics” 163) (where “exists” should be taken to mean “obtains in actuality”; as Conti says of Burley’s view, “a proposition is true if and only if it denotes a state of affairs which actually exists in the world” [“Ontology” 134]). Klima observes that “[t]he payoff of this… semantic picture is a very simple, uniform theory of truth,” yet it is also one that may seem to come “at the expense of an ‘overpopulated’ ontology containing various layers of entities: substances, their accidents and/or their privations, underpinning the existence of the significata of propositions” (“Nominalist Semantics” 163, his italics). And of course, this “is precisely the price a nominalist like Ockham is not willing to pay” (Klima, “Nominalist Semantics” 163).

67 If mental sentences qua sentences signify things at all, they do so straightforwardly rather than obliquely. And if mental sentences straightforwardly signify things, then they name their significates (cf. footnote 8). That mental sentences qua sentences signify things straightforwardly appears thus. For a given mental sentence qua sentence to signify something is just for it as a whole to signify something. But if a given mental sentence as a whole signifies something, then every part of that sentence contributes to spelling out what that sentence’s significate is. Hence, no part of that sentence remains to connote how that sentence’s significate is, i.e., in what way its significate stands. Hence, mental sentences signify things not connotatively or obliquely, but simply or straightforwardly. They therefore name the things they signify. Moreover, if a given mental sentence names the thing it signifies, then, since it signifies only one thing, it names only one thing. Hence mental sentences properly name the things they signify.
mental sentences, unlike the things properly named by simple concepts, are not simple things.

Rather, in correspondence with mental sentences’ status as complex concepts, mental sentences properly name complex things. More precisely, “the objects signified by complex expressions,” according to “the common, medieval realist theory of meaning,” are “compounds of at least two of those [objects] signified by simple expressions and a relation of identity (or non-identity, in the case of a true negative sentence)” (Conti, “Johannes Sharpe’s Ontology” 177).\(^6\) The mental sentence corresponding to “Socrates is human,” for example, would name the compound object

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\(^6\) Burley tells us that, although the significate of a mental sentence “is composed of things” (“composita est ex rebus” [Pinborg, “Walter Burleigh” 399]), these things are composed by “intellectual composition” (“Compositio intellectualis” [Pinborg, “Walter Burleigh” 401])—i.e., “composition by which the intellect composes subject with predicate” (“compositio qua intellectus componit subjectum cum predicato” [Pinborg, “Walter Burleigh” 401]). In a similar vein, Scotus states that the significate of a mental sentence is “a composition… of things, yet not as they exist, but as they are understood” (“compositio est… rerum, non tamen ut existentium, sed ut intelliguntur” [Quaestiones super I et II Perihermeneias q. 1 p. 912]). These claims must be approached carefully. They do not mean that mental sentences signify, either for Burley or for Scotus, mental entities. Rather, they express these realists’ conviction that mental sentences do signify extramental compounds, but only insofar as those extramental compounds are grasped by the mind—i.e., only insofar as the mind apprehends or reflects them in their extramental complexity, re-assembling them in thought according to how they are outside of the mind. Thus the significates of (true) mental sentences are, for Burley, “actual states of affairs which happen to be apprehended by the intellect” (Karger, “Mental Sentences” 193). Likewise, the idea that mental sentences signify complex extramental things insofar as they are grasped by the mind agrees with Scotus’ general intuition that “signifying presupposes understanding, as that without which there is no [signifying]” (“significare prae supponit intelligere, sicut illud sine quo non” [Quaestiones super I et II Perihermeneias q. 1 p. 913]): as a rule, something’s being signified presupposes that thing’s being understood as it is in reality. But since, as we have just seen, Scotus identifies a mental sentence’s significate with a complex thing (a composition of things), something’s being signified by a mental sentence presupposes a complex thing’s being understood as it is in reality—and, thus, in its extramental complexity. These considerations shed light on Burley’s otherwise bizarre-sounding assertion that the significates of mental sentences, although made up of extramental things, may be said to have a certain mental aspect or to be “partly in the intellect” (“partim… in intellectu” [Pinborg, “Walter Burleigh” 400]). In brief, the extramental significates of mental sentences may be said to be in the intellect precisely insofar as they are understood. And in fact Burley indicates as much when, while discussing sentences and their significates, he implies a comparison between objects apprehended by the mind and objects perceived by sight. “Very often,” he says, “there are colours or visible objects before the sight, and yet we do not see them, because we do not attend to them. But when we attend to them, we see them. Thus attention couples the act of sight or sight [itself] with the object. Thus this expression, ‘seen stone,’ signifies a certain being coupled together from a stone which is outside the eye and from the act of seeing which is… within the eye” (“Multotiens… sunt colores et visibilia ante visum, et tamen non videmus ea, quia non habemus intentionem ad illa. Sed cum intendimus ea, videmus ea. Unde intentio copulat actum visus vel visum cum objecio. Unde hec vox ‘lapis visus’ significat quoddam ens copulatum ex lapide qui est extra oculum et ex actu videndi qui est… in oculo” [Pinborg, “Walter Burleigh” 401]). Just as a “seen stone,” *qua* seen object, has a certain perceptual aspect (however much the stone is extra-perceptual in itself), so also, we are given to understand, an object apprehended by the mind, *qua* intellectually apprehended—for instance, a complex thing signified by a given mental sentence—has a certain mental aspect (however much that object is extramental in itself). Accordingly, Cesalli describes the significate of a mental sentence, on Burley’s view, as “la simple recomposition in intellectu d’un composé réel extramental” (*Le réalisme* 231, his italics): the significate of a mental sentence is indeed a real or extramental composition, but only insofar as that real composition is reflected or re-composed within a mind that apprehends it.
made up of Socrates, humanity, and their identity—or in brief, Socrates’ being human. We may call the complex things purportedly named by mental sentences “real states of affairs.”

Like Wodeham’s complexly signifiables, realists’ real states of affairs are sententially structured. Their parts correlate with the subjects, copulas, and predicates of the mental sentences that properly name them. But again, real states of affairs differ from complexly signifiables in that real states of affairs, if they exist, are extramental things. Only realists admitted that mental sentences signify sententially structured things—and accordingly, only realists held that mental sentences signify knowable things. Realists therefore countenanced knowable extramental things, i.e., real states of affairs. And they further identified these real states of affairs with the ultimate objects of knowledge (and belief). So doing, they linked knowledge of mental sentences with knowledge of extramental things in a clear-cut manner, forthrightly underwriting the objectivity of knowledge and warding off idealism. For this reason, realist propositional theories indeed belong at “l’intersection de l’anti-nominalisme et de l’anti-idéalisme” (Cesalli, Le réalisme 8).

Realists, then, directly evaded idealism by positing sententially structured things able to serve as objects of knowledge. But clearly, if extramental reality contains sententially structured things,

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69 This locution accords, for example, with Conti’s description of Burley’s “significata of statements” as “states of affairs” (“Ontology” 126, his italics), as well as with Cesalli’s observation that, for Wyclif, “propositions do have proper significates, which are… states of affairs” (“Some Fourteenth-Century Theories” 90). I add “real” to distinguish realists’ states of affairs, which are complex extramental things, from Wodeham’s states of affairs or quasi-states of affairs, which are not things at all.

70 And in fact, as Cesalli makes explicit in the case of Burley, realists hold that “[r]eality is such that the propositional form subject-copula-predicate is not conventional, but derives from the metaphysical structure of things” (“Some Fourteenth-Century Theories” 99).

71 For instance, Burley makes it clear that the ultimate objects of certain branches of knowledge, namely the real sciences, are complex extramental things structured like sentences (Pinborg, “Walter Burleigh” 399). Similarly, Wyclif states that “human scientific knowledge… must reach through to the object known…. But this is the external object of knowledge, and not the term or concept” (Kenny 59) (“scientia humana… penetra ad rem scitam…. Sed hoc est scibile extra et non terminus vel conceptus” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 7 p. 148]). But Wyclif’s “external object of knowledge” is just “what is signified objectively” by a given mental sentence (Kenny 55) (“objective significatum” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 7 p. 140]), and this in turn is a real state of affairs, as we shall soon see.
then extramental reality must be to some degree homologous with language. Reality must be, that is, rather language-like itself. Walter Burley calls attention to the “linguistic” dimension of the extramental world by dubbing real states of affairs “propositions in re”—real sentences. If real states of affairs are sentences, i.e., linguistic items, then the world’s ontological furniture clearly includes linguistic items. It follows that extramental reality is itself importantly linguistic.

However, it is John Wyclif—late fourteenth-century Oxford “[U]niversity’s recognized leading philosopher” (Catto 186), whose philosophical “innovations pointed the way” for his colleagues (Catto 219)—who most fully develops the idea of reality’s being language-like. In his masterful Tractatus de universalibus, Wyclif speaks approvingly of Burley’s real sentences, describing a real sentence on Burley’s view as “the truth on the side of reality, which God puts together from subject and predicate” (Kenny 2). Like Burley, Wyclif uses the label “real sentences” for real states of affairs. But as his above characterization of Burley’s idea reveals, Wyclif builds upon the scaffolding he borrows from Burley. To clarify, notice that Wyclif refers to the parts of real sentences as subjects and predicates, not merely as correlating with subjects and predicates. This

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72 Properly speaking, a real sentence is a real state of affairs qua significate of a mental sentence, i.e., a real state of affairs insofar as intellectually apprehended; see footnote 68. However, Burley also admits an improper way of speaking on which a real sentence is “le complexe de choses dont la proposition in re au sens propre est tirée” (Cesalli, Le réalisme 226, his italics), i.e., the complex extramental thing considered not qua significate, but in itself.

73 Ivan Mueller believes that the Tractatus de universalibus, which comprises the sixth book of Wyclif’s Summa de ente, “was composed at the earliest after autumn 1373, but most likely during the following year” (“Introduction” xxix). Williell Thomson suggests an earlier date, either 1368 or 1369 (20). In either case, the main contours of Wyclif’s theory of universals, along with his treatment of identity and distinction, had already appeared, by the time of the Tractatus de universalibus’ publication, in “Purgans errores circa universalia in communi” (Tractatus quartus of De ente libri primi; but see also Harrison Thomson, “A ‘Lost’ Chapter of Wyclif’s Summa de ente”), which Wyclif certainly wrote prior to 1368 and possibly as early as 1359 (Mueller, “Introduction” xxxv).

74 “[V]eritas ex parte rei, quam Deus componit ex subjecto et praedicato, sit realis propositio” (Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 21). This description of the real sentence as an extramentially existing “truth” concurs with Sharpe’s later description of a true mental sentence’s significate as a “complexly significable truth on account of which a sentence is called ‘true’” (“veritas complexe significabilis, ratione cuius dicitur propositio vera” (Quaestio pp. 131–2). Here Sharpe makes it clear that, for him just as for other realists, the significates of true mental sentences double as their truth-makers.

75 Whereas Burley deploys the phrase “propositio in re,” Wyclif prefers “proposicio realis” (De logica I c. 5 p. 15).
reflects Wyclif’s own account instead of Burley’s; in particular, it accords with Wyclif’s theory of real predication. According to Wyclif, the predication that occurs in human language derives from another, metaphysical kind: real predication.76 Real predication, in turn, is “being shared by or said of many things in common” (Kenny 1, my emphasis)77 in the way that a real universal is shared by or common to its individuals (and its species, if the universal in question is a genus).78 Hence, Wyclif sees the way that real universals inform their individuals as a sort of predication.79

Now given real predication, there must be real subjects and predicates too—namely, those things related by real predication and comprising real sentences. Hence extramental reality, exactly like language, contains subjects and predicates related by predication. Extramental reality is evidently extremely language-like. And in fact, for Wyclif, it is a kind of language. More precisely, reality is nothing other than God’s ontological speech: according to Wyclif, “[n]ous parlons avec des mots, Dieu avec des choses” (Cesalli, Le réalisme 332).80 Wyclif’s position is that God, himself a language-object,81 “says” universals of individuals—thereby composing the poem of the world.

Wyclif thus finds reality to be so language-like that reality and language converge. Reality is real language, God’s natural language or language of natures—the language which grounds human or

76 As he declares in the Tractatus de universalibus, “the predication of one term of another” in human language “is modelled on real predication” (Kenny 1) (“praedicatio… termini de termino… exemplata sit a praedicatone reali” [c. 1 p. 17]). Statements of this kind make it plain that for Wyclif, as Spade observes, “predication in language is a mirror of real predication” (“Introduction” xxxiii).
77 “participari vel dici communicative de multis” (Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 17)
78 Wyclif describes real predication thus: “every actual universal is predicated of its inferiors in nature” (Kenny 1) (“omne universale in actu praedicatur de suis inferioribus in natura” [Wyclif, Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 17]).
79 He also regards a real universal’s being common to any species it may have as real predication.
80 As Cesalli observes, earlier thinkers, most notably Augustine, had already expressed the intuition that creation is God’s language (Le réalisme 332). Wyclif’s contribution is to develop this intuition into a fully fledged system.
81 God’s “word or eternal interior saying is the divine essence” (Kenny 2) (“verbum vel dictio aeterna ad intra est divina essentia” [Wyclif, Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 18]). Conversely, God is essentially his word. Wyclif takes very seriously the idea that God is the archetypal Word, and may well reason, on that basis, that God’s products must be linguistic.
artificial languages and models their structures. Conversely, human language, especially human mental language, mirrors the structures of God’s natural language, i.e., extramental reality. And according to Wyclif, this parallelism between human mental language and the extramental world is absolute. One of the core “axiomes du système wycliffien” is a “thèse de l’isomorphisme entre langage et réalité” (Cesalli, *Le réalisme* 331)—in view of which Cesalli designates Wyclif “the absolute anti-OCKHAM” (“Theories” 88, his capitals). To clarify, it should by now be clear that, for Ockham and for his fellow nominalists, “our knowledge does not reproduce the world and its objects, but merely concerns them” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 70). By contrast, Wyclif holds the opposite view. He thinks that our knowledge perfectly reproduces the world and its objects. Each and every concept—as well as mental language as a whole, to which the extramental world as a whole corresponds—maps straightforwardly onto something that extramentally exists. Hence on Wyclif’s extreme-realist account, it is illimitably true that “our thought spontaneously models itself on reality, so that the contents and articulations of our ideas are fully objective” (Conti, “Analogy” 136). The mental world, the world within us, perfectly blueprints the exterior world.

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82 Wyclif calls any sentence of human language an “artificial sentence” (“proposicio... artificiali[s]” [De logica I c. 5 p. 15]). By contrast, God’s language is real or natural insofar as it is precisely (created) reality or (created) nature, i.e., all the kinds, and all the things of every kind, that constitute creation. Wyclif makes reference to God’s natural speech in, for example, *De materia et forma*, where he writes that “it implies a contradiction that some creature is of some mode [i.e., possesses some accident], if God should not first *naturally* say that that which is of this mode is of this mode” (“claudit contradiccionem aliquam creaturam esse alicuius modi, nisi deus eam prius naturaliter dicat huiusmodi, quam sit huiusmodi”) [c. 1 p. 167]).

83 More precisely, Wyclif holds that each and every first intention straightforwardly maps onto something in the extramental world. He does not deny that there are also second intentions, i.e., thoughts about thoughts. The point remains that, setting second intentions aside, Wyclif “firmly believed that mental language was an ordered collection of signs, each referring to one of the metaphysical constituents of the world” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 70).

84 Plausibly, Burley accepts an “isomorphism between language and the world” fully as thoroughgoing as Wyclif’s, regarding absolute language-reality symmetry as “a necessary prerequisite for protecting the [objective] value of our knowledge” (Conti, “Ontology” 128). At least on Conti’s reading of Burley’s “semantic presuppositions,” reality for Burley is such that “the structure of language is a mere reflection of that of reality” (“Ontology” 164, my emphasis).
In claiming that every concept maps straightforwardly onto something that extramentally exists, Wyclif commits himself to the position that everything conceivable enjoys some existence in the world outside of the mind. To make room for the profusion of extramental beings this implies, he extends the set of referents of the term ‘ens’ to include in addition to [1] the categorical beings (entia praedicabilia): [2] all that is in potentia in its causes; [3] all the intelligible beings which are only in God as something producible by Him; [4] non-categorical (extra genus) principles, like God, the unity, and the point; [5] privations; [6] collections and groups of things, like villages, towns, cities, lands, and religious orders; [7] states of affairs, both atomic and molecular; [8] past and future states of affairs (praeteritiones and futuritiones), not seen as res that have been real and will be real, but regarded as real in the present as past and future truths; [9] the (molecular) states of affairs which are signified by negative true sentences; [10] hypothetical and tautological truths; and [11] such res as death, sin, and the false (falsitas) itself. (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 79)

Truly, Wyclif’s ontology is maximally rich. Yet as Conti’s list reflects and Wyclif himself makes explicit, Wyclif does not maintain that each concept signifies something actual; some entities are unactualized possibles, others mere Ideas in God’s mind. It does not follow from the bare fact

85 Cf. Wyclif’s claim that “there are many creatures which are not in any of the ten categories, such as privations, the principles of the categories and their properties, and accidental aggregates” (Kenny 87, my emphasis) (“multae sunt creaturae quae non sunt aliqua decem generum ut privationes, principia illorum generum, passiones eorum et aggregata per accidents” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 9 p. 201]). In brief, Wyclif sees categorical things (substances and accidents) as the basic building blocks of creation insofar as each creature with a nature or essence of its own is a substance or an accident. However, he denies that these building blocks exhaust creation. Notably, aggregates of categorical beings also count as beings, as do aspects or formal features of categorical beings, whether positive or privative. Even outside of the created world, not only God, but also all of His Ideas are entities—although, among these, God alone has an essence proper to Him. The divine Ideas are mere aspects of God’s essence.

86 Cf. De materia et forma, c. 9 p. 235, where Wyclif distinguishes three basic levels of being, “namely intelligible being [in the divine mind], possible being, and being in actual existence” (“scilicet, esse intelligibile, esse possibile, et esse in actuali existere,” Dziewicki’s italics). Similarly, in the Tractatus de universalibus, Wyclif assigns three levels of being to all actual creatures: (1) “the eternal mental being which they have in God” (Kenny 48) (“esse intelligibile aeternum quod habe[n]t in Deo” [c. 7 p. 126]); (2) “being in their causes whether universal or particular” (Kenny 48) (“esse in suis causis sive universalibus sive particularibus” [c. 7 p. 126]), which Wyclif also calls “essential being” or “being of essence” (Kenny 48) (“esse essentiae” [c. 7 p. 126]); and (3) “being which is the existence of the individual, which begins to be and ceases to be at its own time” (Kenny 49) (“esse existere individuum, secundum quod esse incipit et corrupitur / pro suo tempore” [c. 7 p. 127])—that is, “actual existence” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 93). (Wyclif also adds a fourth level of being which is proper only to substances, namely (4) “the accidental being of a substance” (Kenny 49) (“modus essendi accidentalis substantiae” [c. 7 p. 127]) “caused in a substance by the inhering in it of its appropriate accidental forms” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 94).) He seems to think that, although a creature’s actual being presupposes both its ideal being and its potential or essential being, still a creature might fail to have actual being and yet have ideal and potential being, or alternatively it might fail to have actual and potential being and yet still have ideal being. In the former case, the creature would be an unactualized possible; in the latter case, it would be nothing more than an Idea in God’s mind.
that something is conceivable that it actually exists, but simply that it exists. Nonetheless, Wyclif undeniably exhibits a powerful "'propensity' towards hypostisation" (Conti, "Analogy" 164).

Insofar as Wyclif posits utter symmetry, indeed unity, between language and reality—and insofar as, correspondingly, he extends his ontology to the limits of conceivability—his account may be regarded as the fourteenth-century culmination of the realist philosophical vision. As Conti says, "Wyclif’s logical and metaphysical theories are" as much "the final result of the preceding realist tradition of thought" as "the starting-point of the new form(s) of realism propounded in Europe between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries" ("Wyclif’s Logic" 68). Certainly Wyclif’s philosophical picture resonated with the realist temper of its time, and the Oxford Realists assumed its guiding insights.87 Yet Wyclif’s treatment of real states of affairs as

87 For example, they took the notion of real predication as primitive (de Libera, *La querelle* 401)—and, in so doing, started from the conviction that the extramental world is sententially structured. Moreover, the Oxford Realists as a whole adopted Wyclif’s characteristic proclivity for hypostatization (Conti, “Categories” 394). Accordingly, Conti says of Robert Alyngton: "Like Burley and Wyclif, he was firmly convinced that our thought is modelled on reality itself, so that it reproduces reality in all its elements, levels, and inner relations. Therefore, one of the best ways of understanding the world lay for him in an accurate investigation of our notions and conceptual schemes, as they show the structure of the world. A logical consequence of this was a strong propensity toward reification" ("A Realist Interpretation" 324). Yet it should be noted that Sharpe differed from Wyclif and the other Oxford Realists insofar as he rejected perfect isomorphism between mental language and extramental reality. For instance, he states:

Just as the community of signs outside of the mind, namely [the community] of vocal signs, etc., arises from the community of concepts, so the community of concepts arises from the community of extramental things. And therefore, just as it happens that there is a greater multiplicity in posterior things than in prior things, just as there is a greater multiplicity in effects than in causes, so it is not necessary that there be as much multiplicity in the community of extramental things as there is in the community of concepts or [in the community] of signs at the pleasure of impositors [i.e., conventionally imposed signs].

(\[S\]icut communitas signorum extra mentem, scilicet vocalium etc., oritur a communitate conceptuum, ita communitas conceptuum oritur a communitate rerum ad extra. Et ideo sicut contingit maiorem esse multiplicitatem in posterioribus quam in prioribus, sicut maior est multiplicitas in effectibus quam in causis, ita non oportet quod sit tanta multiplicitas in communitate rerum ad extra quanta est in communitate conceptuum vel signorum ad placitum impositorum. \[Quaestio\] p. 69)

Sharpe goes on to explain that, although standard common concepts do indeed name real universals, there exist non-standard cases in which concepts count as common but do not name real universals. For example, the concepts corresponding to the terms ‘individual,’ ‘person,’ ‘singular,’ etc.” (“‘individuum’, ‘persona’, ‘singulare’, etc.” \[Quaestio\] p. 70)) count as common but do not positively signify real universals; rather, they negatively signify individuals. For example, “the concept of individual conveys that a thing is not communicable” (“conceptus individui importat quod sit res non communicabilis” \[Quaestio\] p. 70)). According to Wyclif and the other Oxford Realists, by contrast, “terms like ‘individual’ have to be considered as singular expressions; more precisely, they are range-narrowed expressions… like ‘this man’, because they identify a singular referent as a member of a given set

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sentences, together with his analysis of identity and distinction (which the Oxford Realists also embraced), produced a remarkable result: according to the “pan-propositionalism” that Wyclif develops, all existing things are sentences (Cesalli, “Le «pan-propositionnalisme»” 124). In fact, Wyclif is overt about this, affirming that “everything that exists can aptly be called a sentence.”

To clarify, take the mental sentence that corresponds to “Socrates is human.” Like other realists, Wyclif would consider this mental sentence to signify a real state of affairs made up of Socrates, humanity, and their identity; like Burley, he would also regard that real state of affairs as a real sentence. Here, however, Burley and Wyclif diverge. On Burley’s account, the parts of a real
sentence, taken piecemeal, are in no way identical with the real sentence itself. For Wyclif, by contrast, a real sentence and its parts are different in one way and the same in another—in his terminology, they are formally distinct and really identical. We shall revisit Wyclif’s notions of identity and distinction in Section 3. At present, the key point is this: because the real sentence in question is (in a way) the same as its parts, on Wyclif’s view, and since further one of its parts is Socrates, Socrates is himself (in a way) the real sentence in question, i.e., Socrates’ being human or that Socrates is human. But Socrates’ being human, like every real sentence, is a complex thing involving real predication; therefore, Socrates is himself a complex thing involving real predication. Indeed, Wyclif explicitly identifies individuals such as Socrates with real sentences, making it very clear that individuals exhibit an internal complexity that involves real predication:

A real sentence is, for example, this stone, this man, etc. For just as in another sentence there is a subject and a predicate and a copula, so in this man one should admit [1] this person, which is a subject part [i.e., subject of inherence] of the human species and which is like a subject; and likewise one should admit [2] human nature, which is essentially in this man as a predicate and is really predicated of this man. And one should admit [3] the essence of this man, which is a real copula coupling this man with his nature. And just as, in an artificial sentence [i.e., a sentence of human language], the predicate is said of its subject, so human nature essentially and really exists in this real sentence: this man.

92 This can be seen as follows. Different properties can be truly predicated of the real sentence and its parts; e.g., the real sentence in question is properly named by the mental sentence corresponding to “Socrates is human,” whereas the real sentence’s parts, taken piecemeal, are not. Further, given Burley’s position on identity and distinction, the fact that the real sentence and its parts have different properties implies their real distinction. But Burley allows no distinction on the side of reality except the real distinction. So the real sentence and its parts are not, on his view, in any way the same on the side of reality. We shall come to Burley’s position on identity and distinction in Section 3.

93 Wyclif would also admit that humanity is (in a way) this real sentence and that the factor identifying Socrates with humanity, namely Socrates’ individual essence, is (in a way) this real sentence. Like Socrates himself, humanity and Socrates’ essence will be really identical with and formally distinct from the real sentence of which they are parts. “Proposicio realis est, ut iste homo, iste lapis, etc. quia sicut in alia proposicione est subiectum et predicatum et copula, sic in isto homine est dare istam personam, que est pars subjecta speciei humane, que est tamquam subjectum; et est dare similiter naturam humanam, que essencialiter inest isti homini tamquam predicatum, et realiter predicatur de isto homine. Et est dare essenciam istius hominis, que est realis copula copulans istum hominem cum sua natura. Et sicut in proposicione artificiali predicatum dicitur de subiecto, sic in ista proposicione reali, iste homo, est essencialiter et realiter natura humana” (De logica I c. 5 p. 15, Dziewicki’s italics).
On Wyclif’s account, Socrates would be a complex thing made up of himself (qua subject part of universal humanity), the real subject; universal humanity, the real predicate; and his individual essence, i.e., Socrates’ singular humanity, the real copula linking him with universal humanity. So Socrates would genuinely be a (real) sentence, and the same goes for each other person, rock, etc. In fact, even things like God and the most general substance, which do not come under any universal in a real category, are real sentences for Wyclif. For although they do not participate in any categorical universals, even God and the most general substance participate in universal being. They are therefore subjects of the real predicate being and joined to it by their essence.

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95 For Wyclif, a person’s “complete essence,” so to speak, contains both universal and particular components: “in the same essence there inheres both being a man and being this man. And being a man is common to every man, and thus is formally universal, while being this man is restricted individually to this essence” (Kenny 5) (“eidem essentiae inest / esse / hominem et esse istum hominem. Et esse hominem est commune omni homini et sic universale formaliter, sed esse istum hominem est individualiter appropriatum isti essentiae” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 pp. 31–2]). Hence a person’s individual essence is a part of her complete essence and is, more exactly, being this person—i.e., her singular humanity. The real copula of a person qua real sentence is thus nothing other than that person’s singular humanity. Further, that person’s singular humanity plays the role of real copula in the real sentence because it really links the real universal and its instance, i.e., it grounds their real identity (see footnote 142)—in a sense, it is their real identity. However, Wyclif also equates a person’s individual essence with that person’s individual being or existence, namely her individual being or existence at the level of essential being (see footnote 86). It follows that a person’s individual essence, her singular humanity, and her individual being or existence at the level of being are all in some way the same. It further follows that we may truthfully identify the real copula of a given person qua real sentence both with that person’s singular humanity and with her individual being or existence at the level of essence.

96 Accordingly Cesalli, with reference to Wyclif’s system, speaks of the “l’«archi-proposition» qu’est Dieu lui-même” (“Le «pan-propositionnalisme»” 125), while Gordon Leff states that for Wyclif the “supreme sign was God” (“Wyclif and the Augustinian Tradition” 32). However, it should be noted that real universals, because they are not individuals, lack individual essences. Insofar as real universals are real sentences, the real copulae coupling them qua real subjects of being with being qua real predicate can only be their specific essences—or, in the case of the ten most general real universals, which are neither individuals nor species, their generic essences.

97 As Leff highlights, Wyclif does regard being as a real universal; it is “the most universal essence of all” (“Place of Metaphysics” 217). More precisely, Wyclif deems being a transcendental “reality that inferior realities incorporate without modifying nor transforming it” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic”). And as such, being “is common to God and creatures” both (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 106–7).

98 My reference to God as a subject may sound troubling, but it follows directly from Wyclif’s belief that “being is an extra-mental reality predicated of everything (God and creatures, substances and accidents, universal and individual essences) according to different degrees, since God is in the proper sense of the term and any other entity is (something real) only insofar as it shares the being of God” (Conti, “Analogy” 137, his emphasis). Since being is predicated of God as well as of creatures, God is in some sense subject to being.
If each thing is a sentence, though, does each thing signify something? Wyclif admits that it does. He insists that “each being that exists signifies complexly”—from which it once more follows that each thing is a sentence, given Wyclif’s definition of a “sentence, broadly speaking” as “a being signifying complexly.” Thus even things like Socrates and God signify something. More exactly, Wyclif states that each thing signifies “that it exists” (“se esse” [De logical I c. 5 p. 14]).

In signifying that it exists, each thing, for Wyclif, reflexively signifies itself: “tout ens est à la fois signe (de lui-même) et signifié (par lui-même)” (Cesalli, “Le «pan-propositionnalisme>” 127–8, his italics). More exactly, each thing signifies itself as existing, as a subject of the real predicate being. And Wyclif describes this self-signifying as a kind of speech: he tells us that “each thing says itself.” It follows that nothing in Wyclif’s universe is silent! Rather, all things express themselves—and in so doing, individuals announce their universals. To clarify, Wyclif maintains that each thing, inasmuch as it says itself, says everything that makes it what it is—including each real universal really said or predicated of it by God. But real universals are the

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99 “[O]mne quod est significat complexe” (De logica I c. 5 p. 14).
100 “Proposicio large loquendo est ens complexe significans” (De logica I c. 5 p. 14, Dziewicki’s italics). Given Wyclif’s absolute semantic-ontological parallelism, the claim that a sentence is “a being signifying complexly” appears to mean two things: (1) a sentence is a complex sign, and (2) a sentence signifies something complex.
101 Still more precisely, each thing signifies a real state of affairs or real sentence made up of: (1) itself qua subject part of being (the real subject); (2) universal being (the real predicate); and (3) its individual essence (the real copula), i.e., its individual (essential) being (see footnote 95). Thus each thing signifies a real state of affairs, and, in so doing, signifies itself as a part of that real state of affairs, namely as the subject of universal being. Each thing may also be said to signify itself complexly—as a complex thing—for the following reason: each thing signifies a complex thing, a real state of affairs, really identical with its parts; but one of the parts of this real state of affairs is the real subject, i.e., the thing itself; so, each thing signifies a complex thing really identical with itself. Each thing may be said to signify itself complexly insofar as the complex thing that it signifies is really the same thing that it is. Wyclif explains: “every thing necessarily says itself…. In this way every created thing says its own per se cause—and correspondingly every inferior says its superior—and similarly it is said of it as a subject” (Kenny 1–2)
metaphysical ties that conjoin individuals. Hence in saying itself, a given individual articulates its metaphysical bonds with other individuals. On Wyclif’s account, in other words, individuals declare themselves, not as metaphysical islands, but precisely as metaphysical peninsulas.

3. Metaphysical Islands and Metaphysical Peninsulas

We have seen that, according to medieval realists, common concepts name common properties: real or in re universals shared by multiple individuals. However, if real universals are shared by multiple individuals, how exactly is this so? Just what are real universals, and in what sense are they in re—i.e., within their individuals? It must immediately be noted that, for medieval realists, real universals are not shared by their individuals in the alleged manner of Platonic Forms. Plato posited universals that “subsist independently not only of sensible particulars but also of any and

(“quaelibet res necessario dicit se… ita quaelibet res creata / dicit suam / per se causam—et per consequens omne inferius dicit suum superius—et sic dicitur de illa ut subiecto” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 18]). Likewise, he tells us that “just as everything says itself, so also every inferior thing foresays its own superior, that is says it as subjectively precedent. So it attaches the real name of its superior alongside itself as subject, since every inferior has its superior attached to itself as a form” (Kenny 3) (“sicut quaelibet res dicit se, sic omne inferius praedicit, id est subiective / prius dicit, suum / superius, et per consequens praecepulat nomen reale sui superioris sibi copulatum / ut formam” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 1 p. 22]). Wyclif’s claim is that, in signifying or saying itself, each thing says its causes—everything that makes it what it is. But anything below or inferior to something else in a given real category is caused by its superior. For example, humanity itself, i.e., the human species, makes a given human, for example Socrates, what he is (insofar as he is a human); but humanity is superior to Socrates in the real category of substance. Again, animal itself, i.e., the animal genus, makes this animal (Socrates) what he is (insofar as he is an animal); but animal is superior to Socrates in the real category of substance. Thus any inferior member of a given real category says (or foresays) its categorical superior(s). Now, Wyclif does seem to claim that each thing says only its per se cause(s). A per se cause of Socrates makes him what he essentially is; a per accidens cause makes him what he accidentally is. If Socrates is a musical human, then presumably humanity is a per se cause of Socrates (making him essentially human), whereas musicality is a per accidens cause (making him accidentally musical). Nevertheless, I do not think that we should read Wyclif as holding that things invariably say only their per se cause(s). For as we have already noted, individual substances have an accidental level of being caused in them by the inhering of accidental forms (see footnote 86). Thus a given substance’s accidental forms are partly responsible for making that substance what it is: they constitute its fourth, accidental level of being. Accordingly, we should in fact expect individual substances, in saying themselves and what makes them what they are, to say their accidental forms as well as their substantial ones. In other words, we should expect individual substances to say the accidental as well as the substantial universals said of them by God. And indeed this appears to be confirmed by Wyclif’s claim that things signify themselves not just specifically and generically, but also “secundum alios modos univeralium,” as observed above (footnote 103). Of course Wyclif thinks that this person qua this person, or this stone qua this stone, says only its per se causes; however, there is no reason to believe that he thinks that this person qua musical, or this stone qua green, says only its per se causes.
every mind” (Adams, *William Ockham* 5). In a way, Platonic Forms are themselves particulars, namely, abstract ones (Adams, *William Ockham* 10). Yet they are also common in the sense that multiple sensible particulars somehow imitate the same Forms (Adams, *William Ockham* 10–11), by virtue of which imitation sensible particulars fall under common concepts, i.e., those common concepts that correspond to the imitated Forms (Adams, *William Ockham* 5, 10–11). Take, say, the Form of humanity. The Form of humanity is one abstract entity, the nature of humanity or the universal human, eternally subsisting independently of being thought about and outside of every sensible individual. But at the same time, some sensible individuals imitate the universal human; and because they do so, these individuals fall under the concept of humanity and count as human.

A consequence of Plato’s position is that individuals are not metaphysically interconnected—or at least, not metaphysically interconnected in the sense of having common metaphysical parts. The Form of humanity, although somehow present to or resembled by sensible humans, does not contribute to their metaphysical make-up. It is separated from them, not a constituent of what they are. If Platonic Forms exist and are the only extramental universals, as Plato thought, then it follows that individuals are metaphysical islands in the important sense of lacking common parts.

However, fourteenth-century realists rejected Plato’s account.105 Already by the late thirteenth century, “Aristotle had convinced [realists] that no one in his right mind could hold that the nature of a thing exists separated from it as Platonic forms were supposed to do. They insisted instead,” as Aristotle had, “that the natures of things really exist in the things whose natures they are, as metaphysical constituents of them” (Adams, “Universals” 411). The flavour of the realism

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105 In Karger’s words, scholastic philosophers were “unanimous in condemning” Plato’s account of universals (“Walter Burley’s Realism” 38). In Conti’s words, scholastic philosophers regarded the “Aristotelian claim that… there cannot be universal forms apart from their individuals” as “a sort of undisputed dogma” (“Categories” 377).
propounded in the great universities of the fourteenth century—namely, scholastic realism—was thus decidedly Aristotelian rather than Platonic. This is not to say that the common metaphysical parts of things, *in re* universals, were the *only* universals that fourteenth-century realists granted. To the contrary, we noted in Section 2.1 that realists admitted *post rem* universals (the common signs that name *in re* universals), too. And in fact scholastic realists also countenanced a third type of universals, a type descended from Plato’s Forms: *ante rem* universals, universals “before the thing.” Nonetheless, the medieval conflict over universals concentrated on *in re* universals. It is easy to see why this was so. Whereas Forms answer to common concepts according to Plato, for scholastic realists *in re* universals play that role. The controversy between scholastic realists and nominalists about whether common concepts properly name things thus directly involved the existence or non-existence of *in re* universals, not the existence or non-existence of *ante rem* universals. For scholastic philosophers, *ante rem* universals fulfill a different function. Instead of being the natures of things, as Forms are for Plato, *ante rem* universals are exemplary causes of things: they are precisely the divine Ideas, or “ideal universals,” through which God creates. But nominalists as well as realists admitted that God must have Ideas so as to create rationally. And although Ockham, for instance, identified divine Ideas with creatures themselves—which, *qua* actually created, are clearly not *ante rem* or before created things—still he makes room for

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106 Wyclif summarizes: “there are three kinds of universals, namely, *before the individual as an idea*, in the individual thing as a form shared by many things, and after the thing as a species or sign of the former” (Kenny 18, my emphasis) (“triplix est universale, scilicet ante rem individuam ut idea, in re ut forma multis rebus communicata, et post rem ut species vel signum priorum” [*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 2 p. 69]).

107 Wyclif, *Tractatus de universalibus* c. 2 p. 60: “universalia idealia”

108 *Ante rem* universals were thus seen as the “archetypes of all that is” (Conti, “Johannes Sharpe’s Ontology” 159).

109 The conclusion that rational creation requires divine Ideas derives from Augustine, as Burley notes when he explains: “God, before he made things, knew them. Otherwise he would be ignorant of what he was about to do. Therefore, Augustine maintains… that from eternity there were exemplars representing things to be made, and those exemplars he calls ‘ideas’” (Spade, *History* 102) (“deus, antequam fecit res, cognovit eas, quia alter ignorant quid foret facturus. Et ideo ponit Augustinus… quod ab eterno fuerunt exemplaria representancia res fiendas. Et illa exemplaria vocat ‘ideas’” [*Tractatus* p. 46]).
the ante rem in that Ideas are creatures qua possibly created, i.e., qua things creatable by God. Hence realists and nominalists did not so much disagree about whether there are divine Ideas as about what divine Ideas are. And equally importantly, they disagreed about what divine Ideas there are. Nominalists like Ockham held that “divine ideas are precisely of individuals and not of universals,” and more exactly that they are of individual substances and qualities (Maurer 224). They rejected all other divine Ideas but these: God does not conceive of places, for example, but merely of placed substances and qualities. This position followed straightforwardly from English nominalists’ denial of all creatures other than singular substances and qualities, together with the equation of divine Ideas with creatures. But realists, on the contrary, believed that God requires far more divine Ideas. God needs Ideas of places, for example, since He creates places; again, He needs Ideas of in re universals of ten real categories. This stance accorded with realists’ far ontologically richer picture of creation. In this way, realists’ and nominalists’ incompatible views about what divine Ideas exist supervened on their clashing answers to the questions considered in Section 2, e.g., whether or not real universals exist or whether or not there are ten real categories.

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110 In his words, “creatures themselves are ideas…. For… God looks to the creature itself in order to produce rationally” (Adams, William Ockham 1054) (“ipsa creatura est idea… Nam… Deus ad ipsam aspicit ut rationaliter producat” [Ord. I d. 35 q. 5 p. 488]). Maurer explains: “creatures as preconceived by [God] are his ideas…. The ideas are simply the things themselves God knows to be other than himself and creatable by him” (217–8). Wyclif, for his part, is aware of the view that “any creature is an idea of itself” (217–8). Wyclif, for his part, is aware of the view that “any creature is an idea of itself” (Kenny 172) (“quaelibet creatura / est idea sui ipsius” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 15 p. 363]), and he notes this view’s association with Ockham (although he does not believe that Ockham could actually have held it) (Tractatus de universalibus c. 15 pp. 363–4). However, his own position is that “every idea is essentially God himself, though each is formally distinct from each other and from God” (Kenny 174) (“omnis idea est essentialiter ipse Deus, licet formaliter distinguantur ab invicem et a Deo” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 15 p. 368]). In other words, Wyclif holds that each divine Idea enjoys its own existence as a formally distinct aspect of God but lacks an essence independent of God’s.

111 It should be noted that, whereas there are no Forms “of particulars, but only of universal kinds” according to Plato, scholastic thinkers admitted divine Ideas of particulars (Adams, William Ockham 1034). Thomas Aquinas, accordingly, holds that “each and every thing, to the extent that it may be produced by God”—not merely universal things—“has a corresponding idea in God” (Wippel 10). And likewise, Wyclif claims, “there are exactly as many ideas as there are things that God can produce outside himself” (Kenny 176) (“quot sunt producibilia a Deo ad extra, praecise totidem sunt ideae” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 15 p. 372]). Wyclif also says that God “has most distinct ideas of universals and another set of ideas of their particulars in their multiplicity” (Kenny 71, my emphasis) (“habet distinctissimas ideas de universalibus et alias de suis singularibus secundum numerum eorum” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 8 p. 170]).
Realists and nominalists therefore tended to focus on *in re* universals before *ante rem* universals. They were chiefly concerned to defend or reject, respectively, universals existing in individuals as metaphysical parts. But in support of *in re* or real universals, scholastic realists gave different sorts of account. According to the dominant view of the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century moderate realists, 112 real universals have only potential, not actual, existence (Conti, “Johannes Sharpe’s Ontology” 159). 113 After Ockham’s critique of moderate realism in the first quarter of the fourteenth century led philosophers to deem moderate realism’s “description of the relation between universals and individuals… untenable” (Conti, “Realism” 652), however, realists—far from being defeated—moved to embrace more extreme forms of realism. Burley, Wyclif, and the Oxford Realists uniformly believed that real universals enjoy actual existence (Conti, “Johannes Sharpe’s Ontology” 159 and “Categories” 399), 114 while moreover Burley, developing an “ultra-

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112 Among moderate realists Conti lists “Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Simon of Faversham, John Duns Scotus, Thomas of Sutton, Giles of Rome, and Walter Burley (pre-1324)” (“Realism” 648). As noted in the following footnote, Burley’s moderate realism does not fit the mainstream.

113 Burley is the exception that proves the rule. It is indeed possible that, very early in his career, Burley agreed with other moderate realists in denying real universals, as such, actual existence. According to the author *De materia et forma*, a short tract ascribed to Burley in 1962 by Herman Shapiro (95), “[a universal, under the [kind of] being a universal has, is outside the soul. Yet this being is not actual” (Spade, *History* 117, his brackets) (“universale, sub esse universalis, extra animam est. Hoc tamen esse non est actuale” [Shapiro 97]). In other words, as Karger (1999) summarizes, the author of *De materia et forma* maintains that “a given universal, insofar as it actually exists, exists as singular” (“Walter Burley’s Realism” 28). However, Karger plausibly questions the validity of Shapiro’s attribution (“Walter Burley’s Realism” 25). Whether or not Burley ever accepted the more standard form of moderate realism, by some point prior to Ockham’s critique as well as after it he definitely believed that real universals enjoy actual existence—a fact which sets him apart from most moderate realists (Conti, “Walter Burley” Par. 3). Accordingly, Burley’s “turnabout… caused by Ockham’s critique of the realist view” was not from denying that real universals enjoy actual existence to accepting this, but from holding that real universals are really identical with their individuals to insisting that real universals and their individuals are really distinct (Conti, “Ontology” 140). We shall examine Burley’s remarkably strong later realism in due course.

114 Positing real universals to have actual existence is indeed a measure of a realist system’s relative extremity. Conti makes this clear when he states, for instance, that, “just like Burley, Wyclif holds that formal universals exist in actu outside of our minds; and not in potentia, as ‘moderate’ realists thought—even if, unlike the *Doctor Planus et Perspicuus* [i.e., Burley] he maintained that they are really identical with their own individuals” (“Analogy” 151, his italics). It must be mentioned that, in “Johannes Sharpe’s Ontology and Semantics” (2005), Conti asserts that the Oxford Realist Alyngton “does not think that universals exist in actu in the external world” (162, his italics). Yet he retracts this construal in “A Realist Interpretation of the *Categories* in the Fourteenth Century” (2008), now insisting that, “like Burley and Wyclif, Alyngton holds that formal universals actually exist (in actu) outside of our minds, and not potentially only (in potentia), as moderate realists thought” (327, his italics). Conti’s more recent interpretation seems more correct. For according to Alyngton, “the universal is customarily said to be threefold: [the universal] in act—namely, for instance, man, which is actually communicated to many; [the universal] in potency,
realism” in the wake of Ockham’s critique (Conti, “Ontology” 137), claimed that real universals and their individuals are robustly different things (*res*) (Conti, “Ontology” 144). Among these newer realist positions, Burley’s found little favour because it drew uneasily near to Platonism (Conti, “Realism” 654).\(^{115}\) But Wyclif’s theory proved much more successful. Wyclif “pointed to the strategy (almost) all of the subsequent Realists were to adopt” (Conti, “Categories” 392).

Moderate realists, as well as Wyclif and the Oxford Realists later, agreed that real universals and their individuals must be importantly identical—in a word, *really* identical, the same full-fledged real things (*res*) (Conti, “Realism” 651). Yet real universals are common things while individuals clearly are not. Unlike the individual Socrates, for instance, universal humanity constitutes or can constitute Socrates, Plato, Julia Child, etc. So how should real universals and their individuals be

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\(^{115}\) As Conti says, Burley’s “conclusion that universals have their own being distinct from the being of individuals seems dangerously close to Plato’s theory of Forms” (“Realism” 654). In fact Ockham, anticipating Burley’s later claim that real universals and their individuals are really distinct, had already ridiculed that idea as coming “too close to Platonism for the comfort of a moderate realist” (Adams, *William Ockham* 33). Ockham asserted that, if universal humanity and Socrates (for example) “do not make up something *per se* one, and the one is not an accident of the other, then each will be subsistent by itself. So the universal man will be a Platonic Idea and will be a one subsisting by itself, even though it coexists with many individuals. Many other absurdities, which no one in his senses would accept, follow…” (Spade, *Five Texts* 125–6, his italics) (“non faciant per se unum et unum non est accidens alterius, igitur utrumque erit per se subsistens, et ita erit idea Platonis, et erit unum per se subsistens, coexistit tamen multis, et multa alia absurda—quae nullus sanae mentis caperet—sequuntur” [*Ord. I d. 2 q. 4*]). After Ockham’s critique, Burley would grant that real universals and their individuals do not make up anything *per se* or essentially one; however, he still tried to distance his view from Platonism by insisting that *his* universals, unlike Plato’s, are “existentially incomplete and dependent entities whose existence requires the existence of at least one individual substance” (Conti, “Realism” 654). Thus in effect, Burley responded that, even though his universals really exist and are really distinct from their individuals, “*exister réellement et être réellement distinct* n’équivaut pas à *exister séparément*” (Cesalli, *Le réalisme* 179, his italics).
the same? Moderate-realist thinkers such as John Duns Scotus appealed to the relation of actual to potential. To clarify, Scotus maintained that individuals are actualizations of natures, while, conversely, natures are potencies actualized as individuals.\textsuperscript{116} As potencies (or “of themselves,” as Scotus also says)\textsuperscript{117} natures are common—common in the sense that, however a given nature happens to be actualized in a given case, it is never limited to being so actualized.\textsuperscript{118} Humanity, for example, is of itself a common nature. In other words, humanity is a real universal.\textsuperscript{119} And as a common nature or real universal, humanity can always be actualized as Socrates, Plato, Julia Child, etc.—even if it happens to be actualized as Socrates in a given case. But as actualized, humanity is not a common nature, not a real universal. It is only, for instance, Socrates. The upshot is that, on Scotus’ moderate realism, real universals lack any and all actual existence: in becoming actual, natures become individuals.\textsuperscript{120} Consequently, only individuals actually exist. It follows that individuals conjoined by real universals are so linked only at the level of potency.

We can picture individuals’ metaphysical interrelation, according to this moderate-realist theory and in contrast to the nominalist interpretation, in the following manner. For nominalists, as we

\textsuperscript{116} In Peter King’s words, “the individual is the actuality of the uncontracted nature,” i.e., the real universal (“Common Nature” 69, his italics).

\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ord.} II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 32 p. 902, \textit{Ord.} II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 34, \textit{Ord.} II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 41 p. 903, and \textit{passim}

\textsuperscript{118} In Scotus’ formulation, the nature of itself “is common in such a way that it is not incompatible with it to be in something other than what it is in” (Spade, \textit{Five Texts} 66) (“commune quod non repugnet sibi esse in alio quam in eo in quo est” [\textit{Ord.} II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 42 p. 903]).

\textsuperscript{119} Because natures of themselves are \textit{common}, they may indeed be considered real universals. It is true that Scotus asserts: “a nature, according to its being, is not \textit{of itself} universal” (Spade, \textit{Five Texts} 64, his italics) (“secundum illud esse non est natura de se universalis” [\textit{Ord.} II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 34 p. 902]). However, what Scotus means is that natures, according to their being or of themselves, are not universal \textit{in act or actually}. This is because natures, just of themselves or as universals, are precisely potencies, without actual existence; insofar as natures actually exist, they are individuals. Accordingly, Scotus continues: “there is in reality something that is not of itself a ‘this.’ Consequently it is not incompatible with it of itself to be ‘not-this.’ But that common something is not a universal \textit{in act”} (Spade, \textit{Five Texts} 66, my emphasis) (“[e]st… in re ‘commune’, quod non est de se hoc, et per consequens ei de se non repugnat non-hoc. Sed tale commune non est universale in actu” [\textit{Ord.} II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 41 p. 903]). In other words, there is indeed something common or universal in reality, on Scotus’ account—there is a real universal, i.e., the common nature. It is just that the real universal, as such, is not an actual existent.

\textsuperscript{120} As Giorgio Pini says, the nature or “essence, by itself, is not individual, but is made individual by being made actual” according to Scotus (63).
saw in Section 2.1, each thing is singular. This goes not just for each actual thing or each thing insofar as it is actual, but for each thing whether actual or potential. Individuals such as Socrates are therefore singular through and through, as a whole and in their every element. They are like islands divided from one another not just insofar as each rises from the water of potency into the air of actuality, but all the way down. For moderate realists, by contrast, individuals resemble the islands of an archipelago. Above the waves, they part; yet they converge beneath the surface, and are potentially peninsulas (if the water should recede). One can thus abstract from an individual’s actuality as an individual to its increasingly general potential layers. So abstracting (pushing back the waters), one finds an individual interconnected with ever more creatures—until at last a substance’s unity with all other substances, a quality’s unity with all other qualities, etc., appears.

Ockham, however, insisted that “the singular denies the possibility that constitutes the universal in potentia” (Vignaux 169, his italics), and so rejected moderate realists’ efforts to make a place, even if only in potency, for real universals. Centrally, he interrogated the purported real identity between individuals and real universals. If two things are really identical, must they, as Ockham claimed, have all and only the same properties? Some moderate realists, for instance Burley, accepted this account of real identity, but Ockham emphasized that “unacceptable consequences”

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121 Ockham tells us that “among creatures the same thing cannot be truly affirmed and truly denied of the same thing…. For contradiction is the strongest way to prove the distinction of things” (Spade, Five Texts 156) (“de eadem re in creaturis non potest idem vere affirmari et vere negari… quia contradictio est via potissima ad probandum distinctionem rerum” [Ordinatio I, d. 2 q. 6]). Hence for any \(x\) and \(y\), \(x\) and \(y\) differ if there is some property \(F\) such that \(F\) can be truly affirmed of \(x\) but not \(y\) or of \(y\) but not \(x\). It follows that, if \(x\) and \(y\) do not differ (i.e., if they are the same), then there is no \(F\) such that \(F\) can be truly affirmed of \(x\) but not \(y\) or of \(y\) but not \(x\).

122 In his Tractatus de universalibus (1337), Burley insists: “in order to know whether [things] are the same or diverse, one must see whether [this or] that is affirmed of the one and denied of the other, and in that case they are not the same but rather diverse. If nothing is affirmed of the one that is denied of any other, then they are the same” (Spade, History 87, his brackets) (“ad sciendum, utrum aliqa sint eadem vel diversa, considerandum est, utrum aliquod affirmetur de uno, quod negatur de altero, et sic non sunt eadem sed diversa. Et si nihil affirmetur de uno, quin illud affirmatur de reliquo, tune sunt eadem” [Tractatus p. 22]). Thus for Burley, “two things are identical if and only if whatever is predicated of one is also predicated of the other” (Conti, “Walter Burley” Par. 2). According to Conti, Burley must have accepted this account of real identity prior to Ockham’s critique of moderate realism, for it is chiefly on the basis of having accepted it that Burley finds Ockham’s arguments persuasive (“Ontology” 141).
for realists flow immediately from it (Conti, “Ontology” 140). For example, if Judas is damned and really identical things have all and only the same properties, then Judas’ real identity with universal humanity entails that universal humanity, which Christ shares with Judas, is damned.¹²³

Moreover, given the above account of real identity and also that individuals really identical with real universals have contrary properties, it follows that real universals themselves have opposing properties (Conti, “Realism” 651).¹²⁴ For instance, if Socrates and Plato are each really identical with universal humanity and Socrates is exuberant at the same time that Plato is glum, it follows that universal humanity is simultaneously both exuberant and glum. However, this seems absurd.

According to some moderate realists, though, really identical things need not have all and only the same properties. Notably, Scotus considered the true criterion of real identity to be logical inseparability: two things are really identical if and only if neither can exist without the other.¹²⁵

Moreover, he held that some really identical things are formally distinct—not distinct as two full-fledged real things (res), but rather as two mind-independent aspects of the same res.¹²⁶ Formally

¹²³ In Ockham’s words, “the common nature really existing in Christ and a damned [person] would be damned, because [it is damned] in Judas” (Spade, History 146, his brackets) (“illa natura communis existens realiter in Christo et in damnato esset damnata, quia in Iuda” [Summa logicae I c. 15 p. 51]).

¹²⁴ Ockham’s favourite example is that real universals would be in multiple places at once, just as their individuals are: “the same thing would be in distinct places, because the universal human would be in this human and in that one” (“eadem res esset in distinctis locis, quia homo universalis esset in isto homine et in illo” (In librum Praedicamentorum Aristotelis c. 8 part 1 p. 166)). Hence if, at a given time, Socrates is in Athens and Plato is in Thebes, and if Socrates and Plato are each really identical with universal humanity, then universal humanity is in both Athens and Thebes at that time. Ockham could easily add that, because Socrates is not in Thebes at the same time Plato is, universal humanity both is and is not in Thebes at that time.

¹²⁵ “Scotus holds that two items are really distinct from one another if and only if they are separable: one can exist without the other, at least by divine power”; correlatively, he “maintains that items are really identical if and only if they are not really distinct—that is, if and only if neither can exist without the other, even by divine power” (King, “Metaphysics” 21–2, his italics). Logical inseparability, or in Gaskin’s phrase “mutually assured creation and destruction,” was a “standard criterion for real identity in medieval thought” (92).

¹²⁶ According to Scotus, x and y are formally distinct if and only if they are (1) really identical and (2) definitionally nonidentical or non-overlapping. Regarding (2), King explains: “[S]ome really items may differ in their definitions. More precisely, they may differ in ratio, which is a generalization of Aristotelian ‘definition’ or account: a ratio, like a definition, picks out the feature or set of features that make something to be what it is, although it need not do so by genus and specific differentia. All definitions are rationes but not conversely: there are items that lack definitions yet do have a set of features that make them what they are…. Thus items that are formally distinct have
distinct things, i.e., “formalities” or “real aspects,” have different properties despite their real identity. This nuanced treatment of identity and distinction allowed Scotus to evade objections like those above, because he posited that two formalities, each with its own properties, contribute to each individual’s essential make-up. In addition to a common nature—the potential part of an individual essence, which renders an individual human, say, or canine—there is an “individual difference,” the act or actuality of the essence, which individuates and actualizes the nature as Socrates, for instance, or Lassie. Further, the common nature and the individual difference each has its own properties, meaning that one real thing (the individual) has some properties qua common nature and some properties qua individual difference, i.e., qua a certain actuality of the nature. Accordingly, Scotus can hold that “individuality and commonness… apply to one and the nonidentical definitions or rationes; that is, the ratio of one does not include that of the other…. Furthermore, both real identity and definitional nonidentity are independent of any activity of the intellect. We discover rationes through the intellect but do not create them. Hence, the distinction between formally distinct items seems to be present in the world, not even partially caused by the intellect” (King, “Metaphysics” 22–3, his italics). For a more thorough treatment of Scotus’ formal distinction, see “Scotus’s Formal Distinction,” Section III (pp. 25–43) of Adams’ “Ockham on Identity and Distinction.”

127 “Scotus variously calls the non-identical entities within what is one and the same real thing (rex) ‘realities’ (realitates), ‘formalities’ (formalitates), ‘aspects’ (rationes), ‘formal aspects’ (rationes formales), ‘intentions’ (intentiones), or ‘real aspects’ (rationes reales)” (Adams, “Ockham on Identity and Distinction” 31–2, her italics). Because Scotus’ ontology is “wider” or richer than Ockham’s insofar as Scotus admits formalities and Ockham denies them, “Scotus could identify mind-independent property-bearers of which properties of the form ‘x is F’ and ‘y is not F’ are true with non-identical or distinct formalities,” whereas Ockham could not (Adams, “Ockham on Identity and Distinction” 45, her italics). Thus, Scotus “would be able to claim that propositions of the form ‘x if F’ and ‘y is not F’ can be simultaneously true of non-identical or distinct constituent realities of the same real thing (rex), just as much as they can of distinct parts of a single whole” (Adams, “Ockham on Identity and Distinction” 45, her italics).

128 “differentia individualis” (Ord. II, d. 3 p. 1 q. 6 n. 210 p. 930 and passim)

129 According to Scotus, “the reality of an individual [i.e., the individual difference] is… so to speak an act determining the reality of the species [i.e., the nature], which is as it were possible and potential” (Spade, Five Texts 104) (“ista realitas individui est… quasi actus, determinans illam realitatem speciei quasi possibilem et potentialalem” [Ord. II d. 3 part 1 q. 6 n. 206 p. 930]). Scotus therefore thinks that “the relationship between the specific essence [i.e., the nature in potency] and its principle of individuation [i.e., the individual difference] is that between a potentiality and its actuality (i.e., what makes it actual)” (Pini 61). (We should not be distracted by Scotus’ uses of “quasi.” These simply stress that the individual difference is not a form but, rather, the “last reality of the form” (Spade, Five Texts 104) (“ultima realitas formae” [Ord. II d. 3 part 1 q. 6 n. 206 p. 930]). If the individual difference were a form, then individuals would be species and definable, which Scotus denies.)

130 As King says, “Scotus holds that in each individual there is a principle that accounts for its being the very thing it is and a formally distinct principle that accounts for its being the kind of thing it is; the former is its individual differentia, the latter its common nature” (“Common Nature” 50). Scotus makes it clear that the common nature and individual difference are only formally distinct, explaining that they “cannot be distinguished as ‘thing’ and ‘thing,’” but rather “are always formally distinct realities of the same thing” (Spade, Five Texts 107) (“Nec possunt… esse res et res”; “semper… sunt realitates eiusdem rei, formaliter distinctae” [Ord. II d. 3 part. 1 q. 6 n. 215 p. 931]).
same subject, but only in virtue of that subject['s] being the actuality of a given potentiality—commonness applies to it in virtue of the potentiality, individuality in virtue of its actualization” (King, “Common Nature” 51). Of course, this helps to explain how real universals and their individuals can be really identical even though real universals are common and individuals are not. But it also positions Scotus to say that Judas’ damnation does not imply that of universal humanity, since presumably damnation befalls Judas as a certain actualization of humanity and not qua humanity of itself. Likewise, Scotus can explain that universal humanity need not be at the same time exuberant and glum if Socrates is exuberant and Plato glum—for exuberance may befall Socrates, and glumness Plato, just inasmuch as each is actually a certain individual human.

Ockham contended that Scotus’ formal distinction, beyond being incoherent,\textsuperscript{132} could not rescue his realism. For if humanity and an individual difference are formally distinct but really identical parts of Socrates’ essence, say, and if moreover real identity implies logical inseparability, then the individual difference that actualizes humanity as Socrates \textit{must} come together with humanity. Hence humanity \textit{must} be actualized as Socrates. But if a common nature is one that, regardless of how it happens to be actualized in a given case, is never limited to being so actualized—but can always be actualized as Julia Child, for instance, even if in fact actualized as Socrates—then, so Ockham argued, Socrates’ essence does not contain a \textit{common} nature, after all.\textsuperscript{133} By extension, no natures are common. Ockham argues that Scotus’ account leaves no room for real universals.

\textsuperscript{132} For Ockham’s rejection of the formal distinction, see, for instance, his \textit{Ordinatio} I d. 2 q. 6 nn. 25–38.
\textsuperscript{133} Ockham puts the argument thus: “[What] [Scotus] says—‘The multitude opposed to the greater unity can go together with the lesser unity without contradiction’ [i.e., multiple individuals can without contradiction actualize the common nature]—seems to be inconsistent with his other claim, where he says the nature and the individual difference are not really different. For when two items are really the same, whatever can by divine power really be one of them can also be the other. But this individual difference cannot be numerically several really distinct items. Therefore, neither can the nature that is really the same with this contracting difference be really several items. Consequently neither can it be anything other than this contracting difference. So the nature cannot without contradiction allow in itself a numerical multitude” (Spade, \textit{Five Texts} 160) (“quod dicit quod ‘cum unitate minori
Perhaps Scotus could plausibly respond to Ockham’s attack. But however that may be, realists reacted to the critique by reconceiving the relationship between individuals and real universals. They developed two structurally similar, but quite descriptively different, new accounts, on each of which real universals enjoy actual existence. For after all, if real universals actually exist, then there is no need to posit individual differences really identical with them and actualizing them as individuals. This at least avoids the problem that Ockham sets Scotus, though challenges remain.

Burley, who offered the first proposal, in effect distinguished individuals strictly speaking from individuals broadly speaking. Strictly speaking, an individual is just an immediately individual essence or substantial form along with the matter it informs—not also real universals. Yet the individual essence, or the “form perfecting matter,” as it were carries real universals with it. For Burley sees the form perfecting matter as a token of multiple types: real universals or “forms

134 King believes he could. Summarizing the problem as “if the contracted nature [e.g., the common nature combined with the individual difference] and the individual differentia are really the same and only formally distinct, the contracted nature cannot be in another,” he suggests that Scotus’ “way out of this dilemma... depends on his theory of modality” (“Common Nature” 71, his italics). See “Duns Scotus on the Common Nature” for King’s discussion of Scotus’ “theory of modality” and how it might help with the problem Ockham raises.

135 Burley explains, “the species is not a part of the individual.... Socrates, who is a particular effect, is put together only out of particular causes, namely, out of this matter and this form” (Spade, History 98) (“species non est pars individui.... Sortes, qui est effectus particularis, non componitur nisi ex causis particularibus, scilicet ex hac materia et hac forma” [Tractatus p. 40]).

136 “forma perficiens materiam” (De formis p. 10)
that declare quiddity.” Socrates strictly speaking, for instance, is just his materialized, singular humanity—yet precisely because Socrates’ singular humanity is an instance of humanity, which is a real universal, a real universal enters the equation: Socrates’ humanity presupposes humanity and cannot exist without humanity existing. So Socrates’ humanity imports universal humanity; and for its part, universal humanity makes Socrates the type of thing he is (declares his quiddity). But Socrates betokens several types: beyond being a human, he is an animal, a living thing, and, at last, a substance. Thus those types or real universals also attend Socrates (strictly speaking).

Furthermore, his accidents, e.g., musicality or glumness, clothe Socrates (strictly speaking) like successive garments, and these, by instantiating their own specific and generic real universals, add such universals to the equation. Socrates (strictly speaking) turns out to be the nucleus of a larger metaphysical bundle—in Conti’s phrase, a “macro-object” (“Ontology” 175)—including not only his singular essence and matter, i.e., his “parties constitutives,” nor only these together

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137 “forme que declarant quidditatem” (De formis p. 45). Conti makes it plain that the relationship between Burley’s forms that declare quiddity and forms perfecting matter is a relationship of types to tokens: “universal substances and individual substances are linked together by a relation of instantiation, so that primary substances are tokens of secondary substances” (“Ontology” 158). For more about the type-token distinction, cf. footnote 83 of Chapter Two.

138 As Karger remarks: “It is in virtue of having a certain proper substantial form that an individual has certain shared [i.e., universal] substantial forms. Thus, it is by her proper substantial form… that Susan is a human being, that she is an animal, that she is an animated body, that she is rational and that she has, consequently, the shared substantial forms in which those quiddities exist” (“Walter Burley’s Realism” 33, footnote). Burley seems to uphold a certain bidirectional dependence: as existentially incomplete and dependent entities (see footnote 115), real universals presuppose singulars; as tokens, however, individuals presuppose real universal types.

139 The analogy is Burley’s: “We can so imagine, by imagining that the body of a man is that to which the shirt immediately adheres—and then the tunic adheres to the body clothed by the shirt, and afterwards [come] the other garments in order—that it is thus of prime matter, to which the substantial form immediately adheres; and then quantity comes to the composite of prime matter and substantial form; and then quality comes to the whole composite of prime matter, substantial form, and quantity—and so on for the other accidents in order. And thus the substantial form immediately comes to the prime matter, and so to the being in potency, and the accidental form immediately comes to the composite substance and to the being in act” (“Unde nos possumus sic ymaginari, yimaginando quod corpus hominis est cui immediate adheret camisia et deinde corpori induto camisia adheret tunica et postea secundum ordinem alia indumenta, quod sic est de materia prima cui immediate adheret forma substantialis, deinde composito ex materia prima et forma substantiali advenit quantitas, deinde toti composito ex materia prima, forma substantiali et quantitate advenit qualitas et sic de aliis accidentibus secundum ordinem. Et ita forma substantialis immediate advenit materie prime et sic enti in potentia et forma accidentalis immediate advenit substantie composite et enti in actu” (De formis p. 11).
with his accidents, but also an array of universal “parties concomitantes” (Cesalli, *Le réalisme* 178). Socrates broadly speaking is the whole macro-object, and similarly for other individuals.

Now if individuals strictly speaking constitute the cores of individuals broadly speaking, so that real universals belong to the metaphysical bundles that enwrap individual *res* but are still, for all that, extrinsic to those *res*, then real universals interconnect individuals only in the broad sense. The better to picture this, let us again sail the metaphysical sea. Coming to Burley’s ultra-realist country, we find scattered islands, each a lonely pinnacle of stone. Sandbars, however, join them, emerging as a consequence of currents islands cause, and in this way actual accumulations make peninsulas of islands. From above—from a God’s eye perspective, as it were—these landmasses are continuous: above the waters of potency, individuals broadly speaking join. But despite their concurrence or inevitable concomitance, stone and sand remain robustly different things.

The second sort of extreme-realist proposal to appear after Ockham’s critique was developed by Wyclif. Wyclif tightened the ties among individuals by reconstruing real identity and reviving Scotus’ formal distinction. Individuals for Wyclif, like individuals broadly speaking on Burley’s view, are metaphysical bundles of individual and universal parts. But where Burley sketches real distinctions, Wyclif draws formal ones. Spade clarifies Wyclif’s bundle-view of individuals:

Wyclif regards an individual—that is, an individual substance or nature, for example, Socrates—as a kind of metaphysical fusion of a number of disparate entities. First of all,

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**140** Conti gives “Socrates or Coriscus” as examples of macro-objects (“Ontology” 175). Cesalli likewise considers Burley’s metaphysical bundles to be individuals in a sense: “La chose Socrate apparait dès lors comme une véritable *somme de parties réelles*” (*Le réalisme* 179, his italics). And he provides this helpful formula: “*S* était Socrate, et *S* était accidentellement rouge. La métaphysique de *S* révélait la composition suivante (*m₀ = matière première de *S*; *fs₁* = âme intellective de *S* (forme substantielle particulière et partie constitutive de *S*); *fa₁* = la rougeur de *S* (forme accidentelle particulière et partie constitutive de *S*); *fs₂* = l’humanité en *S* (forme substantielle universelle et partie concomitante de *S*); *fa₂* = la rougeur en *S* (forme accidentelle universelle et partie concomitante de *S*)): *S* = {[*m₀ + *fs₁*] + *fa₁* + *fs₂* + *fa₂*}” (*Le réalisme* 236, his italics). In the same vein as both Conti and Cesalli, Karger speaks of an “individual as a whole” according to Burley (“Walter Burley’s Realism” 32).
the individual may share or participate in a variety of [real] universals: its generic and specific natures, for instance, but also its accidents. All such universals will be said to be “numerically identical” with [i.e., one and the same real thing as] the individual that shares or participates in them. Again, if the individual is a material individual, then matter and substantial form are combined in its metaphysical make-up. In that case we shall say that the matter and the substantial form are likewise “numerically identical” with the individual they compose…. In short, anything bound into the metaphysical synthesis that is an individual will be said to be numerically identical with that individual. (“Introduction” xxiv–v)

For Wyclif, then, an individual—one and the same real thing—is a fusion of formalities. In fact, Wyclif takes being or belonging to such an individual fusion, which he calls a supposit, \(^\text{141}\) to be precisely the criterion of real identity. \(^\text{142}\) Really identical things certainly do not have to have all and only the same properties. Instead, Wyclif regards having all and only the same properties as a criterion of formal identity. \(^\text{143}\) But at the same time, really identical things do not even have to

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\(^{141}\) As Spade states, “every suppositum will be an individual” (“Introduction” xxix, his italics), where “a suppositum is an entity that does not inhere in anything else, although other entities inhere in it. Thus, universals inhere in the individuals to which they are common, matter and form inhere in the individual composites they make up, and accidents inhere in their subjects. Universals, matter and form, and accidents, therefore, are not supposita. But Socrates is a suppositum. He is the bearer of universals and accidents, and he has both matter and form, but he does not in turn inhere in any other entity” (“Introduction” xxviii, his italics).

\(^{142}\) According to Wyclif, two things are really identical if and only if they agree “within the same single essence or supposit” (Kenny 29) (“in eadem singulari essentia vel supposito” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 4 p. 91]). But although Wyclif speaks in one breath of agreement in singular essence or supposit, his overall treatment of identity and distinction makes it clear that agreement in supposit makes for real identity — whereas agreement in singular essence does not. This is because Wyclif deems it possible for things really to differ by having different supposita, even though they agree in the same singular essence; in fact, this is just what happens in the case of the three divine Persons. Nevertheless, except in remarkable cases like that of the divine Persons, individual essences may appropriately be taken as a mark of real identity, for in normal cases an individual essence for Wyclif — like a form perfecting matter for Burley — constitutes the core of the metaphysical bundle and makes it the very bundle it is (bringing together or coupling all the other components). Wyclif’s complete treatment of identity and distinction may be summarized as follows. First, essentially different items differ in generic essence, specific essence, or singular essence (Tractatus de universalibus c. 4 pp. 90–1). Correlatively, essentially identical items agree in singular essence (and a fortiori also specific and generic essence). Second, really but not essentially different items agree in singular essence but are or belong to different supposita of that singular essence (Tractatus de universalibus c. 4 p. 91). Correlatively, really and essentially identical items agree in supposit (and a fortiori also singular essence, specific essence, and generic essence). Therefore essential identity does not imply real identity, but real identity does imply essential identity; conversely, essential distinction does imply real distinction, but real distinction does not imply essential distinction. Finally, formally distinct items agree in supposit (and a fortiori also singular essence, specific essence, and generic essence) but nonetheless differ in some way — namely, as will be seen momentarily, by having different properties (Tractatus de universalibus c. 4 p. 91).

\(^{143}\) Items having all and only the same properties are said to be indiscernible. But as Spade points out, indiscernibility for Wyclif serves as “a criterion… of… ‘formal identity’: \(x\) and \(y\) are formally identical if and only if they are indiscernible” (“Introduction” xxvi).
be logically inseparable—as is clear from the fact that accidents, which are separable from their subjects, belong to the same supposit as their subjects and are therefore really the same.\footnote{Wyclif makes it clear that accidents can “coincide in the same subject” (Kenny 30) (“convenientia in eodem subiecto singulare” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 4 p. 91]), i.e., in the same supposit, in which case they are really identical and only formally distinct. Hence as Gaskin observes, “Wyclif fails to produce… real… identities conforming to the standard criterion of real identity, namely that of mutually assured creation and destruction” (93).} Wyclif’s view of identity and distinction permits him to hold that individuals and real universals are, despite being equally actual and equally mind-independent, simultaneously identical in one sense and distinct (or different) in another. If they belong to the same supposit, if they make up a single fusion, then they are really the same; if nonetheless they differ in some property, then they are formally distinct.\footnote{Wyclif asserts that “every universal is particular, and \textit{vice versa} though the two are formally distinct” (Kenny 28, his italics) (“omne universale est singulare et econtra, licet distinguantur formaliter ab invicem” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 4 p. 87]). For example, “a man is a primary substance as an individual of substance, and also a secondary substance as a species of substance—not formally, according to the definitiouniversalis, sed essentialiter atque identice. Et ita tam substantia prima quam substantia secunda est una et eadem substantia, quia persona Petri. Nec in ipso est ipsa duo supposita.....” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 9 p. 196]). The real identity and formal distinction of real universals and their individuals proved to be one of the most influential aspects of Wyclif’s realism, so that de Libera speaks of “la doctrine de l’identité réelle et de la différence formelle entre universaux et singuliers, prônée par l’ensemble de l’école réaliste d’Oxford” (\textit{La querelle} 411).} But how should we know whether two things differ in some property? A crucial clue lies in the fact that Wyclif speaks interchangeably of “formal difference, or notional difference” (Kenny 29), i.e., conceptual difference.\footnote{“differentia formalis vel secundum rationem” (\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 4 p. 91).} Because Wyclif certainly takes the formal distinction to be “ontologically grounded” (Gaskin 89), he holds that every conceptual difference is simultaneously ontological. If two things can be thought of as distinct, they are at once distinct beyond the mind. Again, our thought correctly traces reality’s ontological lines.
Like formal distinction, real identity is for Wyclif intellectually apprehensible.\(^{147}\) And he further maintains that, because supposites can overlap in real universals, real identity comes in degrees: individuals may be partly identical \(res\), may partly coincide.\(^{148}\) Furthermore, though the body’s senses fall short—though “a thing in so far as it is perceptible by an external sense, is particular” (Kenny 15)\(^{149}\)—nevertheless, the mind can find the real agreements of the world. To emphasize, the mind \textit{can} discern certain things, even when the body cannot; for Wyclif, “understanding was perception, not simply ratiocination” (Catto 192). Perhaps most importantly, only the mind’s eye sees real universals; only the mind’s ears hear their speech.\(^{150}\) Wyclif says that “common natures are objects of intellects, and not of senses” (Kenny 15).\(^{151}\) Via thought, we are able to apprehend real universals, even in this life. But whether or not a given person ever perceives real universals, God and the blessed discern them.\(^{152}\) Likewise, God and the blessed behold individuals as linked by real universals—and this means, Wyclif holds, that individuals actually \textit{are} interconnected. In effect, Wyclif approaches Burley’s individuals broadly speaking from above, from the God’s-eye perspective, and deems this the truer gaze: his own individuals are properly or strictly peninsulas. That is, a peninsula is a peninsula for Wyclif, one real thing, however its raw materials may vary.

\(^{147}\) For instance, all properties “said” by a given individual are thereby intellectually apprehensible as belonging to that individual, bound into the synthesis of its real identity.

\(^{148}\) “[W]henever individuals resemble each other in genus or species they are to that extent one and the same…. For just as the three divine persons resemble each other in the common being God—which is the divine essence—and to that extent are the same essence, thus too individual men resemble each other in this common being man, and to that extend they are the same specific nature” (Kenny 35) (“quaecumque individua conveniunt in genere vel specie de tanto sunt unum et idem…. Sicut enim tres personae divinae conveniunt in hoc communi esse Deum—quod est essentia divina—et de tanto sunt eadem essentia, sic singuli homines conveniunt in hoc communi esse hominem et de tanto sunt eadem natura specifica” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 5 pp. 101–2]).

\(^{149}\) “[R]es, ut sensu extrinseco sensibilis, est singularis” (\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 2 p. 64).

\(^{150}\) I.e., the ontological or natural speech of all beings in the world (see Section 2.3). Wyclif certainly believes that real universals as well as individuals say or signify themselves—for, as he states, “universal things truly signify themselves when they are made objects of the intellect” (Kenny 12) (“res universales vere significare seipsas dum sunt objecta intellectus” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 2 p. 55]).

\(^{151}\) “[N]aturae communes sunt intelligibles et non sensibles” (\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 2 p. 63).

\(^{152}\) “God has most distinct knowledge of universal realities, as the Blessed too will have in our homeland” (Kenny 70) (“Deus… cognoscit distinctissime res universales sicut et Beati in Patria” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 8 p. 169]). Wyclif also affirms, similarly, that “in our homeland, in the book of life, we will [clearly] see the number and the accidents of all the things which today are unknown to us” (Kenny 84, my brackets) (“in Patria clare videmus in Libro vitae numerum et accidentia omnium quae sunt nobis hodie ignota” [\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 9 p. 196]).
God sees it so, as do the saints; so may we now, in thought. For we truly are united—though only minds envision our connection.

4. From Philosophy to Poetry

We have seen that fourteenth-century English realists granted more extensive symmetry between mental language and extramental reality than nominalists did and, further, that realists invariably countenanced some sort of metaphysical connection or communion among individuals, whereas nominalists did not. We have also seen that the realist school of thought inspired by Wyclif and dominant in late-fourteenth-century England defended both aspects of the realist philosophical vision in particularly strong forms, binding individuals as res with res via actual universals even while extending mental-extramental isomorphism to the point of reality’s comprising a language.

Like other realists, Wyclif believed real universals necessary to secure objective knowledge. But in fact, he also considered them essential to the acquisition of wisdom and for right moral action. He placed a premium on real universals, making them not just prior to individuals by nature (and consequently closer to God within creation’s whole unfolding), but also instrumental causes of individuals, causally serving a deity “Lord of them [i.e., real universals] before he is Lord of individuals” (Kenny 111). To clarify, on Wyclif’s view God’s truth and goodness flow into

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153 Conti speaks of the “primacy of universals over any other kinds of beings” on Wyclif’s account, “by which all the main subsequent forms of realism were to be inspired” (“Wyclif’s Logic” 70).

154 As Wyclif says succinctly, “The species is by nature prior to its individual” (Kenny 37) (“species est natura prius suo individuo” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 5 p. 106]).

155 More precisely, Wyclif holds that “the universal is related to its particular as formal, efficient and final cause” (Kenny 91) (“universale se habet ad suum singulare ut causa formalis, efficiens et finalis” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 10 p. 209]). He admits that the individual, in turn, “is a quasi-material cause of its superior” (Kenny 92) (“est quasi causa materialis sui superioris” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 10 p. 211]), i.e., the real universal.

156 “[P]rius… dominus eorum quam individuorum” (Tractatus de universalibus c. 11 p. 247). Wyclif adds: “among all creatures it is universals that are the most beneficial and do the most good, since without the prior causation of universals there could be no particular…. [U]niversals, who, after God, make everything happen in the world, are
individuals through the real universals that they presuppose and instantiate, and which are really identical with them. And correlative, individuals rise toward God—intellectually as well as affectively or morally—through those same real universals, first by apprehending real universals and then by duly loving them. Wyclif is adamant that knowledge of real universals is necessary (although of course insufficient) for attaining wisdom or sacrosanct knowledge:

(T)he knowledge of universals is the principal step on the ladder of wisdom towards the exploration of hidden truths…. In the highest Trinity the Father is everything that the Son is, because he is all the substance or essence which the Son is. If so, what wonder is it if man is that one thing that a donkey is, namely general substance? (Kenny 74)

By understanding the real agreements among creatures (how substances, say, are genuinely one), therefore, we come somewhat nearer to comprehending God’s mystical unity in three Persons.

Wyclif similarly insists, even more forcefully, that love of real universals is morally obligatory—that it is, indeed, morality’s very pith. On the basis of Augustine’s premise that “what everyone must principally love in his neighbour is that he is a human being, and not that he is his own son, or someone useful” (Kenny 21), for instance, Wyclif comes to a profoundly realist conclusion:

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\text{not just useful, but the most necessary in the world among all creatures} \] (Kenny 113) (“universalia inter omnes creaturas maxime prosunt et faciunt magis bonum, cum sine priori causatione universalium non poterit esse aliquod singulare…. [U]niversalia, cum faciunt immediate post Deum quodlibet opus mundi, sunt mundo nedum utilia, sed inter creaturas summe necessaria” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 11 p. 251]).

Wyclif expresses the emanation of causal power through real universals thus: “the genus has of its nature, the attribute of being able to cause the species and any one of its inferiors. Thus, just as naturally and in its own right light causes shining, so naturally and in its own right the genus causes each and any of its species” (Kenny 155–6) (“genus habet de natura sua tamquam passionem quod potest causare speciem et quodcumque suum inferius, ex quo capitur quod, sicut naturaliter et per se lux causat lucentiam, sic naturaliter et per se genus causat quamlibet sui speciem” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 14 p. 331]).

\[\text{[N]otitia universalium est gradus praeceptuus scalae sapientiae ad indagandum veritates absconditas…. Si enim in altissima Trinitate Pater est omne illud quod est Filius, quia omnis substantia vel essentia quae est Filius, quid mirum si homo sit unum quod est asinus, quia substantia generalis?} \] (Tractatus de universalibus c. 8 p. 175).

As J. Catto comments, “for Wyclif the question [of the existence of real universals] was fundamental to a logical understanding of theological issues: awareness of universals marked a quantum leap… up the ladder of wisdom, and without it heresies like Abbot Joachim of Fiore’s on the trinity would flourish” (192).

\[\text{[Q]uilibet debet principaliter amare in proximo quod est homo et non quod est filius suus vel sibi utilis} \] (Wyclif, Tractatus de universalibus c. 3 p. 75).
All envy or actual sin is caused by the lack of an ordered love of universals... because every such sin consists in a will preferring a lesser good to a greater good, whereas in general the more universal goods are better. Therefore... if the will, in place of its private good, preferred, in due order, the common or better good, it would not sin.... Thus, beyond doubt, intellectual and emotional error about universals is the cause of all the sin that reigns in the world. (Kenny 22)\textsuperscript{161}

Thus according to Wyclif, directing one's love toward the real universals in individuals instead of toward individuals themselves (or, what is the same on his doctrine of real identity and formal distinction between real universals and individuals, directing one's love toward individuals \textit{qua} universals instead of \textit{qua} individuals) is indispensable to right action, to doing well. Regrettably, however, fallen “man’s inordinate affection for the concrete singular makes him apprehend the singular of any being more distinctly than its \textit{pura natura}, the universal” (Catto 190, his italics). Only by overcoming the undue focus on singulars characteristic of fallen humans and reorienting one’s affection from concrete individuals to abstract universals, then, can one eschew emotional error and align oneself with God. And it follows from this position that nominalism’s rejection of real universals undercuts a crucial foundation of morality and salvation. Nominalism, as at least some other English theologians also claimed, emerges as a threat to Christians and the Church.\textsuperscript{162}

In subsequent chapters, we shall see that Wyclif’s affiliation of real universals with wisdom and right love or action resonates potently in contemporary poetry, namely in the great imaginative

\textsuperscript{161} “[O]mnis invidia vel actu ale peccatum causatur ex defectu ordinatae dilectionis universalium... nam omne tale peccatum consistit in voluntate praeponente minus bonum magis bono. Sed generaliter bona universaliora sunt meliora. Igitur... voluntas, si loco boni privati praeponeret ordinate bonum communis [i.e.] melius, tune non sic peccaret.... [I]gitur indubie error intellectus et affectus circa universalia est causa totius peccati regnantis in saeculo” (\textit{Tractatus de universalibus} c. 3 p. 77, Mueller’s brackets).

\textsuperscript{162} For example, one John Lutterell of Oxford—who considered Ockham’s nominalism so perilous that he travelled to Avignon in 1323 with a list of 56 alleged errors culled from Ockham’s works and “induced Pope John XXII to start the process against Ockham”—found nominalism injurious to Christian faith itself (Thijssen 152). Lutterell claimed that “Ockham argued as follows: knowledge is of propositions, and since propositions consist of concepts and not of substances, we have (certain) knowledge only of concepts”—but in fact, “[t]he same goes for articles of Faith,” since “they are propositions,” and so it will follow from Ockham’s position (according to Lutterell) that “we believe propositions and not the eternal things \textit{(res eterne)} these propositions deal with” (Thijssen 153, his italics). Lutterell thus derived a danger to Christian faith, and by extension to Christian salvation, from the idealism that he, like other realists, believed nominalist views like Ockham’s to entail.
dream visions of late-fourteenth-century England. For in addition to affirming both aspects of the realist philosophical vision—pronounced parallelism between mental language and extramental reality, and metaphysical interconnection among individuals—Pearl and Piers Plowman appear to present real universals, revealed to the mental eyes of dreamers, as the answers to intellectual, emotional, or moral problems posited early in the poems. By contrast, the House of Fame seems more plausibly to presuppose the nominalist vision of division—but only to reduce nominalism to idealist absurdity, and hence to affirm realism indirectly. So understood, all three dream-vision poems imply or presuppose that realism is invaluable in the attempt to approach God and heaven.
CHAPTER TWO

“Commune to Alle þat Ryȝtwys Were”: Pearl’s Universal Delight

1. Toward a Realist Reading

In *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form*, J. Stephen Russell advances an interpretation of *Pearl* guided by his conviction that late medieval dream-vision poetry as a genre presupposes nominalism. Centrally, his literary-nominalist explication attempts to account for the following paradoxes, each of which is conveyed to the dreamer-narrator by the *Pearl* maiden in the course of their discourse on beatitude or heavenly bliss: (1) heaven’s having multiple queens, although it is a single realm and the rank of queen is superlative; (2) rank’s applying to the heavenly at all, although rank implies disparity and the heavenly enjoy parity in the mystical body of Christ; and (3) the pearl of price’s “being both ‘makeleȝ’ and… ‘commune to alle þat ryȝtwys were’” (172).

Russell thinks that these paradoxes cannot be logically unlocked; they are irreducibly irrational and “contradictory” (162, 164). Yet he also believes that their irrationality is precisely the point. Specifically, Russell surmises that nominalism underwrites *Pearl* insofar as the above paradoxes participate in the “late medieval skepticism” arising from nominalism (140), for, on his account, the poet deploys them as skeptical and deconstructive “strategies” to undercut “the discourse of eschatology” (162). Thus if for Russell late medieval dream-vision poems in general exhibit the

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1 See the Introduction to the present study.
2 That is, both “matchless” and “common to all that were righteous.” The paradoxical character of these claims will be discussed at greater length below: claim (1) in Section 2.1, claim (2) in Section 2.2, and claim (3) in Section 2.3.
3 Russell’s affiliation of nominalism with deconstructivism or postmodernism resonates with Hugo Keiper’s outlook. For Keiper, “nominalist” literature resembles postmodern literature (208) in virtue of nominalism’s “deconstructive” viewpoint (220). And in a comparable vein, Richard Utz speaks of “the modernist/postmodernist notion” of “a world
nominalistic skepticism of their time by deconstructively challenging “the possibility of words to access the realities that have lain behind them” (141), *Pearl* in particular critiques eschatological language’s ability to approach those realities (such as heavenly bliss) with which it is concerned. This construal of the poem has enjoyed a certain influence; for example, J. Alan Mitchell speaks favourably of Russell’s view of *Pearl* as developing a “nominalist critique of religious language” (88), like Russell regarding paradoxes (2) and (3) above as “contradictions” (100), and even goes so far as to describe his own explication of the text as fundamentally “similar to Russell’s” (109).

A serious problem for Russell’s interpretation is that, as observed in our Introduction, skepticism was no part of medieval nominalists’ program. So even if *Pearl*’s paradoxes do serve a skeptical agenda for the poet, that agenda will not be explicable precisely in terms of nominalism. In other words, Russell’s analysis of “*Pearl* as a deconstruction” rooted in skepticism gains nothing from his claim that nominalism underpins the poem (162). Whatever its merits, Russell’s reading does not ultimately succeed in accounting for the work’s paradoxical contents in terms of nominalism.

If a literary-nominalist approach to *Pearl* cannot explain (or dismiss) its paradoxes in the manner that Russell suggests, neither is any other nominalist interpretation of them readily forthcoming.⁴ I do not mean that all possible interpretations of the poem’s paradoxes require us to suppose that realism rather than nominalism underwrites *Pearl*; some interpretations may be compatible with either philosophical foundation. What I do mean is that supposing nominalism to inform *Pearl* gone entirely recalcitrant to universals, a contingent world, a world supportive of the individual’s unpredictable free will, i.e., a nominalistic world” (27), while James Paxson asserts that “deconstruction may well be the most extreme form of philosophical nominalism ever produced in Western thought” (47) and stresses “the ruthless nominalism of postmodernism” (51). In response to such views, Robert Myles decries the “misunderstanding of ‘nominalism’” that has led some critics to “create an overly exclusive association” between nominalism and “postmodern literature” (4). ⁴ Russell overtly states that coming to terms with *Pearl*’s paradoxical contents requires “rejecting them as contents” and accepting them as deconstructive strategies alone (162).
does not obviously ground or enable any special account of the paradoxes. In particular, it does not help us to avoid the conclusion that the poem’s paradoxical contents are in fact contradictory. But to the contrary, taking realism to inform the poem does enable a special way to elucidate the paradoxes—a way that, as we shall see in Section 2, is straightforward, consistent, and eminently plausible. Briefly, a literary-realist exponent of *Pearl* stands positioned to perceive the paradoxes as imaginative representations of the real community or universality of heavenly bliss. On such a reading, the definite impression that the “Pearl maiden offers... a glimpse of Heavenly bliss and precious eschatological information” is not, *contra* Russell, “a trap” (166). The maiden’s purpose is not to reduce the narrator’s (and auditors’ or readers’) attempts “to comprehend the eternal and supernal joy of salvation in rational, logical terms” to intellectually humbling absurdity (Russell 167). Rather, she endeavours to show him, without abstract terminology or philosophical jargon, that heavenly bliss involves a genuine unity utterly opposed to—and potentially redeeming—the deep division the narrator relates in *Pearl*’s initial canto. The maiden accordingly becomes again, as she is for such critics as Patricia Kean, J. J. Anderson, and Barbara Nolan, the voice of reason, correcting for the narrator’s pre-dream failure of reason and helping him to see the highest good.5

I have suggested that taking *Pearl* to presuppose realism positions us to unlock its paradoxes in an especially satisfactory way. Accordingly, Section 2 of the current chapter will offer a literary-realist explication of paradoxes (1) through (3). On the reading to be developed, these paradoxes serve to indicate that heavenly bliss, joy, or delight is common to the blessed in the manner of a

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5 For Kean, the maiden stands “as the voice both of [the narrator’s] own reason and of what is divinely reasonable” (The Pearl 132). Anderson, observing that at the beginning of *Pearl* “the dreamer’s will has the ascendancy over his reason” (24), contends that the maiden takes over as “the embodiment of reason” (29). Like Anderson, Nolan notes that the narrator’s “reason... has been crippled by a wretched will caught up in woe,” and she adds that his “mental conflict will later be eased by the Pearl Maiden’s instruction,” which will reform his will by aiding his reason (173).
real universal. Section 3 will then build on Section 2’s foundation. It will show that the form or structure of the poem—i.e., the interconnection of its stanzas and cantos through shared words—parallels the key content of the maiden’s speech with the narrator, i.e., the interconnection of the blessed through the property they share. Significantly, the conformity between form and content in *Pearl* is especially close in Canto 19, the canto that relates the narrator’s vision of the blessed. Finally, Section 4 will consider the possible importance of heavenly bliss’ being a real universal to the plot of *Pearl*. If a realist acceptance of real universals plausibly underwrites *Pearl*, then so may a realist sense of their moral value. Accordingly, the maiden may be attempting (in keeping with the realist view of universals described in Section 4 of Chapter 1) to redirect the narrator’s affection from singular goods to universal goods—and chiefly to that highest of universal goods, heavenly bliss, in which she and the narrator, who is presumably her father, would forever unite.

2. Representations of Heavenly Bliss

2.1 Heavenly Queenship

After explaining to the narrator that she is not annihilated by death (“al awaye” [258]), but lives on as a blessed spirit, the *Pearl* maiden deploys courtly language to specify the “stage” (410) or

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6 Some fourteenth-century realists overtly regard heavenly bliss or beatitude as a real universal. For instance, Wyclif states in the following terms that beatitude is common: “I maintain that God promises Peter beatitude in common, as he has promised to all who follow him perfectly that they will possess eternal life.... ‘Be faithful onto death... and I will give thee the crown of life’... and he goes to prepare a place for his own... giving them peace. He uses common terms, and particular mansions, peace or degrees of beatitude are not mentioned” (Kenny 56) (“arguo ponendo quod Deus promittat Petro beatitudinem in communi sicut promisit omnibus eum perfecte sequentibus... quod vitam aeternam possidebunt.... ‘Esto fidelis usque ad mortem, et dabo tibi coronam vitae’, et... vadit parare suis locum dans eis pacem sub verbis communibus ubi singularis pax, mansio vel gradus beatitudinis subticetur” [Tractatus de universalibus c. 7 pp. 141–2]).

7 Despite the protestations of a few scholars (see, for instance, Jane Beal’s “The Pearl-Maiden’s Two Lovers”), the identification of the late loved one whom the narrator meets in dream with his daughter remains generally accepted. Support for this identification comes not only from the narrator’s description of the *Pearl* maiden as a close relative (“me nerre þen aunte or nece” [233]) and as very young (he tells us she “lyfed not two ȝer” [483]), but also from the fact that, as Norman Davis noted in 1966, the language used by the narrator to commit the maiden to God at the end of *Pearl* (“In Krystez dere blessyng and myn” [1208]) echoes a formula which was often deployed as a salutation or valediction in medieval English letters—but always and only so used in letters written “by a parent to a child” (405).
state of bliss in which her “blysful lyf” consists (409). More precisely, she claims to occupy the superlative office in heaven, that blissful domain—to be “quene in blysse” (415), as she says, or, as the narrator says, “quene of heuenez” (423). So far, so curious. But the maiden’s talk becomes paradoxical when she adds that she is not heaven’s only queen. To the contrary, “The court of þe kyndom of God alyue / Hatz a property in hytself beyng: / Alle þat may þerinne aryue / Of alle þe reme is quen oþer kyng” (445–8). All those who gain heaven hold its superlative office; each blessed soul is queen (or king) “in blysse.” This is paradoxical because, of course, a monarchy’s superlative office is its single highest office—one office instead of many—the occupant of which reigns supreme in her (or his) realm. Accordingly, what sense can it make to avow that multiple individuals are simultaneously queen (or king) of a given domain? If many rule together, can any truly be said to reign supreme over “alle þe reme”? Or rather, must not multiple rulers divide and destroy the superlative status distinctive of the sovereign position? What then might the maiden mean by this paradox, which I shall call the “heavenly-queenship paradox,” i.e., by the claim that multiple individuals hold the office of heavenly queen (or king)? And why should she choose the figure of queenship (or kingship) to specify the state of bliss that she and the other saints enjoy? I think the best answer is that she does so to depict the perfect, pacific, perpetual delight of heaven as one state common to many—as a common property or real universal, a joy uniting the blessed.

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8 Except where otherwise noted, all Pearl quotations are from Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron’s edition. All translations into modern English are mine, taking Andrew and Waldron’s translations, where available, into account.
9 “The court of the kingdom of the living God / Has a property in its own nature: / Each who may arrive therein / Is queen or king of the entire realm.”
10 As a related concern, being a monarch appears to imply having subjects, but it would seem that no one is a subject in a realm where everyone is queen (or king). This difficulty evaporates if we take heavenly queenship (or kingship) figuratively, though, regarding it—as of course literary nominalists no less than literary realists can—as symbolizing the state of supreme or sovereign delight. For after all, nothing about such a state in any obvious way implies having subjects! That heavenly queenship (or kingship) in Pearl should be understood as sovereign delight is argued below.
11 Russell calls attention to the essential uniqueness of the queenship or the queenly office when he states, “owing to the nature of queenship… there may be only one queen per realm” (163).
At various points in her dream-discussion with the narrator, the maiden reveals that she thinks of heaven, not as a physical place, but as a spiritual state.\(^{12}\) For example, she distinguishes between Old Jerusalem, a region “in Judy londe” (937), and New Jerusalem, or heaven, defining the latter as the beatific vision or “syȝt of pes” (952) consisting in limitless bliss (“Per... blysse schal euer encres” [959]).\(^{13}\) Again, when the narrator supposes the maiden to be in the paradise he seems to see before him, she denies having such a location—and presumably, having location at all.\(^{14}\) For as C. L. Clark and Julian Wasserman note, the maiden consistently attempts to show the narrator, who is “oriented to concrete rather than abstract terms” (7), that she exists “‘wythouten spot’ not only in the sense of staining sin but also in the sense of... physical position” (3).\(^{15}\) She urges him instead to regard her heavenly situation as an abstract state, a condition that she, as an immaterial spirit, enjoys. Or more precisely, the maiden encourages the narrator to see heaven as the beatific vision, the bliss of resting in the unmediated vision of God.\(^{16}\) She reminds him that joy in seeing God is the proper reward of the elect when she references the Beatitudes (“De ryȝtwys man schal

\(^{12}\) Hence as John Finlayson insists, in Pearl “the Heavenly City... is a state of being” (“Pearl” 316). Cf. Rom. 14:17.

\(^{13}\) In The Gothic Visionary Perspective, Nolan shows that New Jerusalem, as the visio pacis, represented the beatific vision or “the experience of beatitude” in addition to “the glory of the blessed after the general resurrection” (19 and passim). Accordingly, she speaks of “the state of the angels,” who like the blessed behold God without mediation, as “a state of unity, immobility and indivisibility—the vision of peace” (39). And she adds that, for Dante as well as for Aquinas, this “state of blessedness” is founded on the act of intellectual vision when a soul, arriving “in the heavenly court,” participates “in a state of understanding analogous to that of the angels” (42). Nolan’s point receives support from Louis Blenkner’s description of New Jerusalem as “a traditional symbol of beatitude” (47). It is also confirmed by Walter Hilton’s identification of New Jerusalem with the “sight of pees,” along with his identification of the sight of peace with the “sight of Jhesu, the which is veri pees”—namely the peace enjoyed post mortem by the elect (176).

\(^{14}\) The narrator expects to live with the maiden forever, now that he has found her (284). But the maiden rejects this naïve hope, calling “[v]navysed” (292) (“unadvised”) both it and her father’s more basic idea that she stands before him “in þis dene” (295) (“in this valley”).

\(^{15}\) In a similar vein, Sandra Prior remarks that, although the maiden endeavours to show the narrator that she inhabits “a spot without a spot (‘moteless mote’), still the Jeweller [or narrator] thinks of [heaven] as a place” (41). Theodore Bogdanos, too, tells us that heaven in Pearl “is meant to transcend time and space,” and thus to be no place at all (3).

\(^{16}\) Mindful of the face-to-face vision of God promised to the elect (e.g., in 1 Cor. 13:12), medieval philosophers held that saved souls enjoy “an experience of God’s very essence without any medium” (as Lawrence Hundersmark puts Aquinas’ view [167]). More exactly, they construed this experience of God’s essence as an act of intellectual vision, namely the beatific vision or “vision of peace” (see footnote 13). And at the same time, philosophers maintained that the beatific vision constitutes the highest happiness or bliss available to humans. As Aquinas says, “Final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence” (p. 601) (“ultima, et perfecta beatitudo non potest esse nisi in visione divinae essentiae” [ST I–II q. 3 a. 8]). Hence in an important sense, the beatific vision just is beatitude or the heavenly state of bliss.
se Hys face” [675]), and she speaks at length about the “blysse parfyt” (638) forfeited by Adam but through Christ’s sacrifice restored post mortem to the elect (639–60). Heaven, then, is bliss in the highest, perfect bliss, best or sovereign bliss. And it only stands to reason that the maiden, insofar as she enjoys this sovereign bliss, should qualify as “quene in blysse” or queen of heaven.

If the foregoing reflections are justified, then the maiden, in speaking of heaven, speaks, not of a land, but of perfect (sovereign) bliss. She implies that to attain heaven is to attain sovereign bliss or sovereignty in bliss—to be queen (or king) in bliss. This consideration helps explain heaven’s inalienable property (its “property in hytself”) of rendering anyone who there arrives monarch in bliss. But if to attain heaven just is to gain sovereignty in bliss, heavenly queenship (or kingship), then heaven and heavenly queenship (or kingship) seem to be somehow the same. I suggest that they stand to one another as tenor to vehicle—that the maiden figures heaven or heavenly bliss as queenship in bliss to highlight the supremacy of that bliss, i.e., its being perfect, superlative joy.

If the maiden uses a superlative political office to underscore the preeminence of heavenly bliss, her figure simultaneously implies the uniqueness of heavenly bliss. The suggestion that heavenly

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17 “The righteous man shall see His face.”
18 The maiden’s allusion to the Beatitudes draws most directly from Matthew 5:6 and 5:8. Speaking of the maiden’s claim that “no barrier remains between us and bliss” subsequent to Christ’s sacrifice, Marie Hamilton contends that Pearl, in its totality, “is a finely wrought elaboration of this theme” (810).
19 I make use of the tenor / vehicle distinction, though introduced only in the twentieth century (by Ivor Richards, in The Philosophy of Rhetoric [1936]), rather than the more medieval “integumentum,” both because “integumentum” is predominantly associated with Platonic realism and because the term suggests concealment, as “vehicle” does not: “Integumentum is the term used for the outer sense of a passage or a poem cunningly designed by the artist to reveal effectively only to the adroit reader the carefully hidden inner meaning” (Stiefel 174, her italics). For authors such as William of Conches, Bernardus Silvestris, and Alan of Lille, furthermore, the “hidden inner meaning” of a metaphor finally refers to an Idea or Ideas in the divine mind, “archetypal source of allegorical expression” (Wetherbee 107). I see no reason to assume, though, that the Pearl maiden deploys metaphor to conceal meaning; rather, I think that she attempts to convey to her father the true nature of heavenly bliss. Hence heavenly queenship, for example, serves not as a “veil” (Wetherbee 95), but as that which ‘transports’ the metaphor to the topic of the maiden’s discourse—that is, the vehicle. And while I do of course take Pearl to presuppose realism, I have no wish to imply, by blithely using a term favoured by the Platonic authors of twelfth-century Chartres, that specifically Platonic realism informs Pearl.
bliss is unique, ultimately one instead of many, is not accidental or unimportant, for the narrator
seizes on that implication the moment the maiden labels herself “quene in blysse.” However, he
interprets the uniqueness of heavenly queenship in a way that his daughter resists. To clarify, the
narrator, in accord with his often remarked literal-mindedness, supposes here (and throughout the
dream) that heaven is a kingdom literally rather than figuratively, a place instead of a state. And
in harmony with his characteristic “preoccupation with singularity” (Clark and Wasserman 3), he
immediately avers that this place, like any place, cannot have more than one queen—namely, the
Virgin Mary, whose peerless, phoenix-like “senglerty” he emphasizes to a near-comical degree:

Art þou þe quene of heuenez blwe,
Þat al þys worlde schal do honoure?
We leuen on Marye þat grace of grewe,
Þat ber a barne of vyrgyn flour.
Þe croune fro hyr quo moȝt remwe
Bot ho hir passed in sum fauour?
Now, for synglerty o hyr dousour,
We calle hir Fenyx of Arraby,
Þat fereles fleȝe of hir Fasor
Lyk to þe quen of cortaysye. (421–32)

The narrator worries that the maiden, to gain heaven’s throne, would have to dethrone Mary! He
clearly finds no compatibility between heaven’s queenly office and multiple occupants, no way
for the same top political position to be co-possessed by many. In other words, he interprets the

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20 In the lines that follow, the narrator seems to identify heaven with the blue sky, since he speaks of “heuenez blwe” (421). But even as late as Canto 16, the narrator supposes that the saints must occupy a physical place (and there he specifies a city), for it would be unseemly for them to sleep outside: “A gret cîte, for þe arn fele, / Yow byhod haue, withouten doute. / So cumly a pakke of joly juele / Wer euel don schulde lyȝeroute” (927–30) (“A great city, for you are many, / You must have, without doubt. / So lovely a pack of joly jewels— / It would be bad if you should lie
outside”). The narrator’s literal-mindedness has been noted by critics including Katherine Terrell, who speaks of his
“overly literal, earthbound perspective” (“Rethinking” 436); A. C. Spearing, for whom the narrator “is hopelessly
literal-minded” (Gawain-Poet 152); and Clark and Wasserman, who refer to the narrator’s “excessive literalism” (9).
21 We shall return to the narrator’s preoccupation with singularity in Section 4.
22 “Are you the queen of the blue heavens, / That all this world shall do honour? / We believe in Mary, from whom
grace grew, / That bore a child in virginity. / Who might remove the crown from her / Unless she passed her in some
virtue? / Now, because of the singularity of her sweetness, / We call her ‘Phoenix of Arabia,’ / Which flew peerless
from her Creator— / Like to the queen of courtesy.”
uniqueness of heavenly queenship as numerical uniqueness—particularity or singularity—taking heavenly queenship to be a *singular* status available to only a single individual at any given time.

In reply to the narrator’s objection, with its conspicuous fixation on singularity, the maiden does not deny the uniqueness of heavenly queenship or forgo her heavenly-queenship metaphor. She instead suggests, via the heavenly-queenship paradox, that the position of heavenly queenship—however much it may be one or unique in itself—is simultaneously possessed by all the blessed. Thus if indeed heavenly queenship has some uniqueness or unity, that unity must be compatible with numerical multiplicity, with its being enjoyed at the same time by many individuals.23 After all, heavenly queenship is a prize that many win in such a way that one person’s acquisition of it does not stand in the way of another’s: “fele here purchaze and fongez pray, / Bot supplantorez none withinne þis place” (339–40).24 Moreover, it, or rather its tenor, heaven’s “mutual ‘blysse,’” founds a definite harmony or agreement among the elect (Macrae-Gibson 63). For as the maiden adds, each saved soul rejoices in each other’s possession of bliss (“neuer oþer… schal depryue, / Bot vchon fayn of oþerez hafyng” [449–50]).25 The maiden thus stresses that “[m]utuality is the essence of the heavenly land” (Macrae-Gibson 57) or that heavenly “joy is essentially mutual” (Macrae-Gibson 63). Supernal bliss does not divide the saints, one attaining sovereign bliss only by evicting another. To the contrary, heavenly bliss unites them, comprising their common prize.

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23 To anticipate, heavenly queenship—or rather its tenor, heavenly bliss—may have the unity proper, according to realists, to universals or common natures: the unity Scotus refers to when he says, “I understand a nature to have a real unity less than numerical unity” (Spade, his italics) (“intellego ‘naturam habere unitatem realem, minorem unitate numerali” [Ord. II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 35 p. 902]).

24 “Many here purchase and receive the prize, / But there are no supplanters in this place.”

25 “One will never deprive another, / But each one is glad of the other’s having.”
However, what sense can be made of heavenly queenship’s—or heavenly bliss’—being common to many? How can the heavenly queenship paradox be rationally unlocked? One option, as noted in Section 1, is to respond that it cannot. For a literary nominalist of Russell’s stripe, the maiden proclaims logical impossibilities in order to defeat logic and lead her humbled father toward “the wonderful irrationality of God” (170). But this reply is deeply counterintuitive. Since the time of Boethius’ Lady Philosophy, visionary poets have created illustrious female teachers who provide positive lessons, not incoherent contradictions. It appears yet more counterintuitive in light of the narrator’s problematically irrational condition in Canto 1 of *Pearl*. Wracked with sorrow over the loss of his daughter, the narrator there describes himself as conflicted, his emotion vying with his reason (51–2). Worse, emotion is winning, wrenching his “wreched wylle” from Christian truths (55–6). Given this context for the dream in which the narrator sees his daughter, it hardly seems that what he needs are antidotes to logic. To the contrary, he requires instruction to aid his reason and restore his will to God’s. Accordingly, the maiden visits him to cure—not crush—his mind.26

Another, I think far more plausible way to respond to the paradox would be to suggest that, in the beatific vision, all the blessed partake of God Himself as their sole reward and bliss. After all, St Augustine maintains, in *De libero arbitrio*, that God, as Absolute Truth, is continuously imbibed by the saints and “entirely common to them all at the same time” (Benjamin and Hackstaff 69).27 In this way, God becomes “the happy life of the soul” (Benjamin and Hackstaff 73).28 But if God can be common to all the blessed as their happy (or blissful) life, can He not be the nexus among them, the joy in which they join? And does not the maiden dub God her “Joy” and “Blys” (796)?

26 See footnote 5.
27 “simul omnibus tota est communis” (*De libero arbitrio* 2 n. 146 p. 182)
28 “beata vita animae” (*De libero arbitrio* 2 n. 162 p. 186)
In *Pearl in Its Setting*, Ian Bishop seems to favour an interpretation of this sort. He acknowledges that the *Pearl* poet’s portrayal of the blessed (specifically in the narrator’s New Jerusalem vision, to which we shall turn in Section 2.3) indicates that “they have something in common” (92), and he proceeds to identify this common thing with the “*sumnum bonum* that is enjoyed by everyone who enters the Kingdom of Heaven” (96, his italics). Calling the blessed “beings who participate in the Sovereign Good” (93), he observes that, in the literary tradition descending from Boethius, “what men most desire is happiness (*beatitudo*)” (93–4, his italics). These comments lead one to expect Bishop to concur with Nolan’s view that “the Pearl Maiden, like Philosophia and the host of guides after her, hopes to redirect the jeweler’s [or narrator’s] vision toward spiritual joy and eternal bliss, the *sumnum bonum*” (185, her italics). Yet if he indeed deems the *sumnum bonum* spiritual joy, he does not, or does not obviously, see spiritual joy as joy informing the spirit, i.e., an accident of the soul. He asserts only that the sovereign good is “God Himself” (94). It appears that, when Bishop speaks of the blessed as “participating in the *sumnum bonum*” (95, his italics), he means not that they participate in bliss as in a common property, but that they partake of God.

I agree with Bishop that, in *Pearl*, the blessed alike partake of God. Moreover, it does seem fair to describe God as the bliss of the blessed, or as their happy life, insofar as God’s essence is the object of their beatific vision.29 Yet as the object of the saints’ sight, God is better regarded as the *foundation* of their bliss—a point the maiden underscores when she avows, for instance, that “he

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29 Accordingly, Hundersmarck states that, for Aquinas, “heavenly beatitude is perfect happiness because it is union with the essence of God…. [I]t is the essence of God to be happy” (171). God is joy, Absolute Joy, and therefore is bliss or beatitude in a crucial way. But we must remember that the union between God and a creature enjoying the beatific vision is rooted in a special continuity or contiguity between God and the creature, namely a continuity of apprehension in which the creature mentally apprehends Absolute Joy (which is also Absolute Truth) and receives joy from that Joy (and truth from that Truth) without impediment or limit. In brief, God can be regarded as the bliss of the blessed precisely insofar as He is the Absolute Bliss upon which they gaze in the beatific vision and which, as such, founds the bliss they themselves enjoy in that vision.
Lamb… / is þe grounde of alle [her] blysse” (407–8). Beholding the divine essence produces bliss in the souls of the blessed, but the divine essence does not seem to be, strictly speaking, the same as that bliss. Just so, the maiden explains that God “gladez” (861) and “myrþez” (862) the saints, who receive joy from Him no less than, in the narrator’s New Jerusalem vision, they take a borrowed luster from their “lantyrne,” the Lamb (1047). The blessed approach God’s throne (1114), refulgent in the illumination that flows from that font (1054–6). Yet the poet appears to distinguish between God Himself (the source of light) and the radiance flung from that source, which floods the streets the blessed walk and saturates those saints in its glow. Translating light into delight, we infer that the saints obtain a bliss of their own from seeing or partaking of God.

Granted that heavenly bliss accrues to souls who gaze on God, that bliss could only be a property of those souls. More exactly, it must be an accident, since those souls lacked it before the death

30 “The Lamb… / is the ground of all [her] bliss.” The proper grounding of bliss constitutes the key topic of Canto 7.
31 Aquinas maintains that, in addition to the Absolute Joy identical with God Himself (see footnote 29), “joy is caused in us by the Holy Ghost” (p. 1305) (“gaudium in nobis causatur ex Spiritu sancto” [ST II-II q. 28 a. 1]). As caused in us, bliss is an accident and can thus, unlike Absolute Bliss, vary in degree from individual to individual. This holds true even in the case of the blessed, for even though “the joy of the blessed is full to perfection” (p. 1307) (“gaudium beatorum est perfecte plenum” [ST II-II q. 28 a. 3]), in the beatific vision “one’s joy will be greater than another’s” because “some will approach nearer to God than others” (p. 1307) (“erit… gaudium unius majus quam alterius” [ST II-II q. 28 a. 3]). So though the blessed alike enjoy perfect joy in the beatific vision, they participate in perfect joy to degrees varying in accordance with their nearness to the Absolute Joy from which their own joy flows.
32 The Pearl poet suggests that the saints appearing to the narrator in his New Jerusalem vision receive a borrowed radiance from God by comparing the procession of the blessed to the newly risen moon: “Ryȝt as þe maynful mone con rys / Er þenne þe day-glem dryue al doun, / So sodanly on a wonder wyse / I watz war of a prosessyoun” (1093–6) (“Just as the mighty moon rises / Before the day-gleam sinks wholly away, / So suddenly, in a wonderful way, / I became aware of a procession”). Accordingly Kean, referring to the narrator’s New Jerusalem vision, speaks of “the Virgin company, described in terms of the moon, who are the brides of the sun-like Lamb” (The Pearl 213).
33 In “Landscape in Pearl,” Elizabeth Petroff makes the connection between light and delight in the poem explicit.
34 Spreading notes that, when the maiden speaks of heaven’s having an inalienable property (“a property in hytself”), she draws upon the “technical language… of scholastic philosophy” (Gawain-Poet 157). Kean, likewise referring to the maiden’s use of “property” at this point, also highlights its philosophical meanings: “Property… certainly means ‘quality’ ‘attribute’” (The Pearl 189, her italics). She adds that “property” may also have a legal meaning—namely, the meaning of “appropriation to”—but then appears to attempt to combine the philosophical and legal senses of the term, for she asserts that, in Pearl, “heaven is… in its very nature, through its distinctive quality, common property” (The Pearl 189). As remarked above (in footnotes 13 and 16), scholastic philosophers considered the beatific vision, in which beatitude or heavenly bliss consists, to be an act of intellectual vision, that is, an act of the soul. This means that beatitude or the beatific vision is a property of the soul. And it should be noted that this view of beatitude—i.e., the view of beatitude as a spiritual property or property of the soul—cuts across realist-nominalist lines. For instance,
of their bodies. The blissful state of seeing God is the reward of the righteous departed, and like any reward it is acquired, accidental, not inborn or essential. Therefore, all those attaining heaven receive an accidental, albeit numinous, property of the soul. Thinking along these lines, we stand positioned to resolve the heavenly-queenship paradox in the following way. Each soul arriving at heaven acquires the superlative bliss—a property as unique as a domain’s queenly office—which consists in the vision of God and arises from God as its source. Yet the selfsame property’s being at once received by many is entirely coherent, because it is a real universal. Unlike the narrator, the maiden is not preoccupied with singularity or particularity. Rather, in her omniscience (859), she recognizes the existence of real universals—adopting a realist outlook—and, in her grace or “cortaysye,” she attempts to help her father perceive them as well. However, since his reason has succumbed to emotion and abstract thinking eludes him, “it is necessary for the Pearl-Maiden to walk him through a rather complex philosophical argument couched in terms he can understand” (Clark and Wasserman 2, their italics). At least it is necessary that she approach a philosophical idea (the notion that heavenly bliss is a real universal) using terms he can understand, and so she deploys metaphor, depicting common bliss, in duly imaginative fashion, as one position common

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Ockham, no less than Aquinas, located beatitude in an act of intellectual vision, even if Ockham went on to specify that the beatific vision is a “simple intuitive act” (Panaccio and Piché 107). For Ockham as much as for Aquinas, the “beatification of the intellect” occurs when “God causes in it a vision of his essence” (Panaccio and Piché 107). That beatitude is a property of the soul founded on God as the object of the soul’s apprehension also appears in Wyclif’s *Trialogus*, where we are told that “subjective joy is one thing, and objective joy is something else. All of the blessed have the same beatitude and the same objective joy, because of the divine nature…. But subjective joy is a form inhering in the soul according to how it is formally called joy, and this is not something that can exist in itself, but is the same as the joy of the blessed” (Lahey 315–6) (“aliquod est gaudium subjectivum et aliud gaudium objectivum. Omnes autem beati habent eandem beatitudinem et gaudium objectivum, quia naturam divinam…. Sed gaudium subjectivum est forma inhaerens animae, secundum quam dicitur formaliter gaudere, et illa non est aliquid quod potest per se existere, sed ipsummet gaudere beati” [399]).

35 James Milroy points out that the narrator “seldom uses abstract words carefully” (197). If the present chapter’s reading is valid, the narrator seldom uses abstract words carefully because he is not at home in abstractions, but lives utterly immersed in the concrete and sense-perceptible.
to many. Or to put this otherwise, the maiden represents the universal bliss of the blessed via the vehicle of “the universal kingship and queenship of the blessed” (Spearing, Gawain-Poet 163).

Of course, the foregoing reading of the heavenly-queenship paradox is not the only possible one. In particular, we do not need to say that realism underpins *Pearl* in order to interpret that puzzle. We might, after all, rest content with identifying heavenly queenship or heavenly bliss with God, object of the beatific vision. Such a reading can proceed regardless of whether *Pearl* presupposes realism, nominalism, or neither, for almost any medieval thinker would grant that all saved souls gaze upon the essence of God. Now I have intimated that, because an analysis of this kind fails to distinguish between the beatific vision and its object, between the saints’ bliss and its foundation, it leaves something to be desired. But however that may be, we should notice that taking *Pearl* to presuppose nominalism does not help us in any evident way to unlock the paradox. For example, it is of course possible that the maiden means to suggest via the heavenly-queenship paradox that all saved souls enjoy equivalent but non-identical joys. This suggestion would be in keeping with nominalism, for each saint would have a bliss of her or his own, and these many blisses would be similar yet really distinct. There would be, to speak concisely, no ‘one in the many’—no identity, but merely resemblance, among the blessed or their delights. Fine. But why, in that case, does the maiden insist on many souls’ enjoying superlative bliss or occupying the highest political office? Surely her doing so would be needlessly confusing or misleading, inasmuch as speaking of many best delights seems an abuse of language? If, then, we hope to go beyond the reading that Bishop

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36 Spearing’s language may *seem* to imply that realism underpins *Pearl*, but unfortunately Spearing does not expand on that apparent suggestion. Russell likewise speaks of “universal queenship,” but he deems it “really a tease” (164).
appears to provide without thereby insinuating, with Russell, that the maiden undercuts language or logic, we may do well to construe heavenly bliss as a common property, i.e., a real universal.37

2.2 Community in Christ

The Pearl maiden’s assertion that all blessed souls enjoy the same rank in heaven—namely, that of monarch—may appear to flatten or obliterate the hierarchical disparity rank normally implies. Yet the maiden promptly nuances her treatment of heavenly queenship in a way that reintroduces disparity to heaven, for she insists that, however much each saint may be queen (or king) in bliss,
Mary holds that happy position in a preeminent manner or to a highest degree: “my lady of quom Jesu con spryng, / Ho haldez þe empyre ouer vus ful hyȝe” (454–5). And having acknowledged disparity among the saints, she at once confirms their equality! Adapting a Pauline metaphor, she describes all Christian souls—but saved souls especially—as members of Christ’s mystical body:

> Of courtaysye, as saytz Saynt Poule,  
> Al arn we membrez of Jesu Kryst:  
> As heued and arme and legg and naule  
> Temen to hys body ful trwe and tryste,  
> Ryȝt so is vch a Krysten sawle  
> A longande lym to þe Mayster of myste.  
> Þenne loke: what hate oþer any gawle  
> Is tached oþer tyȝed þy lymmez bytwyste?  
> Þy heued hatz nauþer greme ne gryste  
> On arme oþer fynger þaz þou ber byȝe.  
> So fare we alle wyth luf and lyste  
> To kyng and quene by cortaysye. (457–68)

Although the maiden begins by speaking of “vch a Krysten sawle,” she deploys Paul’s metaphor primarily to portray the agreement among each “kyng and quene by cortaysye,” i.e., the blessed. Whereas Paul’s point is that Christians should no more contend with one another than one limb vies with another, the maiden’s point is that, like a body’s limbs, the blessed do not in fact feud. She therefore makes Christ’s mystical body represent the community of the saints more than the community of all Christians. It is that of which the saints are parts, that in which they participate; it is that in which they unite and agree, enjoying parity precisely insofar as each is part of it. But again, the maiden’s adaptation of Paul’s metaphor appears in the context of “hierarchy,” “rank,” and “courtesy or courtliness,” as Russell reminds us, and thus “serves to authorize” or affirm the

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38 “My lady from whom Jesus grew, / She holds the supreme empire above us.”  
39 “Of courtesy, as Saint Paul says, / We are all members of Jesus Christ: / As head and arm and leg and navel / Belong to their body very truly and faithfully, / Just so each Christian soul is / A limb belonging to the Master of mysteries. / Consider then: What hatred, or any bitterness, / Is implanted or fixed between your limbs? / Your head has neither resentment nor anger / If you wear a ring on arm or finger. / So fare we all with love and joy / To king and queen by courtesy.” Cf. 1 Cor. 12:14 ff.
saints’ parity without cancelling their disparity (165). In this manner, the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor, together with her talk of heavenly sovereignty and Mary’s foremost queenship, yields what Anderson labels “the paradox of the co-existence of hierarchy and equality in heaven” (42).

How can this paradox be resolved? What might the maiden mean? For Russell, she means little; her use of the Pauline metaphor is “platitudinous and mildly evasive” (165), not really intended to illuminate the heavenly state. Assuming, however, that she does attempt to relate information, we may approach her message by revisiting Christ’s mystical body. In what do the saints, among all individuals, participate or share? Paul says that Christians, being alike baptized, share “in uno Spirito” (1 Cor. 12:13): the Holy Spirit stands to Christians as form to matter, making one body of them. Similarly, it seems that, on the maiden’s use of the mystical-body metaphor, the blessed should share a “form” that makes one body precisely of them. But what could inform specifically the blessed, except beatitude itself—the heavenly bliss of which the maiden has been speaking? Bliss does play a key role in the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor, which concludes by stressing that the blessed live in “lyste” (joy) for one another. Further, bliss aptly renders the saints Christ-like, for, as the narrator later perceives, Christ, “þat gay Juelle” (1124), is the “blypest” being in heavenly bliss (1131). Delight is inseparable from Christ, who is “gloryous glade” (1144) despite a wide “wounde” (1142): it characterizes Him primarily and the elect secondarily or derivatively, through His happy sacrifice. In light of these reflections, it seems fair to say that, in representing the community of the saints, the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor represents not just the blessed themselves (the matter of the body), but also the bliss of the blessed (the form of the body). Or to put this otherwise, it represents the bliss in which the saints unite to make Christ’s mystical body.

Of course, one might also answer “heaven.” But as noted in Section 2.1, the maiden appears to regard heaven as or equate heaven with beatitude. In that case, heaven’s informing the saints amounts to beatitude’s informing the saints.
If the above considerations are correct, the blessed converge in heavenly bliss. Christ draws them into “Hys bonerté” or beatitude (762), founds their joy, makes many one in delight. But how can we take this idea seriously, unless heavenly bliss is a real universal and realism underpins *Pearl*? For suppose that heavenly bliss is a real universal. In that case, multiple individuals (the blessed) can participate in one and the same property (universal bliss) and, by doing so, be metaphysically united, really identical insofar as they share a common metaphysical part (universal bliss). At the same time, the individuals sharing in universal bliss—or more exactly, the individuals’ particular instances of universal bliss—could be regarded as parts of universal bliss (i.e., “subjective parts,” in medieval realists’ parlance).  

Hence the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor would express that all of the saints participate and metaphysically unite in universal bliss as parts of universal bliss, really becoming one insofar as each is part of that bliss. This reading seems satisfying for at least two reasons. First, the vehicle of the mystical-body metaphor suggests that the saints are robustly connected, united much like the limbs of a natural body, which share in one substantial form.  

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41 Anthony Kenny defines “subjective parts” as “inferior items in a classification in relation to superior items: thus species are subjective parts of their genus” and individuals are subjective parts of their species (183). Wyclif uses the term “subjective part” when, for instance, he says that “every particular of the universal has an essence which is the particular itself, and this essence is a subjective part of the given universal; it follows that every individual receives a part of the universal, which is its essence, from the universal from which it takes its origin” (Kenny 28, my emphasis) (“Quodlibet... singulare universalis, cum habet essentiam quae est ipsum singulare—qua quidem essentia est pars subjectiva dati universalis—sequitur quod omne individuum capit partem universalis, quae est sua essentia, a suo universali a quo originatur” [*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 4 p. 89]). But the term “subjective part” is not original with Wyclif; earlier realists, such as Scotus, also made use of it. For example, Scotus maintains that “a universal whole, which is divided into individuals and into subjective parts, is predicated of each of those subjective parts in such a way that each subjective part is it” (Spade, *Five Texts* 85) (“totum’ universale, quod dividitur in individua et in partes subiectivas, praedicatur de qualibet illarum partium subjectivistae (ita quod quaelibet pars subjectiva est ipsum)” [*Ord.* II d. 3 part 1 q. 4 n. 118 p. 916]).  

42 Medieval philosophers disagreed about whether several substantial forms could inform the same body or chunk of matter at the same time. Adherents to what is sometimes called “scholastic monism,” such as Aquinas, claimed that only one substantial form could inform one chunk of matter at once, whereas “scholastic pluralists,” such as Scotus, Ockham, and Wyclif, held that several substantial forms could inform the same chunk of matter at once. Exponents of both positions, however, maintained that a single substantial form—whether (in the case of a human) the rational soul itself or some other form, e.g., an organic soul—informed a given body as a whole and gave it unity as a body. For more on scholastic monism and scholastic pluralism, see, for example, “Aristotelian Substance and Supposita,” by Marilyn Adams and Richard Cross, and “John Wyclif on Body and Mind,” by Emily Michael.
the members of Christ’s mystical body, the elect, enjoy a comparable unity, then should they not similarly share in one form? But if they do, and if that form is heavenly bliss—an accident of the soul, as we saw in Section 2.1—then must not heavenly bliss be a real universal, enjoyed at once by multiple souls? And second, the interpretation here developed explains straightforwardly why the maiden deploys her mystical-body metaphor immediately after, and indeed in the context of, her heavenly-sovereignty metaphor. For if the heavenly-sovereignty metaphor can serve to stress that the blessed alike enjoy superlative bliss, the mystical-body metaphor can serve to stress that the blessed participate in that joy. In other words, participation in Christ’s mystical body figures participation in heavenly bliss. The mystical-body metaphor reveals, in imaginative fashion, that the community the elect enjoy fundamentally is or implies the real universality of heavenly bliss.

But now suppose that nominalism underwrites *Pearl*. In that case, the blessed would presumably resemble one another in their singular heavenly joys, but they would not metaphysically unite in heavenly bliss—i.e., would not be one or identical insofar as they enjoy heavenly delight. Rather than sharing in one and the same property (universal bliss), they would merely comprise a group or totality or ‘team’ of individuals with similar blisses. Or to put this point otherwise, the blessed could be said to unite in delight only in the sense that each saint’s bliss would belong to the same class as each other saint’s. However, this consideration does not help us to take seriously the idea that the vehicle of the mystical-body metaphor implies a robust connection among the elect, even if it does not necessarily preclude the possibility of their being somehow robustly connected. Nor does the assumption that nominalism underpins the poem suggest any evident explanation for the maiden’s deploying a metaphor of participation, seemingly in supernal bliss, at exactly this point.
It might be replied that, even if nominalism informs *Pearl*, the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor could indicate that the saints robustly converge in a factor other than heavenly bliss. Perhaps they unite in a transcendent being or value, e.g., Christ Himself. But if the blessed converge in Christ, do they join in Him as in a *singular* factor? In other words, do they unite in something individual to Him? Yet if how could they fuse in something individual to Him without amounting, absurdly, to the very same individual as Christ? Accordingly, it might seem better to hold that the blessed converge with Christ as in a *common* factor, i.e., to hold that they unite in something common to Him (and to others). And a natural way to construe this suggestion would be to see the blessed as sharing a property with Christ—a property which, however numinous, would still be common, i.e., a real universal. Of course, speculations of this kind must remain inconclusive. Nevertheless, they do tend to promote a literary-realist understanding of the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor.

We have seen that taking *Pearl* to presuppose realism enables a straightforward interpretation of the mystical-body metaphor, which metaphor in turn factors into the paradox of the co-existence

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43 Perhaps the saints stand to Christ as accidents to a substance, inhering in Him while remaining really distinct from Him. (For as noted in Chapter One, some medieval thinkers regarded accidents as really distinct from their subjects.) But this suggestion sits uneasily with the maiden’s mystical-body metaphor, on which the saints are limbs of Christ, since limbs do not stand to a body as accidents to a substance. To the contrary, the metaphor seems to imply that the blessed are the “stuff” of Christ in some way—continuous with Him, presumably, in some metaphysical constituent.

44 I suppose it could be suggested that Christ is *Himself* a common factor in a certain fashion. One might reason thus: “According to Paul, the Holy Ghost is common to all Christians. Just so, Christ could be common to all the blessed.” One difficulty for this view, though, is that medieval thinkers did not usually see the Holy Spirit as a common factor strictly speaking, that is, a common part. Rather, the Holy Spirit is “common to” Christians just insofar as It acts as a common cause of Christian virtues, e.g., by infusing Christians with charity. Accordingly Ian Levy, after noting that Peter “Lombard had said that the Holy Spirit, who is the mutual love of the Father and the Son, is himself the charity within us,” proceeds to show that most later medieval theologians rejected this position (“Grace” 300). To name just one theologian who rejected Lombard’s view, Aquinas claims that what “perfects a creature is an inherent form, and God is not and cannot be an inherent form” (Adams, “Genuine Agency” 35), adding that “[i]nfused charity likens us to the Holy Spirit Who is the love by which the Father and Son love one another” (Adams, “Genuine Agency” 36). The Holy Spirit is Absolute Love, and Absolute Love makes some creatures like Itself precisely by infusing another love—a charity distinct from Itself—into those creatures. Hence when the Spirit is present in creatures, It is present in them precisely in the sense that It infuses them with a virtue like Itself in being love, but nonetheless distinct from Itself. Similarly, if the Spirit is present in multiple creatures, i.e., common to multiple creatures, it is present in them more precisely as a virtue, charity, shared by all those creatures. In the same vein, Christ, if He is common to all the blessed, should be common to them as an infused virtue shared by them.
of hierarchy and equality in heaven. But we have not yet shown that taking realism to underwrite the poem can help us to unlock that paradox. If all the saints participate in the sovereign bliss of heaven, the best or supreme bliss, as in a real universal, how is it possible for their participation in that universal to admit of degrees? How may Mary enjoy a preeminent level of heavenly bliss?

In fact, I think this ‘problem’ need not prove very problematic. For realists normally allowed that some universals admit of diverse degrees. As Peter King explains of Scotus’ account, it “is a fact about the way things are rather than about how we conceive of them” that “some natures come in a range of degrees that are inseparably a part of what they are” (“Common Nature” 25). Thus, for instance, whiteness can, by its very nature, be more or less intense (King, “Common Nature” 25). Likewise, happiness ought to admit of more and less. So at least if we understand heavenly bliss as the highest kind of bliss—since it alone consists in the vision of God’s essence—then there is no obvious reason why it should not admit of degrees. In that case, all who attain heaven could participate in the selfsame sort of bliss, namely sovereign bliss, without this contradicting Mary’s enjoying it to a preeminent degree. In other words, the elect could be equal to one another insofar as each is a subjective part of the superlative kind of bliss while making up a hierarchy insofar as they enjoy that joy to sundry degrees. Or to put this in terms of the mystical-body metaphor, they could make up one body by sharing in the selfsame form (heavenly bliss) although some limbs of that body, say, the “heued,” stand higher than others, say, the “legg.” Taking Pearl to presuppose realism provides a straightforward way to resolve the paradox of parity and disparity in heaven.

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45 See footnote 31.
46 Nolan insists that the “apparent contradiction between equality and difference could be easily enough resolved in two separate but related arguments to be found in St. Augustine and in Bradwardine as well as in Dante: (1) all who are in heaven enjoy total happiness; and (2) souls enjoy this totality in different ways in order to enhance the beauty of God’s court through variety” (191). This “resolution” might be compatible with (or even reducible to) the one I have suggested, depending on what enjoying total happiness “in different ways” means. It might or might not mean
2.3 The Common Pearl of Price

By implying that heavenly bliss is one or unique although shared by many and enjoyed to diverse degrees, according to the line of thinking we have been pursuing, the Pearl maiden sets the stage for her rendition of St Matthew’s parable of the pearl of great price. In Canto 4, the narrator had perceived “a wonder perle withouten wemme / Inmyddez [the maiden’s] breste” (221–2), a pearl that stands out among all those his daughter wears because it defies measurement or delimitation (“A mannez dom moȝt dryȝly demme / Er mynde moȝt malte in hit mesure” [223–4]). Securely “sette” (222) precisely “where the Pearl Maiden’s heart would be” (Prior 46)—and hence aligned with her salvation or beatitude (Prior 46)—this curiously indeterminate pearl explicitly comes to figure beatitude or heavenly bliss in Canto 13. For there, at what Bishop calls “the true heart of
the poem” (Pearl 35), the maiden overtly identifies the pearl at her heart with the “bliss ‘þat con not blynne,’ the pearl of price for which [Matthew’s] merchant sold all his goods” (Nolan 195):50

Ryȝt con calle to Hym Hys mylde,  
And sayde Hys ryche no wyȝ myȝt wynne  
Bot he com þyder ryȝt as a chylde….  
Þer is þe blys þat con not blynne  
Þat þe jueler soȝte þurȝ þerré pres,  
And solde alle hys goud, boþe wolen and lynne,  
To bye hym a perle watz mascellez.

This makellez perle þat boȝt is dere,  
Þe joueler gef fore alle hys god,  
Is lyke þe reme of heuenesse clere—  
So sayde þe Fader of folde and flode—  
For hit is wemlez, clene, and clere,  
And endelez rounde, and blyþe of mode,  
And commune to alle þat ryȝtwys were.  
Lo, euen inmyddez my breste hit stode:  
My Lorde þe Lombe, þat schede Hys blode,  
He pyȝt hit þere in token of pes. (721–3, 729–42)51

In this passage, as Nolan points out, the “mascellez” pearl or “perle of prys” (746) stands for the tenor of Matthew’s pearl-of-price metaphor, namely the perpetual bliss purchased by Matthew’s merchant (or jeweller).52 Accordingly, Jefferson Fletcher equates the pearl of price with “heaven,

50 Bishop explains that the maiden’s “allusion to the parable of the pearl of great price” (Pearl 35) stands at the heart of the poem because it appears “at the point where the first part of the debate [between the maiden and the narrator] ends and the second begins” (Pearl 34). And after likening the function of the pearl-of-price parable in the poem to “that of the thema or Biblical text in a learned fourteenth-century sermon constructed according to the principles recommended in the Artes Praedicandi,” he adds that “the author of Pearl, instead of enunciating his text at the beginning of his composition, places it at the centre — which is the most important position in a poem whose external structure is nearly circular and whose internal structure is more or less symmetrical” (Pearl 35, his italics). We shall return to the circularity of Pearl’s “external structure” in Section 3. For more on the poem’s “internal structure,” see Chapter Two of Bishop’s Pearl in Its Setting and Blenkner’s “The Theological Structure of Pearl.”

51 “Justice called His mild ones to Him, / And said no one might win His kingdom / Unless he came thither exactly as a child…. / There is the bliss that cannot cease / That the jeweller sought by means of precious jewels, / And for which he sold all his goods, both woolen and linen, / To buy himself a spotless pearl. // This matchless pearl that is dearly bought, / For which the jeweler gave all his goods, / Is like the realm of bright heavens — / So said the Father of land and sea — / For it is flawless, clean, and clear, / And endlessly round, and blissful of nature, / And common to all that were righteous. / Lo, it stood even in the middle of my breast: / My Lord the Lamb, that shed his blood, / He set it there in token of peace.”

52 Noting that the maiden transforms Matthew’s merchant into “a jeweller,” Anderson argues: “Her point is that in selling all his goods for a wonderful precious stone the merchant becomes a jeweller, acquiring the values of a true jeweller when he gives up his worldly goods for the sake of a beauty which is of another order” (51, his italics).
or the bliss of heaven” (3), while Louis Blenkner speaks of “the pearl of great price which is the bliss of heaven” (73). But the pearl of price also stands for the vehicle of Matthew’s metaphor, for the maiden says that Christ placed the pearl of price on her breast “in token of pes,” i.e., as a sign of the perfect, pacific bliss in which the beatific vision or sight of peace consists. Hence the pearl of price has a double role. Qua tenor, it is heavenly bliss. Qua vehicle, it signifies that bliss.

Now, the maiden insists that, qua tenor or as heavenly bliss, the pearl of price is “makellez,” one of a kind. But she also says that it is common to all that were righteous, that is, to all the blessed. This assertion compels us to ask: Is the pearl of price common to the blessed qua heavenly bliss, or only qua sign of that bliss? It does at least appear to be common as a sign, because the maiden describes it as a “token” immediately after characterizing it as “common,” without any transition. But if the pearl of price is a common sign or common qua sign, it may also be a common reality, common qua significate of that common sign. In that case, heavenly bliss itself is common to all the blessed (instead of its only being the case that the pearl-of-price token signifies all the saints). If the pearl of price is common only qua sign, no paradox arises because the maiden equivocates: when she calls the pearl of price “makellez,” she refers to heavenly bliss, but, when she calls the pearl of price “commune to alle þat ryþtwys were,” she refers to the sign of that bliss. If however the pearl of price is common also qua significate, then a paradox, which I shall call the “pearl-of-price paradox,” does indeed arise. For in that case, heavenly bliss is both matchless and common,

53 Again, D. W. Robertson speaks of “the pearl of eternal felicity” (“The Pearl” 159), while Hamilton, observing that the Church “Fathers often construe the Pearl of Great Price as everlasting life or beatitude” (808), says, “Besides the maiden… there is the wondrous jewel at her breast, which she clearly identifies with the Pearl of Great Price and interprets as eternal felicity” (805). The Pearl maiden closely associates the pearl of price with beatitude or heaven’s limitless bliss at many points; for instance, in Canto 15 she says (in a phrase that seems to connote that pearl’s being borne or possessed by all the blessed at once), “Lasse of blysse may non vus bryng / Þat beren þys perle vpon oure bereste” (853–4) (“Our bliss may not lessen, / We that bear this pearl upon our breast”).
unique and yet had (at once) by all the blessed.\textsuperscript{54} We might expect a literary nominalist to prefer the former reading, the equivocation reading, because it does not commit the maiden to affirming that heavenly bliss is somehow common. Yet as we have seen, Russell takes the latter reading for granted. He thinks it genuinely paradoxical that the pearl of price is both matchless and common.

As a literary nominalist endorsing the paradox reading, Russell may have little choice but to hold that the pearl-of-price paradox cannot be logically unlocked. It should not surprise us that, on his view, the paradox functions only “to underscore the inadequacy of the discourse of eschatology” (172), for, after all, it is not obvious how heavenly bliss could be both unique and common to all the blessed unless—as only a literary realist can claim—heavenly bliss is a real universal.\textsuperscript{55} That is, the pearl-of-price paradox poses no difficulty for a literary realist: she can say that the maiden paints the pearl of price as both unique and common to portray heavenly bliss as a real universal. But literary nominalism impedes this straightforward interpretation of the pearl-of-price paradox.

\textit{Contra} Russell, I presume that the maiden’s elucidation of the pearl of price is a true elucidation, not a deconstructive project, for, if Jefferson Fletcher goes too far in esteeming the pearl-of-price parable that “of which the poem is chiefly an allegorical interpretation” (2), it nevertheless seems safe to see the pearl of price as \textit{Pearl’s} main symbol and the maiden’s explication of that pearl as

\textsuperscript{54} The maiden does not, here, state that the pearl of price is common to all the saints at once or at the same time. Yet it does seem to be simultaneously common to the saints in the narrator’s New Jerusalem vision, as we shall soon see.\textsuperscript{55} It might once more be claimed, \textit{à la} Bishop as cited in Section 2.1, that the heavenly bliss shared by the blessed is God Himself, i.e., the divine essence all the blessed behold in beatific vision. But if God is the pearl of price as here described by the maiden, then He fixed \textit{Himself}; His very essence, “inmyddez” her breast. And surely God’s essence should not reside “inmyddez” the maiden’s breast! Rather, God ought to ‘reside’ there only in the sense that her soul constitutes an \textit{imago Dei}—as is true even during earthly life—or, alternatively, in the sense that she holds God in her heart by loving Him, as may also be the case during earthly life. But the pearl of price cannot be identified with the \textit{imago Dei} or with love for God, because it is a prize for those that were righteous and is not enjoyed in earthly life. Thus the pearl “inmyddez” the maiden’s breast should not be identified with God at all: not with God’s essence, and not with God in another sense. It should rather be identified with the beatitude or bliss consisting in beholding God.
key to understanding that symbol. To devalue or discount her description of the pearl of price in the manner Russell proposes is, accordingly, to obscure Pearl’s overall meaning. But in denying that the maiden’s explication of the pearl of price is deconstructive, we leave open the possibility that, when she dubs the pearl of price ‘common,’ she refers to that pearl only qua sign or vehicle.

Suppose that what I have labeled the equivocation reading of the above passage is correct. In that case, the maiden merely asserts that the badge or token she wears is, as such, applicable to all the saints (perhaps by properly signifying each and every saint’s singular joy). Such an interpretation of the maiden’s message may seem to trivialize it, for why should she be so concerned to tell her father about a badge she bears in his dream, unless she means to say something further about that which the badge represents? But another objection to the equivocation reading stands out as well. If the maiden refers to the pearl of price qua sign when she labels it “common,” she also refers to it qua sign when she proclaims it “lyke” heaven as regards certain attributes, attributes including being common to the blessed (735). After all, her depiction of the pearl of price as common to all that were righteous, like her portrayal of it as flawless, as clear, etc., serves to elaborate her basic proposition that the pearl of price resembles (is “lyke”) heaven. But given that the maiden asserts a resemblance between the pearl of price qua sign and heaven as regards features including being common to the saints, it follows that heaven, like the pearl-of-price sign, is common to the saints. And as we saw in Section 2.1, the maiden treats heaven as a state of bliss instead of as a region.

56 Paul Piehler designates the pearl of price “the dominant symbol” in Pearl (150). Likewise for Robertson, the pearl of price is “the central figure in the poem” (“The Pearl” 155).
57 These considerations suggest that heaven is somehow identical with the pearl of price (qua tenor). I believe this is correct, because, as earlier observed, New Jerusalem—i.e., heaven—is the beatific vision in which beatitude consists (see footnote 16), and the pearl of price qua tenor is likewise beatitude or heavenly bliss. Thus Bogdanos asserts that New Jerusalem is “an anagogic expansion of the pearl” (120), while Blenkner, in a similar vein, speaks of “eternal beatitude, symbolized by the heavenly City of the final visio” in Pearl (67, his italics).
Consequently, there is a common state of bliss—a common property. Even if the maiden speaks only of the pearl of price *qua* sign when she tags it “common,” then, a common property exists.\(^{58}\)

If the foregoing reflections hold, then the maiden affirms a robust likeness or symmetry between the pearl of price *qua* vehicle and the pearl of price *qua* tenor, that is, between a sign of heavenly bliss and heavenly bliss itself. In virtue of this conformity, the metaphor’s tenor is as common as its vehicle, and a common property (heavenly bliss) answers to a common sign. But of course, if the maiden endorses a common property, she assumes a realist perspective. And it might even be suggested that her talk of *likeness* between language and reality, namely between a common sign and heavenly bliss, points toward realism’s definitive acceptance of language-reality parallelism.

By taking the pearl of price *qua* sign or vehicle to signify a common property, the universal bliss in which each saint participates, we stand positioned to comprehend Paul Piehler’s description of the pearl of price as “a general symbol of participation” in a straightforward manner (154). It is a *general* symbol because it is a *common* sign; it is a symbol of participation because it symbolizes the universal bliss participated in by the elect. Again, we stand positioned to construe Anderson’s statement that the saints “share in the general bliss of heaven” (58), as well as Blenkner’s talk of the maiden’s “participation in eternal bliss,” in what seems the most natural way (67): the saints, including the maiden, share or participate in heaven’s perpetual bliss as in a real universal. What is more, taking the pearl of price *qua* vehicle to represent a real universal positions us to account for the indeterminacy or resistance to delimitation, mentioned at the beginning of this section, of

\(^{58}\) Alternatively, of course, the maiden speaks of the pearl of price *qua* tenor or significate—or perhaps *qua* tenor or significate as well as *qua* vehicle or sign—when she speaks of the pearl of price as “lyke” heaven. In that case, she claims that heavenly bliss is like heaven, and she may be affirming an *identity* between heavenly bliss and heaven, since, as Andrew and Waldron observe, Middle English “lyke” can mean “the same” as well as “similar (to)” (330).
the “wonder perle” the maiden wears. For if this pearl, the pearl of price, signifies universal bliss, the indeterminacy or absence of measure it exhibits could indicate universal bliss’ indifference of itself to singularity, i.e., the lack of numerical unity and measure characterizing a real universal.59

However, in signifying universal bliss, the pearl of price also comes to signify all the individuals who participate in that bliss, so that, by “an easy shift from the quality possessed to the possessor of that quality,” the pearl of price comes to signify the maiden herself, as well as the other saints (Jefferson Fletcher 12). In Canto 5, the maiden declares herself “a perle of prys” (270). And right after the maiden’s rendition of the pearl-of-price parable in Canto 13, her father applies a label to her that she has just given to the pearl of price when he names her “maskelez perle” (745). In the poem’s final canto, the narrator refers to all the blessed as “precious perlez” (1212). Further, the Pearl maiden and her blessed peers—often collectively dubbed “pearl maidens” (Field 10)—not only warrant being called pearls of price or precious pearls, but also profoundly resemble pearls in the narrator’s dream. The maiden appears to her father as “smal” and “smoþe” (190), arrayed in “blysnande whyt” (198), her skin the “depe colour… / Of precioz perle” (215–6).

Everything about the maiden is white, in fact, except her golden hair (213), and this, framing her face (214), provides an apt “setting” for a precious pearl (2).60 Considering her pearl-like appearance as well as the various pearl epithets applied to her, then, the narrator’s daughter—together with the other pearl maidens, that “pakke of joly juele” (929)—constitutes a significate of the pearl of price qua

59 Cf. footnote 23 on the ‘less than numerical unity’ proper to universals. Themselves having no unity save ‘less than numerical unity,’ universals are “indifferent to singularity” (Spade, Five Texts 64) (“indifferens… ad singularitatem” [Scotus, Ord. II d. 3 part 1 q. 1 n. 35 p. 902]). In or of itself, that is, a given universal is not any particular individual.

60 In context, the adjective “blysnande,” i.e., “gleaming,” may well pun on “blysse” or “blysful.” Cf. footnote 64.

61 Because the impression of likeness between the Pearl maiden and the other pearl maidens is so strong, it seems reasonable to suppose that all the pearl maidens, not the narrator’s daughter alone, have pearl-white skin (i.e., are not just dressed in white). They are meant to be uncannily similar to pearls, so that we may without qualification speak, as Helen Barr does, of “the maiden, together with the other pearls” (63).
sign. Yet as she asserts, she became a pearl of price only when she died (269–72): the “condition for heavenly bliss is death” (Nolan 202). Participation in heavenly joy made her a “jolly” jewel. It might be objected that, if the pearl of price as a common sign applies to individuals, e.g., to the maiden, then it does not signify in a realist fashion. But to the contrary, we saw in Chapter 1 that, according to realists, humans (for instance) fall under the common sign “humanity,” and count as human, in virtue of their participation in the real universal properly signified by “humanity.” Just so, in Pearl, the maiden and the other blessed fall under “pearl” or “pearl of price,” and count as pearls, in virtue of their participation in the pearl of price qua tenor—that is, in the real universal, universal bliss, signified by the pearl of price qua vehicle. In full agreement with a realist view, then, we can maintain that the pearl of price properly signifies heaven’s universal bliss, but also applies to individuals insofar as they share in that delight. We can see universal bliss as the pearl of price properly speaking, and souls possessing that blissful pearl as pearls of price derivatively.

It is easy to construe the narrator’s New Jerusalem revelation in exactly these terms. In Canto 18, the narrator, like St John before him, enjoys a vision of the beatific vision, i.e., the sight of peace imaged as a perfect, glowing city—a city that “blysned” with light or delight from God (1048)—and this revelation persists until Canto 20. At the vision’s culmination in Canto 19, the narrator beholds the pearl maidens in procession, the “blysful perle” fastened at once to each one’s breast: Ryȝt as þe maynung mone con rys

62 As Anderson says, the maiden “only became a true pearl in heaven, achieving jewel-like permanence by becoming part of the heavenly eternity” (32).
63 If Pearl should presuppose Oxford Realism, then the poet’s use of “pearl of price” to designate both universal joy and the individuals enjoying it (the blessed) would be especially satisfying. For as noted in Chapter One, Wyclif and the other Oxford Realists maintained that universals and their individuals—as well as individual substances and their accidents—are really identical. If this realist theory underpins Pearl, then heaven’s universal bliss is really identical with each blessed soul, and “pearl of price” applies to the blessed by virtue of their real identity with heavenly bliss.
64 In context, the verb “blysned,” i.e., “shone,” may well pun on “blysse.” Cf. footnote 60.
The correspondingly clad and indiscernibly glad pearl maidens, among them the “blysful” *Pearl* maiden, glide, with like delight, in line behind the pearl-white Lamb—Itself, as noted in Section 2.2, the “blypest” (1131) “Juelle” of all (1124). Here the maiden, along with the other blessed, is clearly “enjoying the perfect bliss of communion with the Lamb” (Spearing, Gawain-*Poet* 116), and I would argue that this blissful communion amounts to co-participation in common bliss. For it is in this sense, I believe, that “the Maiden and the other brides [of Christ] share in the essential

65 “Just as the mighty moon rises / Before the day-gleam sinks wholly away, / So suddenly, in a wonderful way, / I became aware of a procession. / This noble city of rich renown / Was suddenly full, without summons, / Of such virgins in the same dress / As was my blissful crowned one. / And all were crowned in the same fashion, / Adorned in pearls and white clothes; / On (or ‘in’) each one’s breast was bound fast / The blissful pearl with great delight. / They glided together with great delight / On golden roads that gleamed like glass; / I perceived there were a hundred thousand, / And their liveries were all of a kind. / It was difficult to know the happiest face. / The Lamb proudly passed before them, / With seven horns of clear red gold; / His clothes were like prized pearls. / Toward the throne they made their way. / Though they were many, there was no crowding in their arrangement, / But, mild as seemly maidens at mass, / They thus moved forth with great delight.”
quality of the Lamb who leads them” (Field 11). Yet if she shares in the essential quality of the Lamb, the maiden likewise shares in the essential quality of heaven; as Piehler puts it, she is “not so much an allegory” of heaven as “a participant in its essential reality” (151). And as the maiden herself makes clear, heaven’s essential quality—its nature—is bliss (it is “blyþe of mode” [738]).

The poet goes to great lengths in Cantos 17–19 to emphasize heavenly bliss. Rosalind Field notes that, despite extraordinary overall fidelity to John’s Apocalypse, “the poet has infused the vision of Heaven with a ‘delyt’ it does not have in the awesome majesty of the original” (10). In much the same vein, Sandra Prior explains that the maiden (who leads her father to the hill from which he espies the happy city [973–84]) “uses John’s Apocalypse to describe the bliss of the 144,000” pearl maidens (27). And Elizabeth Petroff maintains, with considerable plausibility, that “all the imagery of joy built up throughout the poem finds its climax in the heavenly procession” (190). So overwhelming does the sense of heavenly bliss become by Canto 19, in fact, that the narrator finds “himself… caught up in the ‘gret delyt’” (Field 10) permeating this “heuen of joye” (1124).

At the heart of the narrator’s vision of the vision of peace, that delightful rest in which “suffering and death are transmuted into joy” (Field 15), lies the blissful pearl at every pearl maiden’s heart. The narrator’s application of the definite article “þe” to that pearl—like the maiden’s application of the singular demonstrative “þys” to it earlier (854)—strongly suggests that the pearl is unique, one instead of many. Rather than each virgin owning a blissful pearl utterly her own, the maidens seem to share the same joyful gem as common property. Yet this situation recapitulates the pearl-

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66 On the saints as brides of Christ, see footnote 37.
67 The poet’s fidelity to the Apocalypse has often been remarked. As Kean says, “the poet is careful to reproduce the information provided by the Vision of John in the Apocalypse, whose truth could not be questioned” (The Pearl 28). In Cantos 17 and 18 alone, the poet explicitly cites “þe apostel John” eleven times (984 and passim).
of-price paradox, or at least, it recapitulates that paradox if the maidens share the pearl *qua* tenor or heavenly bliss. But is this obvious? Might they share it only *qua* vehicle, as a common badge?

This question can be answered with another. How *could* the blissful pearl, i.e., the pearl of price, appear to the narrator as a shared sign? Could one and the same pearl, worn by multiple maidens simultaneously, appear in his imagination (as if before his bodily eyes)? I, for one, cannot picture this, and I doubt that we should impute the supposed image of one same pearl “inmyddez” many maidens to the narrator, either. Instead, it would seem that the pearl of price *qua* token could be shared by all the pearl maidens—they could all bear or possess the *same* sign—only in the loose or weak sense in which one says that multiple teammates wear “the same” logo or device. But if we think of the pearl as common to the saints in this way, then we reduce them to a sort of troupe or squad (the Lamb’s cheerleaders, as it were), and we reduce the symbol at the heart of the pearl maidens, of the New Jerusalem vision, and of *Pearl* as a whole to a mark of belonging to such a troupe. In my eyes, such an analysis trivializes both the dream vision and the dream-vision poem.

When we consider the blissful pearl in the narrator’s revelation as a sign or vehicle, we attend to the vision’s sensual surface: dream images, not what they represent. The narrator himself acts in a similar fashion, for, throughout the vision, “the senses of the dreamer are engaged, rather than his intelligence” (Finlayson, “*Pearl*” 324). Or rather, he believes that his senses are engaged. In

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68 When the maiden calls the pearl of price “common,” she may merely mean, as noted above, that it signifies many individuals. Yet it is difficult to see what light this consideration, even if true, could shed on how the pearl of price might *appear* to the narrator as a shared sign.

69 Discussing the narrator’s excessive “reliance on his physical faculties” instead of on his intellect, Edward Condren makes much the same point (70). Again, Kean notes that the narrator attends to (seeming) sensation as late as in his New Jerusalem vision, where his “mind still clings to the beauty that is actually before his eyes” (The Pearl 205).
Canto 2, when the dream begins, he states that he “ne wyste in þis worlde quere þat” he is (65). He supposes that he is somewhere in the extramental world, and reacts accordingly, focussing on the visionary landscape in all its sensual, “particularizing detail” (Finlayson, “Pearl” 323). Taken with the colours of the trees and their leaves (75–7), the sound of birdsong (91–4), and the “frech flauorez of frytez” (87), he never pauses to examine what these (often numinous) images mean.

So too, the narrator describes New Jerusalem’s appearance, itemizing the gems on which the city stands, throughout most of Canto 17. And as late as Canto 20, when he relates his dream after the fact, the narrator supposes “that he experienced the otherworld ‘in yȝe and ere’” (Bogdanos 55).

Of course, however, the narrator’s eyes are not actually active; his “bodily eyes are shut in sleep” (Spearing, Dream-Poetry 118). And if he detects only bodily sensations, if he fails to engage his mind’s eye or perceive extramental realities via dream-images, this redounds to his discredit. The maiden sternly rebukes him “for being unable to accept more than he can see with his own eyes” (Anderson 61), calling on him instead to think or “deme” (313). The narrator’s failure to accept more than he sees with his bodily eyes, or seems to see with his bodily eyes, constitutes a serious shortcoming, for it entails that, however much his dream reveals “an authenticated reality outside itself” (Spearing, Dream-Poetry 119)—however much in principle sensory “perception becomes simultaneously metaphysical penetration” in the dream (Bogdanos 19)—the narrator nonetheless fails in practice to penetrate through to the extramental and metaphysical truths its images reveal.

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70 “did not know where in this world”
71 “fresh flavours of fruits”
72 “Delyt me drof in yȝe and ere” (1153) (“Delight penetrated me through eye and ear”). The narrator revels in what he sees and hears (or seems to see and hear), failing to seek out the meanings of the images and to delight in those.
73 In Canto 6, she says that he “leuez noþynk bot [he] hit syȝe” (308) (“believes nothing unless he has seen it”).
Furthermore, the dream does offer access to truths. It is declared a “veray avysyoun” in Canto 20 (1184).\(^{74}\) Again, Canto 18 underscores Canto 2’s suggestion that the narrator’s dreaming “goste” begins to dream “in Godez grace” (63), in an out-of-body condition (61–2, 1090–2) in which it is “rauyste” by heavenly illumination (1088).\(^{75}\) In this situation, the narrator should perceive truths or realities, since his mind’s eye is unobstructed by bodily sensations.\(^{76}\) His dream vision invites him to apprehend with his mind, to subordinate seeming sensation to intellection, to conceive of what his dream images mean.\(^{77}\) And as the dream vision summons the narrator to see significates through signs, so the dream-vision poem *Pearl* solicits auditors or readers, who suspend disbelief and adopt the narrator’s position, to perceive truths through tokens and appreciate the vision on a deeper, more metaphysical, and less sensuous-superficial level than in fact the narrator does. As Nolan says, “Caught up into a realm in which the external senses are useless, reader and narrator must restructure their expectations in order to ‘see’ aright” (178). Most of all auditors or readers, as also the narrator, should regard that pearl at the heart of the pearl maidens, the New Jerusalem vision, and *Pearl* itself in a more-than-just sensuous way, *qua* sign or vehicle; they should “move from the sign ‘pearl’ (as word or thing) to something else,” its significate or tenor (Prior 25). On

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\(^{74}\) “true vision”

\(^{75}\) Here, according to Edward Wilson, “rauyste” should be taken in “something of the mystical sense,” which involves “the alienation of the spirit from the body” in rapturous vision (18). More forcefully, Blenkner states that *Pearl*’s “final visio carries the dreamer aloft to supernatural levels, and although the scene is presented in visual images it is mystical in that it presents things divine, hidden” (50, his italics).

\(^{76}\) As Kean remarks, the narrator’s “goste... is entirely freed. This would suggest a vision of a particularly significant kind” (The *Pearl* 30, her italics). Similarly, Finlayson maintains that the narrator’s “dream is an image for a state of illumination, of perception” (“*Pearl*” 322). Wilson, who asserts that the “narrator’s dream is what medieval mystical theologians called a ‘spiritual vision’, what the *Pearl*-narrator himself, referring later to St. John’s vision in the Apocalypse, calls a ‘gostly drem’” (15–6, his italics), points out that spiritual visions were regarded as revelations from God (16). Bogdanos concurs that “we must view the *Pearl* dream—referring back to Augustine—preponderantly as a visio spiritualis” (37, his italics), adding that the narrator’s “inner senses” act “as crucial channels of spiritual perception,” offering access to invisible truths (37). And Spearing likewise says that “when the Dreamer in *Pearl* refers to St John’s vision as a ‘gostly drem’... he is using that phrase as equivalent to Augustine’s ‘spiritual vision’” (Gawain-Poet 111, his italics). However, Spearing deploys a different classification as well, comparing the “gostly drem” in *Pearl* to “what Richard [of St Victor] calls somnium mentis” (Gawain-Poet 112, his italics). More fully, he contends that the narrator’s somnium mentis leads him “into a contemplation of divine mysteries” (Gawain-Poet 112, his italics).

\(^{77}\) Influenced by Aristotle, for whom the soul never thinks without a mental image (*De anima* III c. 7, *De memoria et reminiscencia* I), medieval authors took for granted that the intellect makes use of the imagination and its phantasms.
this level, the blissful pearl is bliss itself, the perfect bliss of heaven. And insofar as that pearl is common to the pearl maidens, it will be common bliss, i.e., a common property or real universal.

I suggest, therefore, that, when the narrator speaks as though the selfsame pearl belongs to many maidens, he unwittingly denotes it *qua* tenor, as a property, as universal joy. And maybe he does apprehend it with his mind’s eye in some manner—perhaps he does understand it in some way—because, again, his bodily eyes are inactive. He cannot actually perceive it with “ye,” so does he not, after a fashion, perceive it mentally, in thought? Indeed, it is tempting to think that he begins to see the pearl of price as a property even before his New Jerusalem vision. In Canto 13, directly following the maiden’s identification of the pearl of price with heaven’s lasting bliss, the narrator asks about the source of her preternatural “propertéz” (752). Who “formed” her fair figure (746) or “wroȝt” her white attire (748)? Who instilled her pearly hue (753)? Chiefly, who informed or invested her with the perfect pearl (756), of which even “Arystotel” never made mention (751)? The narrator’s reference to Aristotle might indicate that he intends “propertéz” in a philosophical sense, in which case his invocation in this canto of philosophical properties frames his daughter’s claim that the pearl is common. This consideration not only provides a further reason for auditors and readers to construe the pearl of price (*qua* tenor) as a common property, but also hints at the narrator’s so regarding it. Of course, heavenly bliss, as the narrator himself appears to recognize, would surpass any natural property known to Aristotle. Nevertheless, a property it would remain.

The above considerations lead us back to the conclusion that, as disclosed to (and perhaps dimly realized by) the narrator in his New Jerusalem revelation, the saints participate in universal bliss, appearing alike as precious pearls by co-possessing *that* precious pearl. If this is so, then we can
easily explain why the poet presents the blessed as so closely agreeing, as so robustly conformed to one another—but also as distinguishable. The narrator remains able to pick out his own “lyttel quene” among her happy peers (1147). For just as realists held distinct individuals sharing in a real universal to be identical just insofar as they share in that universal, i.e., to be partly identical, so the elect will be partly identical, identical insofar as they share in heavenly bliss. Accordingly, the striking conformity among the virgins in the narrator’s vision denotes their partial identity in a common form—the delight that unites them—without, however, their co-possession of that joy annulling their individuality. In this way, the blissful pearl “constitutes a principle of unification” (Pihler 146), a factor that grounds the narrator’s “perception of the union of his… daughter with Christ and in the heavenly host” yet leaves her individually discernible (Finlayson, “Pearl” 340).

We have seen that taking Pearl to presuppose realism offers a straightforward way to unlock the pearl-of-price paradox. We have further seen that so doing positions us readily to account for the indeterminacy of the “wonder perle” later identified with the pearl of price and for the profound conformity among the blessed in the narrator’s New Jerusalem vision. To the contrary, two broad options seem available to the literary-nominalist exponent of Pearl. First, she can accept that the maiden’s rendition of Matthew’s pearl-of-price parable is paradoxical and can deem the paradox irreducibly contradictory, as Russell does. Of course, this approach will not help us to resolve the paradox. Or second, she can seek to avoid the paradox altogether by maintaining that the maiden equivocates, referring to the pearl of price qua tenor when she calls it “matchless” but only to the pearl of price qua vehicle when she calls it “common.” However, I have suggested that this view, beyond trivializing the poem’s central symbol, stumbles on the maiden’s talk of likeness between

78 As Anderson says, “The first thing to notice about the procession is that all those who take part in it look like [the narrator’s] pearl-maiden” (69). The second thing to notice, however, is that the procession’s participants do not look exactly the same.
the pearl of price and heaven. In the absence of a third literary-nominalist proposal, it seems best, then, to construe the pearl of price as, and as a symbol of, universal bliss interlinking the blessed.

3. Pearl Maidens and Pearl’s Stanzas

Given that in *Pearl* the blessed conjoin in common joy, a striking symmetry obtains between the saints and the poem’s stanzas and cantos. For just as the blessed have a property in common, the bliss that binds them together, so the stanzas in each of Pearl’s twenty cantos have a keyword in common, a “link-word” that binds them together (Macrae-Gibson 54). To illustrate, the stanzas in Canto 5 (in which the maiden names herself “a perle of prys”) include the word “juel” in their first and last lines, while the stanzas in Canto 7 (in which the maiden first claims to be “quene in blysse”) include the word “blysse” in their first and last lines. This use of one keyword repeated in multiple stanzas, all those of a given canto, yields “the effect of concatenatio (‘concatenation’ or ‘linking’)” (Andrew and Waldron 34, their italics). Keywords shared by multiple stanzas thus concatenate those stanzas, chaining them together to form a canto, interweaving them to produce a continuous fabric. As Theodore Bogdanos says, “the hooking-over from one stanza to the next creates a web of connections—much like a rich interlace pattern” (51–2). But Pearl’s link-words

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79 The term “link-word,” now in common circulation, appears to have been coined (with reference to *Pearl*) by O. D. Macrae-Gibson. Macrae-Gibson emphasized the binding function of link-words, observing that the “‘link-word’... forms the major verbal link within a stanza-group,” i.e., a canto, even as it “provides the link between groups” (54).

80 More precisely, all the stanzas in a given canto include a certain keyword in their last lines, and, furthermore, all the stanzas except the first in a given canto include that keyword in their first lines—but the first stanza in each canto does not include its canto’s keyword in its first line. Instead of including its own canto’s keyword in its first line, the first stanza of each canto includes the preceding canto’s keyword. Many critics have claimed that Pearl’s keywords “almost form a key to its contents” (Macrae-Gibson 54), that is, that the keyword of a given canto or “stanza group” epitomizes “the ideas at issue within the group” (Donner 166). Morton Donner further notes that the poet frequently uses link words in subtly diverse ways—“More than half the link words vary their morphological category as well as their semantic reference within a stanza group” (167)—and that this “dexterity increases his lexical reach, extending the range of lexical associations open to him by exploiting the change in meaning that accompanies change in form to achieve the change in sense that transmutes simple lexical repetition into purposeful word play” (181). In brief, the poet deploys the cantos’ keywords with extreme deliberation to make them mirror the main ideas of the cantos in as comprehensive and nuanced a manner as possible.
also connect its cantos, weaving canto with canto no less than stanza with stanza. For as Barbara Newman notes, “the keyword in the last line of each canto is repeated in the first line of the next, binding the cantos both internally and successively like a chain of pearls” (“Artifice” 5). Much as the elect coincide in shared bliss, then, the text’s stanzas and cantos coincide in shared keywords.

Newman’s description of the poem’s stanzas and cantos as chained pearls is of course deliberate. Each stanza displays a pearl-like smoothness or polish, as also does each canto. Each stanza (and consequently each canto) alliterates heavily, while each stanza also maintains a perfectly regular rhyme scheme (ababababcde). At the same time, each canto—in addition to being ‘rounded’ by containing a round number of stanzas and lines—emerges as an integrated object in its own right insofar as all of its stanzas conclude “with a variant of the same line (so that all the c rhymes in a [canto] must be the same)” (Spearing, Gawain-Poet 97–8, his italics). In this way Pearl creates, at the stanza and canto levels both, “a verbal effect as bejewelled as the other world it describes” (Spearing, Gawain-Poet 98). Like the pearl maidens, its verbal or textual parts resemble pearls.

\[81\] As Ernst Curtius noted in the 1950s, medieval writers display “a ‘predilection for round numbers,’” i.e., numbers “divisible by 5 or 10” (505). With a sole exception, Pearl’s cantos contain five stanzas and sixty (five times twelve) lines. Canto 15 includes six stanzas, the surplus stanza being necessary to bring the poem’s total line-count to 1212. However, Canto 15 may still warrant consideration as ‘round’ in one way, i.e., insofar as fifteen is divisible by five. It should also be noted that the number twelve aligns Pearl’s stanzas with pearls, since the stanzas have twelve lines each and the blessed enter New Jerusalem through twelve gates of “parfyt perle” (1038), and that twelve may further align Canto 15 with a pearl since, as Kean first noticed, Canto 15 “contains as its second stanza 72, which is 12 x 6” (“Numerical Composition” 50). Bishop enlarges on Kean’s comment: “As a result of the additional stanza the total number of lines in Group XV is also 72. Moreover, this particular multiple of twelve happens to be half of 144. Thus the number of stanzas in Group XV is half the ‘Apocalyptic’ number, 12, and the total number of lines in the group is half 144—the only other ‘Apocalyptic’ number that has any important place in the poem” (Pearl 28–9). Although he found it necessary to compromise the pearl-like roundness of Canto 15 in one way, then, the poet appears to have taken care to align Canto 15 with New Jerusalem and its twelve pearly gates (and hence with pearls) in another way.

\[82\] It is common to note that Pearl “is the most highly wrought and intricately constructed poem in Middle English” (Bishop, Pearl 27), a rich object like the resplendent ‘jewellery box’—the forest, and subsequently New Jerusalem—that encloses the maiden in the narrator’s dream. The maiden declares herself to be “in cofer… comly clente” (259) (“beautifully enclosed in a coffer”), that “cofer” being “þis gardyn gracious gaye” (260) (“this gracious, gay garden”).
Pearl’s pearl-like stanzas and cantos not only share concatenating keywords to comprise a chain of pearls, but also create an impression of “overall circularity” insofar as the keyword of the final canto, Canto 20, repeats in (or is anticipated by) the first line of the poem’s first stanza (Condren 49). Canto 20 thus connects or concatenates with Canto 1 exactly as Canto 19 with Canto 20, the last of the poem’s verbal or textual sections uniting with the first to produce a perpetual loop. As a result, “the poem itself becomes a kind of pearl, an ‘endelez round’… like its subject,” i.e., the pearl of price (Newman, “Artifice” 5). This feature of Pearl’s form has often been remarked. For example, Teresa Reed’s claim that “[f]ormally, the poem attempts to incarnate its central symbol, the pearl, in its recapitulative aspects” refers to the poet’s “use of concatenatio” (150, her italics). Ann Meyer states that the “linking of stanza groups by key words… gather[s] the structural parts into a self-contained unit, which suggests a sphere, or the pearl itself” (147); Spearing, that Pearl is “pearl-like in its circularity of structure” (Dream-Poetry 120). Via concatenation, the poem, at the level of its form, reiterates its content’s key symbol—becoming the pearl qua sign or vehicle.

If Pearl itself can be seen as the pearl of price qua vehicle, it can be said that the text’s pearl-like stanzas and cantos stand to the pearl of price qua vehicle as the pearl-like saints stand to the pearl of price qua tenor. For much as the blessed are the subjective parts of universal bliss (the pearl of price qua tenor), the stanzas and cantos are verbal or textual parts of Pearl (the pearl of price qua vehicle). On the level of form—the linguistic level of the poem as such, the level of its words—a ‘pearl’ unites elements and explains their being ‘pearls,’ while, on the level of content—the level of what the poem expresses, e.g., the bliss of the blessed—a ‘pearl’ unites elements and explains their being ‘pearls.’

At the risk of anachronism, we might say that, much as the blessed interconnect not in their singular blisses but in universal bliss, Pearl’s stanzas and cantos unite, not in keyword tokens, but rather in keyword types. The type-token

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83 At the risk of anachronism, we might say that, much as the blessed interconnect not in their singular blisses but in universal bliss, Pearl’s stanzas and cantos unite, not in keyword tokens, but rather in keyword types. The type-token
extrametally. Hence a certain parallelism between form and content, language and reality holds. It is tempting to regard this language-reality parallelism as gesturing toward an underlying realist perspective—tempting and, I think, fair. However, we shall postpone developing this suggestion.

We observed above that, for many critics, *Pearl* “achieves a perfectly spherical shape” by means of concatenation (Condren 63). For Bishop, though, “the visual image that [the poem’s structure] suggests is not so much that of a single, solid and spherical pearl as of something that consists of a number of linked units—such as a necklace of pearls” (Pearl 30). He thus regards “each stanza as the equivalent of a single pearl in a necklace” (Pearl 30). I would submit that the visual image produced by *Pearl*’s form may justly be compared to either a pearl or a necklace—or to a crown, as Bishop also proposes—depending on whether we consider the poem holistically or in terms of its constituent parts. In all likelihood, the poet intends both complementary impressions. But Bishop is certainly right to note that *Pearl*’s stanzas and cantos, bound together in a perfect loop, do collectively recall a necklace or circlet. By extension, the keywords binding multiple stanzas

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*distinction*, which was introduced in the first half of the twentieth century by that latter-day Scotist, Charles Sanders Peirce (Wetzel 1.1), is at least comparable to the universal-particular distinction: “The distinction between a *type* and its *tokens* is an ontological one between a general sort of thing and its particular concrete instances” (Wetzel 1.1, her italics). (The type-token distinction may not be identical to the universal-particular distinction, because, as Linda Wetzel notes, “types seem to be *objects*, like numbers and sets, rather than properties” [3, her italics]. Nevertheless, “most thinkers assume,” in fact, that “*types are universals*” [Wetzel 4.1., her italics,]). Therefore “token,” used in the context of the type-token distinction, does *not* mean (in accordance with our standard use of “token” in this chapter) “sign” or “symbol.” Rather, to say that *Pearl*’s stanzas and cantos unite in keyword types instead of keyword tokens is to claim that the poem’s stanzas and cantos share, not the very same concrete ink-marks (or sound waves), but the same types or sorts of ink-marks (or sound waves). By way of illustration, Wetzel invites us “to consider the number of words in the Gertrude Stein line from her poem *Sacred Emily* on the page in front of the reader’s eyes: Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose. In one sense of ‘word’ we may count three different words; in another sense we may count ten different words” (1.1, her italics). In the first sense, we speak of word types, and in the latter of word tokens. Just so, when critics state that *Pearl*’s stanzas and cantos share or are linked with (and are not just made to resemble) one another by means of keywords or link-words, they seem to speak of keyword types common to the poem’s sections, repeated or instantiated in multiple stanzas and cantos. To deny that keyword types (or types in general) exist would be to destroy the connection among *Pearl*’s stanzas and cantos, to reduce the “formal unity” (Field 16) that seems to hold among them to mere similarity. And in the same manner, to deny that real universals exist would be to degrade the strong impression in *Pearl* of unity among the blessed to mere resemblance, mere membership in the same class. Bishop declares that “the poet has constructed a kind of *corona* by his use of *concatenatio*, in which each stanza… represents a pearl” (Pearl 31, his italics). It must be noted, though, that Bishop means not only a crown or diadem by “*corona*,” but also a “kind of ecclesiastical chandelier” (Pearl 30). I shall return to this curious interpretation shortly.
and cantos constitute their common ‘thread.’ So regardless of whether we liken *Pearl* to the pearl itself or to a diadem of pearls, the keywords serve the “function of unifying the poem” (Prior 35).

Now as has been suggested, the keywords’ unifying function at the level of form corresponds to the unifying function served by universal bliss at the level of content. And in fact, the agreement or conformity between keywords and bliss emerges most readily in Canto 19, the canto in which the blessed appear as New Jerusalem’s virgins. For the canto in which the narrator perceives the pearl-like maidens interlinked via delight is the very canto in which readers or auditors perceive *Pearl’s* pearl-like stanzas interlinked via “delyt.” Canto 19’s keyword thus not only functionally parallels heavenly bliss (uniting the canto’s stanzas as heavenly bliss or delight unites the souls depicted in that canto), but also signifies that which it so parallels. Common “delyt,” i.e., “delyt” shared by all the canto’s stanzas, correlates with common delight, i.e., delight shared by all New Jerusalem’s virgins. So perfect is this form-content parallelism that it can scarcely be accidental. Rather, *Pearl’s* formal unity through keywords appears crafted to mirror the saints’ unity in bliss.

Yet a still more thorough parallelism may obtain between pearl maidens and *Pearl’s* stanzas. For in Canto 20, after awakening, the narrator finds solace in the thought that the maiden “strykez in garlande gay” (1186), according to Andrew and Waldron’s edition—or as E. V. Gordon’s edition reports, “stykeȝ in garlande gay” (1186). 85 The Middle English manuscript in fact reads “stykeȝ” (or “stykeȝ”), as Andrew and Waldron admit (109), and “stykeȝ” is not obviously a scribal error. For in 1945, Mary Hillmann suggested a coherent explanation of what the narrator might mean if he indeed says the maiden “stykeȝ” in a garlande. Noting Dante’s use of the cognate “ghirlande”

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85 “goes in a gay garland”; “sticks in a gay garland”
in *Paradiso* 10 to refer to the circle of saints ringing Beatrice, she contended that *Pearl*'s narrator uses “garlande” in a similar way: to refer to “the heavenly procession in which [his daughter] had appeared to him” (244, her italics). “Garlande” thus denotes the pearl-maiden procession, and the narrator calls the maiden ‘stuck’ or ‘set’ in a garland since she is a part of that procession (244).86

No few of *Pearl*’s critics have accepted Hillmann’s interpretation. For example, Kean says, “the Dreamer uses the image of the garland, as Dante does, for the circling dance of the blessed” (The Pearl 168), while, for Spearing, the maiden “is one of the circle of the blessed, the garland gay” (Gawain-Poet 168). However, Bishop opposes Hillmann’s reading. For as he remarked in 1957, “it is difficult to see how that procession [that is, the pearl-maiden procession] could be regarded as circular” (“Significance” 13). After all, the poet’s New Jerusalem is not circular or spherical; it is “a perfect cube” (Newman 5), probably with linear streets. How then could New Jerusalem’s maidens process in circle? Bishop’s objection to Hillmann’s reading directly influences Andrew and Waldron, who cite him when they emend from “stykeȝ” to “strykez” (109). They submit that “garlande” refers, not to the heavenly procession, but to the crown the *Pearl* maiden wears (109).

Yet intriguingly, Bishop himself does not favour the interpretation Andrew and Waldron suggest. To the contrary, he recognizes that “garlande” could refer to “the maiden’s head-dress,” but, like Hillmann, ultimately wishes to retain “stykeȝ”—if only a suitable referent for “garlande” can be found, i.e., a joyous *circle* in which the maiden could plausibly be said to be ‘set’ (“Significance” 12–3).87 So, after dismissing Hillmann’s construal (and after more broadly discounting the notion

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86 Accordingly, Gordon thinks that “probably the *garlande* is a metaphorical description of the Heavenly procession, the circle of the blessed, and *stykeȝ* may therefore be retained with its usual meaning of ‘set’” (85, his italics).

87 As Bishop notes, the emendation from “stykeȝ” to “strykez” is not original to Andrew and Waldron. Gordon made the same change prior to Hillmann’s argument, although, as we have seen, he subsequently seems to have been more
that the ‘garland’ “may be formed out of gems”—i.e., pearl maidens—since such a ‘garland,’ he notes, would be “simply a pattern that is made by the flowers (or souls)” instead of an integrated, crown-like object [“Significance” 13]), Bishop tries to identify the ‘garland’ in which the maiden is ‘set’ with “an object… capable of existing quite independently of any pearls that are ‘stuck’ in it as ornaments” (“Significance” 13). He finally proposes that the object in question is a ‘crown’ of a particular type: a certain “ecclesiastical chandelier” called a corona (“Significance” 16) that constituted an especially “striking representation of the New Jerusalem” (“Significance” 20). For Bishop, then, the narrator draws on the image of an ecclesiastical chandelier to imply figuratively that his daughter abides in heaven—although, again, New Jerusalem is perfectly cubical in Pearl.

To my knowledge, no subsequent scholar has endorsed Bishop’s chandelier interpretation. Since neither the narrator nor the maiden directly mentions any chandelier, and the chandelier image is never overtly offered in Pearl, why, indeed, should the narrator, at so crucial a point in the poem, suddenly allude to a chandelier? But if we oppose Bishop’s reading, must we therefore accept the emendation from “stykeȝ” to “strykez”? Given that revision, it does indeed seem, as Andrew and Waldron suggest, that the narrator takes comfort after his dream in his daughter’s being crowned. Such a reading is coherent; however, the “head-dress” the maiden wears simply does not seem to amount to a sufficiently important image in the overall context of Pearl. It is merely one facet of the “blysnde whyt” attire which, as indicated in Section 2.3, chiefly serves to foster or further the Pearl maiden’s resemblance to the pearl of price. Of course, the maiden’s crown does denote her heavenly queenship (as does all her regal raiment), and that queenship, in turn, signifies bliss. Accordingly, “garlande” probably should be said at least to resonate with or reinforce the image than willing to embrace Hillmann’s view (Bishop, “Significance” 12). Similarly, Charles Osgood’s edition of Pearl (1906) emends “stykeȝ” to “strykez,” though the brackets Osgood adds (“st[rykeȝ i]n garlande gay” [1186, Osgood’s italics]) may bespeak doubts or misgivings on his part.
of the maiden’s crown. But if, as Hillmann believes, “garlande” refers (or primarily refers) to the procession of maidens in New Jerusalem rather than to the maiden’s crown, then, promptly upon waking, the narrator alludes, as would seem quite natural, to the culminating image of his dream. And whereas his daughter’s “head-dress” is steeply arched (“[h]iȝe pynakled” [207]), lacking the simple, level form of a flower garland, the even file of pearl-like girls gliding in orderly sequence would—if circular—suggest a band or circlet of pearls. Thus, it would recall a garland in shape.88

If the pearl-maiden procession does resemble a garland of flowers or circlet of pearls, then a very profound symmetry indeed obtains between Pearl’s content and its form. At the level of content, the Pearl maiden and her peers appear to the narrator as a circular chain of pearls strung together by universal bliss. Simultaneously, at the level of form, Pearl’s polished, keyword-linked stanzas and cantos recapitulate the narrator’s vision of the blessed by likewise suggesting a circular chain of pearls. In this way, the poem’s form re-expresses the dream-vision’s culminating revelation or moment, making it directly perceptible, after a fashion, by Pearl’s auditors or readers. Bishop is therefore right to suspect that the poem’s form celebrates the maiden’s being, as the narrator puts

88 A further reason to believe that the narrator uses “garlande gay” to refer to his daughter and the other saints is that plant and flower imagery throughout Pearl serves to refer to the maiden. In Canto 1, for example, the narrator calls his daughter (or her buried body) a “sede” (34). But the maiden qua seed undergoes a transformation in her passage from the terrestrial to the celestial. By the time the narrator refers to her as part of a garland (assuming that he does refer to her as part of a garland, and not merely as wearing a garland), she has, in effect, matured into a flower: the maiden qua seed has flowered in heavenly bliss. Hence in Canto 15, the narrator describes his beatified daughter as “a reken rose” (906) (“a lovely rose”). And tellingly, in Canto 5, the maiden declares that what her father lost when she died (i.e., her own earthly self) “watz bot a rose / Þat flowered and failed as kynde hyt gef” (269–70) (“was but a rose / that flowered and failed as nature allowed it”). She is now more than the mortal rose she was: she is a pearl of price, the immortal counterpart to that mortal rose (271–2). In other words, the beatified Pearl maiden is now a rose become immortal. For as Kean says as regards these lines in Canto 5: “Mortal flowers must fade in order to qualify for immortality. The flower is thus a symbol, from one point of view, of transience…. From another point of view it becomes a symbol of immortality, and of the highest spiritual reward” (The Pearl 62, her italics). These reflections tend to suggest that, by Canto 20, the narrator grasps that the maiden is an immortal flower among immortal flowers.
it, “[i]n blysse… blypely blent” (385). The unity among Pearl’s parts or sections proclaims the maiden’s unity with the other pearl maidens—her fusion with the other blessed in universal bliss.

However, is the blessed procession somehow circular? Does it recall a garland or crown? I think that it does. For as we saw in Section 2.3, the maiden describes heaven’s realm (New Jerusalem) as “endelez rounde.” This suggests that, if New Jerusalem is a cube, it is also a circle or sphere. Of course, a round square is impossible. Yet since heaven or New Jerusalem is not a place but a state, it must, literally speaking, lack shape altogether; it can be ‘square’ and ‘round’ figuratively only. Notably, heaven’s ‘roundness’ seems to figure the perpetuity of heavenly bliss, since, after all, the maiden calls it “endlez.” But if its perpetuity is that in virtue of which heaven qualifies as figuratively round, then should not the pearl-maiden procession also qualify as round in virtue of its perpetuity? Both New Jerusalem and its unceasing cavalcade appear to be somehow circular.

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89 “In bliss… joyfully situated.” Bishop asserts that “the external form of the poem may celebrate” the “fact that the child’s [i.e., the maiden’s] soul is safe in the New Jerusalem” (Pearl 31). He notes elsewhere that New Jerusalem is or stands for the vision of peace (“Significance” 18).

90 The Pearl poet, as Newman shows, also uses numerical symbolism to imply that New Jerusalem is simultaneously round and square. For with “its twenty cantos of sixty lines apiece, Pearl would have had exactly 1200 lines and 100 stanzas, making it a perfect square” (Newman, “Artifice” 6, her italics). Yet as stated above (in footnote 81), Canto 15 includes an extra stanza. Therefore “the total number of stanzas rises to 101, moving beyond the perfect square to start again with one, the principle of eternally new beginning, even as the last line of the poem circles back to the first…. It happens that 101 is also a prime number, imitating the divine perfection of indivisibility…. What the poet has accomplished with this pattern is a numerical equivalent of squaring the circle, superimposing the square number of the celestial City on the circular form of eternity” (Newman, “Artifice” 6).

91 Because the narrator beholds all 144,000 of the elect, a number which must include at least some individuals who have not yet died by the time of his dream, he seems to perceive the blessed as they exist outside of earthly time, i.e., in the everlasting or aeviternal condition of angels. To clarify, scholastic philosophers, in order to “provide a bridge between time and eternity… advanced the term aeuvum, which had been loosely defined by the Fathers, and gave it a new exact definition. Aeuvum came to signify that duration which participates at once in aspects of time and eternity” insofar as it not only includes times “past, present, and future” but also “exists all at once” (Newman, “Artifice” 39). The angels and the blessed were alike said to enjoy this state of endless, unchanging duration (Newman, “Artifice” 39). A. V. C. Schmidt refers to the aeviternal state of the blessed as “suprahistorical” when he proposes that “for the Pearl-poet a circular poetic form properly figures the suprahistorical existence of the Blessed” (“Medieval Structural Unity” 309, his italics). Schmidt thus agrees that circularity—i.e., the circular structure of Pearl as a whole, but also possibly the circular arrangement of the blessed—figuratively represents the perpetuity of the blessed.
Moreover, the saints appear to the narrator in his New Jerusalem vision *suddenly*—like the rising moon (1093–6). If the blessed rise like the moon, they should also set like the moon, orbiting the divine throne in perpetuity. They should circle God forever, ever approaching, ever increasing in bliss. But how might the narrator apprehend this ‘circle of the blessed,’ this rotation indicated by the analogy between the saints and the moon, yet seemingly incompatible with the cubical city as it appears in his imagination? I would submit that, just as (according to our reflections in Section 2.3) the narrator does not ‘see’ one and the same pearl worn by multiple maidens simultaneously in or with his imagination, but ‘sees’ it with his intellect *through* a dream image, so he perceives the saints’ moonlike rotation not imaginatively but intellectually, not as a picture but as an idea.92

Taking the circularity of the pearl-maiden procession to appear to the narrator’s intellect instead of to his imagination enables us to answer Bishop’s objection to Hillmann. More exactly, we can grant that the procession is not circular insofar as the narrator imagines it—but also maintain that the procession is circular insofar as the narrator (perhaps unconsciously) conceives of it, the idea of it as circular being conveyed by the image of the maidens appearing like the rising moon. And by insisting against Bishop that the pearl-maiden procession *is* circular in a sense, we again stand positioned to acknowledge a possible agreement between the *Pearl* poet’s ‘garland’ and Dante’s.

Let us, then, consider Dante’s ‘garland.’ In *Paradiso* 10, Dante the pilgrim reaches the Sphere of the Sun, heaven of philosophers. The Sphere’s sainted souls—who make up a circle that Dante in fact names a crown (“corona” 65) as well as a garland (“ghirlanda” 92)—are themselves precious

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92 New Jerusalem’s walls are made of “jasper” (1026), which is not a transparent stone, yet the narrator can in some way gaze through them and through the whole city (“Þurȝ weȝe and won my lokyng ȝede; / For sotyle cler noȝt lette no syȝt”’ (1049–50) [“Through wall and city my vision went; / For, subtly clear, it did not hinder sight”]). The city’s paradoxical opacity- *cum*-transparency can be resolved if we understand New Jerusalem as opaque in one manner but transparent in another, namely, opaque as a dream image but transparent insofar as that image conveys ideas clearly.
jewels (“gioie care” 71) in that crown. Further, Dante associates this blessed circle with heavenly bliss, for he says that its component souls sing with a “dolcezza ch’esser no pò nota / se non colà dove gioir s’insempra” (147–8). Thus Dante’s saints, like the Pearl poet’s, appear as gems said to rejoice in heavenly bliss. And like the Pearl poet, Dante compares the blessed to the moon: he aligns the happy circle with that thread of moonlight observed to ring the moon on misty nights.

Like Dante’s saints, also, the Pearl poet’s appear bound by or threaded with light. For as noted in Section 2.1, radiance arising from God’s throne sweeps along New Jerusalem’s streets—the very streets upon which the blissful maidens move. This bright river corresponds to the stream that the narrator follows in the first phase of his dream, a perpetually flowing brook that he immediately associates with joy: “Doun after a strem þat dryȝly halez / I bowed in blys” (125–6). Moreover, Field shows that the river the narrator “follows is that same river which flows from the throne of God” (7, my italics); the two streams are actually one. But in Canto 2, the narrator compares the banks of the river he follows to golden thread (“fyldor fyn” [106]), and he revisits this image in Canto 17, specifying that the roads through which the river runs are golden (1025). Therefore the delightful stream of light along which the pearl-like maidens glide itself recalls a golden thread.

The presence of this shining cord perfects the resemblance between the pearl maidens and strung pearls, and, assuming that the pearl-maiden procession qualifies as circular, it also completes the parallelism between Pearl’s form and its key content. For the stream that flows from God seems,

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93 “sweetness that cannot be known except there where joy is everlasting” (Singleton 117)
94 Dante says, “Thus girt we sometimes see Latona’s daughter when the air is so impregnate that it holds the thread that makes her zone” (Singleton 111) (“così cinger la figlia di Latona / vedem talvolta, quando l’aere è pregno, / sì che ritenga il fil che fa la zona” [67–9]).
95 “Down along a stream that flows continuously / I went in bliss.”
96 Bogdanos overtly likens the river of light to a golden thread, where he says: “While it courses through the streets, one cannot sense any movement in it by focusing on any particular point; it is fixed like a gold-leaf thread” (122).
like the pearl of price the Lamb bestows, to represent heavenly bliss.\textsuperscript{97} And through these distinct but complementary symbols, the poet may imply that bliss both binds and is possessed—that joy conjoins the saints \textit{by being} the property of each. That is, he may reveal it as a common property.

Now if heavenly delight binds the blessed after the fashion of a golden thread linking pearls, then the pearl maidens may be regarded as really, metaphysically united by that common property. In consequence, the pearl-maiden procession will be more than simply a pattern of individual souls. Rather, it, like a crown, will be an integrated thing in a sense (i.e., insofar as the saints are really one in universal bliss). Further, this crown or garland of saved souls will be a \textit{gay} garland indeed, since the saints will stand interwoven like a garland by their very bliss. By contrast, the maiden’s crown can be called a “garlande gay” only more obliquely: not because the crown itself is happy, but because it signifies joy. Accordingly, it seems straightforward, as well as coherent, to see the ‘garland’ of which the narrator speaks in Canto 20 as the procession of saints interwoven in bliss.

We have noted that a symmetry between form and content in \textit{Pearl}—between the linguistic level of the poem as such (the level of its words) and the level of the realities it ostensibly expresses—obtains insofar as the poem’s keyword-linked, pearl-like stanzas and cantos mirror the universal-linked, pearl-like maidens of New Jerusalem (the elect). We have further observed that this close correspondence between form and content, language and reality appears most readily or perfectly in Canto 19, at the culmination of the narrator’s dream. And lastly, we have examined a possible elaboration or expansion of the language-reality parallelism that \textit{Pearl} seems to indicate, namely, the proposed circularity of the pearl-maiden procession, which would answer to the circularity of

\textsuperscript{97} As Field notes, the river flowing from God’s throne in \textit{Pearl} is “the river of the water of life of the Apocalypse, described by the commentaries as the river that ‘bitoknèþ the ioye þat nevere shal faile’” (8). She cites \textit{An English Fourteenth Century Apocalypse Version with a Prose Commentary}, p. 196.
the poem’s concatenated stanzas and cantos. Collectively, these reflections, which of course rely on conclusions drawn in Section 2 of this chapter, attest to a concerted effort on the poet’s part to establish or reveal a close conformity between words and the world. But if the poet goes to great lengths to suggest such an agreement, he must do so for a reason. I propose that the poet gestures toward the definitively realist affirmation of language-reality symmetry via the likeness between *Pearl*’s form and content, as the maiden appears to when she insists that the pearl-of-price token mirrors its significate. In the next section, we shall see why the poet may affirm a realist outlook.

4. Affective Redirection

In Section 2, I suggested that the *Pearl* maiden deploys several paradoxes naturally construed as indicating that heavenly bliss is a real universal. Then, in Section 3, I called attention to the close resemblance between the poem’s form and its key content, namely the blessed as revealed to the narrator, submitting that *Pearl*’s form reiterates the saints’ metaphysical unity or interconnection in heavenly joy. If these reflections hold good, then the narrator’s New Jerusalem revelation may be regarded as a vision of unity insofar as it expresses the blessed’s agreement in a real universal. And at the same time, *Pearl* itself may be considered a vision of unity in a twofold sense: insofar as it ostensibly relates the narrator’s vision of unity to auditors or readers, and also insofar as, via its marked parallelism between form and content, language and reality, it recapitulates that vision on a level (the level of the poem’s stanzas and cantos) directly perceptible by auditors or readers.

The narrator stands in need of a vision of unity, because, prior to dreaming, he feels himself to be deeply divided. As noted in Section 2, his sorrowful will has wandered both from his own reason and from God’s will—presumably because he does not understand why God has seized away his
cherished daughter. (As the maiden says in his dream, the narrator considers Fate or God “a þef” [273].) In this way, his division from the late maiden, or more accurately his way of construing his division from her, leads to his psychological division as well as to his division from God. The narrator makes his feeling of severance from his daughter keenly apparent when, for instance, he states that he and she “in twynne were towen and twayne” by her death (251). And with these words, he also indicates that he “thinks he has understood the fullness of joy in union” during the maiden’s life (Nolan 195). Yet the only ‘union’ with his daughter he has known or recognizes is proximity or compresence, for, when he encounters her in his dream, he expresses his sense of reunion with her solely in terms of renewed compresence (the permanence of which he assumes):

“No haf I fonde hyt [the maiden], I schal ma feste, / And wony with hyt in schyr wod-schawez, / And loue my Lorde… / Þat hatz me broȝt þys blys ner” (283–6). Apparently, the narrator—so conspicuously divided and isolated prior to dreaming—believes that only regained nearness to or re-possession of his lost treasure can heal his division from his daughter and undo his isolation.

Since the narrator sees union (or reunion) with the maiden as reducible to proximity with her, he covets her, regarding her as his own, private possession, a treasure which no one else may obtain without loss and harm to himself. Accordingly, when he deploys the image of the pearl to signify his daughter, he does not use it to depict her qua participant in a real universal—the heavenly joy that constitutes the highest good or summun bonum—but to represent her as a concrete, material,

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98 “a thief”
99 “were separated and rendered two”
100 Similarly, he later tells the maiden, “quen we departed we wern at on” (377) (“when we parted we were at one”).
101 “Now I have found it, I shall rejoice, / And dwell with it in bright woodlands, / And love my Lord… / that has brought me near this bliss.” As David Aers points out, the narrator here “defines final bliss as life with the maiden in lovely groves” (63).
102 Petroff emphasizes the narrator’s self-pitying “isolation” at the beginning of Pearl (190), while, in a similar vein, Aers claims that the narrator’s initial “isolation cuts him off from the past and present communities of the Church” as well as from his daughter (58).
and therefore singular thing.\textsuperscript{103} And as custodian or owner of this precious object, “the narrator is defined as a ‘jeweller,’ aware only of material values” (Spearing, Gawain-Poet 141). His identity as a jeweller, as well as his possessive, materialistic, and objectifying attitude toward the maiden, emerges from the first lines of the poem, in which the narrator portrays his “ pryuy perle” (12):\textsuperscript{104}

\begin{verbatim}
Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye
To clanly clos in golde so clere:
Oute of oryent, I hardly saye,
Ne proud I neuer her precios pere.
So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
So smal, so smo þe her sydez were;
Queresoeuer I jugged gemmez gaye
I sette hyr sengeley in synglure. (1–8)
\end{verbatim}

Like a jeweller judging a gem, the narrator appraises his daughter based on her sensual, material virtues alone: her physical beauty; her comeliness in various attire; the roundness, smallness, and smoothness of her sides. But of course, these qualities, being visible, are particular; if universals exist at all, they are invisible. Thus it comes as no surprise that the narrator—who, as observed in Section 2.3, accepts nothing that he cannot see—concludes to his daughter’s utter singularity (“I sette hyr sengeley in synglure”). Recognizing sensible traits or objects alone, he can apprehend only singulars as such. Notably, he cannot fail to see the maiden as a thoroughly singular good.\textsuperscript{106}

“Whereas the pearl-image is used by the narrator in the context of pride in possession,” however, the maiden, as alleged in Section 2, “uses it as an emblem of supernatural bliss” (Wilson 32). For

\textsuperscript{103} On heavenly joy as the \textit{summum bonum}, see, for example, Nolan’s identification of the two above, in Section 2.1.

\textsuperscript{104} “private [or ‘unique’] pearl.” The phrase ‘privy pearl’ recurs at line twenty-four.

\textsuperscript{105} “Pleasant pearl, which it pleases a prince / To set radiantly in gold so bright: / I assuredly say that, among those of the orient, / I never found her equal in value. / So round, so rich in each array, / So small, so smooth were her sides; / Wherever I judged gay gems, / I set her singly in singularity.”

\textsuperscript{106} Anderson correctly states that the narrator’s pearl metaphor points “to the way in which he thinks of his daughter, objectifying her as something precious which belonged to him in the way that a jeweller owns a jewel. It emphasizes her materiality to him, the fact that he responds more to her apprehensible being than to her inner or spiritual self” (20). But Anderson’s assertion does not go quite far enough. According to the foregoing considerations, the narrator responds \textit{exclusively} to the maiden’s apprehensible being, for he does not accept anything he does not or cannot see.
her, “the pearl which is like the kingdom of heaven is not a private possession but one that is the property of all the righteous… as well as being something personal” (Wilson 32). In other words, the maiden deploys the pearl-image to signify, not a singular object or good available to only one person at once, not a piece of ‘privy’ property, but, as has been argued, a common good available to all saved souls at once as their common property—i.e., the common property of heavenly joy. Accordingly, she tries, throughout the dream, to “convince [the narrator] of the wrongness of his way of looking at things” (Anderson 30). More exactly, she attempts to show him that he errs by accepting, and accordingly loving, only singular goods as such (for instance, herself qua material or sensual object). He invests his love in her, makes her, regarded as wholly singular, sole source of his delight (373), but, by contrast, his daughter’s “delight is in heavenly life” (Wilson 41), that state of bliss the blessed share. To align the narrator’s perspective with her own, omniscient one, then—and so with God or God’s omniscience—the maiden endeavours to impress upon him that the pearl of price, qua tenor or as common joy, “is the proper object of his desire” (Blenkner 67).

If the above considerations are valid, the Pearl maiden visits the dreaming narrator to redirect his affection from singular goods (and chiefly from herself as perceptible and particular) to universal ones (namely, heavenly bliss). Yet in coming principally to love the universal pearl of price, her father need not renounce or reduce his love for the maiden, since, again, she partakes of heavenly bliss and so becomes a pearl of price—an object of value—herself. Rather, he need only love her differently: not in her singularity or as a particular, but in her universality or as participating in a real universal (heavenly joy). That is, he must come to love that which is universal in the maiden above that which is singular. But for the narrator to love the maiden in this manner would just be for him to love her in agreement with the moral outlook espoused by realists such as Wyclif, for
whom, again, right action consists in loving persons for the universal goods they exemplify more than for their singular goods. Accordingly, the maiden’s attempt to redirect her father’s affection from herself *qua* sensual particular to universal beatitude may resonate with a realist moral view.

The maiden’s ongoing effort to indicate that heavenly delight is a common property supremely to be valued would serve to explain why, as Anderson states, the “poem is fundamentally… moving always from concrete to abstract, specific to general” (18). For whereas Canto 1 commences with the narrator’s highly concrete and particularized portrayal of his daughter, the maiden undertakes throughout the dream to undermine his preoccupation with singularity and to orient him, instead, to the abstract and universal. However, her success is imperfect at best. All through his vision, he “clings to her individual identity as his daughter, and so to their singular relationship” (Newman, “Artifice” 17), failing to subordinate her singularity as such to her status as a participant in a real universal until, perhaps, he awakes. Thus he “regards [the maiden] still as his private possession” (Wilson 32), not only when he first encounters her on the bank of the stream, but even by the end of Canto 19, when, upon discerning and zeroing in on his daughter—whom he claims for himself with the possessive pronoun “my” (1147)—he leaps into that river in his eagerness to be near her (“Quen I seȝ me frely, I wolde be þere” [1155]).

At a few points, to be sure, he seems to make progress; for instance, when his daughter reprimands him for faulting God, he responds “with an extravagant assertion to the effect that the maiden’s new happy situation [i.e., her state of bliss]

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107 “When I saw my gracious one, I wanted to be there.” I have suggested that the shining stream represents heavenly bliss; if that is so, then it is interesting to note that the same feature which brings about unity among the saints stands between the saints and the narrator, creating a gap that cannot be bridged by his efforts alone. But analogously, those who share humanity are united by humanity—whereas humanity divides humans from other entities in a manner that cannot be naturally surmounted.
is the foundation of his own happiness” (Anderson 37). Yet this answer is extravagant indeed, for he promptly returns to his materialistic and particularizing perspective, taking heaven to be a physical locale and emphasizing Mary’s “synglerty” in the canto that immediately follows (429).

So even by the end of his dream, the narrator seems to attend to the concrete and particular to the exclusion of the abstract and universal—a focus or outlook which, from a realist point of view, is not only myopic, but also morally fraught. He clearly angers God by latching on to his daughter, in her individuality, at the climax of his vision, for, as the narrator himself remarks upon waking, “Hit payed Hym not þat I so flonc / Ouer meruelous merez” to be next to the maiden (1165–6). Accordingly, his preoccupation with singularity may have moral or even spiritual consequences, preventing him from better perceiving heavenly bliss and becoming more fully caught up in or to that bliss. For again, he does appear to begin—prior to singling out the maiden from “[a]mong her ferez” (1150)—to participate, at least imperfectly or remotely, in heavenly bliss: as has been noted, he tells us he “laȝt a greȝ delyt” (1128) to “loue þe Lombe” (1127) when he perceives the New Jerusalem procession. He here seems to come rather nearer to joining the procession, i.e., to being saved. But once more, he promptly errs morally or spiritually, lapsing from heaven and his heavenly vision, upon seeking one individual part or member of the pearl-maiden procession.

Yet even if the narrator’s “spiritual failings are not fully remedied within the scope of the poem,” not to mention within the scope of the dream, Katherine Terrell speaks for many critics when she

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108 As the narrator puts it, “I am ful fayn þat your astate / Is worþen to worschyp and wele, iwyss; / Of alle my joy þe hyȝe gate, / Hit is in gronde of alle my blysse” (393–6) (“I am quite glad that your condition / has become [one of] honour and happiness, certainly; / The highway of all my joy, / It is in the foundation of all my bliss”).
109 “It pleased Him not that I so rushed / Over marvellous waters.”
110 After waking, the narrator realizes that, had he refrained from possessively pursuing his daughter, he would have “ben dryuen” to “mo of [God’s] mysterys” (1194) (“been driven” to “more of God’s mysteries”).
111 “among her peers”; “conceived a great delight” to “love the Lamb”
asserts that “the end of the poem offers significant hope for his future redemption” (“Rethinking” 445). For Pearl “does offer a glimpse of potential future unity, in the vision of the Lamb of God” (i.e., the New Jerusalem revelation) (Terrell, “Rethinking” 444). And by its last lines, though not before, we find “a prayer that the Dreamer and his fellows… be brought to the same bliss that the pearl enjoys, the joy of being part of God’s household” (Prior 46). According to the approach we have been developing, the narrator, having awakened and started to ‘process’ the contents of his dream, begins to perceive that his New Jerusalem revelation is a vision of unity in something like the sense intended by the maiden, i.e., a vision of the blessed as united in perfect delight. As a result, he now starts to grasp, albeit dimly, that union with the maiden in heavenly bliss may be more than mere compresence. It may involve a robust identity, an agreement in the same bliss, a co-participation in the joy of apprehending God. If this is the case, then Blenkner is right to insist that, by the end of Pearl, the narrator “has progressed from love of the transitory earthly pearl to longing for eternal bliss” (68), “no longer coveting his pearl” or daughter (69), but rather seeking the pearl of price in which he and the maiden may at last converge. At this point, he seems to feel “only a desire to be part of that unity” (Blenkner 68), that oneness of celestial delight—a oneness which, given the omniscience enjoyed by the saints, would be forever perceived by all who attain it. Hence if, prior to Pearl’s ultimate canto, the narrator “had seemed to be locked in a private, self-absorbed struggle, as expressed in the last stanza of the first section, when, in the isolation of the garden, his reason struggled with his will,” he comes finally to “look beyond himself and his daughter” (Anderson 75), beyond particulars and private belongings, to real community in joy.114

112 The narrator prays: “He gef vus to be His homly hyne / And precious perlez vnto His pay” (1211–2) (“May He grant us to be His humble servants / And precious pearls to His pleasure”).

113 Because the blessed would be everlastingly aware of their metaphysical interconnection, they would presumably appreciate that interconnection more fully than viatores can hope to appreciate their interlinkage via real universals.

114 Aers maintains that, “to the poem’s end, the dreamer’s ‘luf-longyng’ shows no sense of relatedness to anyone but the object of his desire—and that… is not the processing Lamb of God” (72, his italics). From such observations, he
In confirmation of the narrator’s apparent affective redirection by the conclusion of *Pearl*—away from love of singualrs only and toward awareness of and preference for real universals—Edward Wilson says: “At the end of the poem [the narrator] no longer regards [the maiden] as something in which he has a selfish proprietary interest and whose loss brings him pain… but as something which he can commit to God” without detriment to himself (32). Indeed, the narrator names God “a frend ful fyin” (1204) when he gives the *Pearl* maiden to Him at the poem’s resolution, which locution, so opposed to his earlier view of Christ as a thief, plausibly implies that he now attends not to his daughter’s particularity, but to her universality—i.e., to that in her which can be shared by both God and himself.¹¹⁵ For once more, both Christ and himself (and also the maiden and all other saints) will enjoy the selfsame heavenly joy, if he should achieve salvation; accordingly, he can give that most valuable part of the maiden—her delight—to God without forgoing it himself.

I am attempting to suggest that, by the end of *Pearl*, the narrator has made some progress toward overcoming his morally or spiritually injurious preoccupation with singularity. After instruction, mostly through his daughter’s paradoxes, and after experiencing his New Jerusalem revelation—and then after awaking and reflecting on his vision—the narrator has come to esteem the maiden less for her singular goods than for her universal goods, and primarily for the heavenly bliss she shares with Christ and her fellow elect. Further, his committing her to God presupposes this shift

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¹¹⁵ “a thoroughly excellent friend.” The narrator explicitly commits the *Pearl* maiden to God when he states, “to God I hit bytyȝte” (1207) (“to God I deliver it”).

draws the broad inference that the narrator at no point abandons his particularizing, “thoroughly individualistic” (73) outlook in favour of a viewpoint that immerses the individual within the Church or the Christian community at large. However, I believe that Aers misses the point. According to the argument advanced in the present chapter, the *Pearl* maiden does not so much mean to promote individual immersion in plurality—the set or aggregate of Christians—as to promote individual participation in universality, i.e., universal heavenly bliss. So though I agree with Aers that the right goal of the narrator’s spiritual journey is community, I think that the community in question is not an aggregate of individuals, but a state of unity among individuals—namely, partial identity, unity in delight as in a real universal.
in perspective and affective appraisal, because he can accept Christ’s possessing his daughter as he now most values her: as a participant in heavenly joy, or, in other words, as that metaphysical part of her that is heavenly joy.\textsuperscript{116} And as a matter of fact, the *Pearl* poet may stress the narrator’s newfound concern with participation, insofar as he refers—in the very same sentence that relates the narrator’s delivering the maiden to God—to Eucharistic participation, the sacrament “of bred and wyn” allowing one to partake of Christ (1209).\textsuperscript{117} The narrator’s interest in “[p]articipating in this sacramental meal” (Terrell, “Rethinking” 446), scarcely anticipated at the beginning of *Pearl* or even in during his dream, may signal his dawning awareness of participation in perfect bliss to which Eucharistic participation will by “Godez grace” in due course lead his soul (63).\textsuperscript{118} Thanks

\textsuperscript{116} Should an Oxford Realist perspective underwrite *Pearl*, it could even be said that the narrator has come primarily to value the maiden insofar as she is herself really the same as (or identical with) heavenly bliss. Cf. footnote 63.

\textsuperscript{117} The maiden may allude to the Eucharist in Canto 11 in a manner that links that sacrament with the “blysse parfyt” (638) forfeited by Adam but, through Christ’s sacrifice, enjoyed anew by the saved. For when she asserts that, at the crucifixion, “Ryche blod ran on rode so roghe, / And wynne water” (646–7) (“Rich blood ran on the rood so rough, / And precious water”), she may use “wynne” punningly, namely to refer to the Eucharistic wine as well as to express the worth of the water flowing from Christ’s wound. This interpretation receives some support from the fact that the maiden immediately proceeds to associate the water from Christ’s wound with the *other* central Christian sacrament, i.e., baptism: “Pé water is baptem, pé sope to telle” (653) (“The water is baptism, truth to tell”). But if she does align heavenly “blysse parfyt” with the Eucharist in this way—a possibility that may be further confirmed by the fact that “wynne,” as a noun, also means “joy” (Andrew and Waldron 362)—then her words in Canto 11 in effectively set the stage for her father, in Canto 20, to affiliate participation in the Eucharist with the perfect bliss enjoyed by the saints.

\textsuperscript{118} Intriguingly, Newman construes the narrator’s invocation of the Eucharist as indicating a turn from individuals to universals (and so also, presumably, as denoting a nascent interest in participation). She explains that “the Dreamer, awaking in his failed attempt to cross the stream, at last resigns his individual loss and individual bliss into the hands of God, resolving henceforth to find solace in the universal. His ‘priuy’ pearl is irretrievably gone, but another pearl, the body of Christ ‘Pat in þe forme of bred and wyn / Pe prest vus schewez vch a daye’ [1209–10], remains available to all so that all—including the Dreamer and the reader—may now become ‘precious perlez vnto His pay’” (“Artifice” 18). I certainly concur with Newman that the narrator’s reference to the Eucharist indicates a turn from individuals to universals. However, the “universal” about which she chiefly speaks is the *Pearl* maiden herself, who, for Newman, is “a concrete universal, a figure not uniquely blessed but representative of all saints” (“Artifice” 17).

Accordingly, Newman reads the narrator’s movement from individuals to universals as a “transition from singular to plural” (“Artifice” 18), from one particular person (the maiden) to many particular persons (the blessed collectively, whom the maiden represents). Her interpretation does not, or does not obviously, have to do with *real* universals; as a “concrete universal” representative of many individuals, the maiden would be a kind of common *sign* rather than a common reality. Terrell similarly takes the *Pearl* narrator’s reference to the Eucharist to gesture toward a fresh focus on participation, where participation amounts to individual membership in a plurality. She says that the narrator “has come,” by the text’s final lines, “to share in the Maiden’s hope of the ‘on dethe’ of Christ and… has moved from his former isolation to full participation in the community of faithful Christians” (“Rethinking” 446). A difficulty faced by both explications is that, contrary to what Newman states and Terrell seems to imply, the narrator does not appear ready by the end of *Pearl* to “relinquish… his Pearl,” i.e., the maiden, in favour of an individuality-effacing plurality of individuals (Newman, “Artifice” 18). He gives no sign of having reduced or renounced his love for the maiden—however much he may have come preeminently to esteem participation (in some form or of some kind). Indeed, this
to his vision of unity, that is, the narrator may now hope to fuse with the maiden and Christ in the sovereign bliss that is the highest human good: the common joy joining the Lamb and His friends like golden-threaded gems. And similarly, Pearl’s auditors and readers may hope to shine within that happy circlet. Taking “the pearl that is the poem” to heart as the pearl-maidens take the pearl of price to heart (Prior 26), they too can orient their love to the universal delight Pearl proclaims.

very consideration seems to underlie Aers’ rejection of interpretations that construe the narrator as having renounced ‘individualism’ by the poem’s conclusion (see footnote 114). It is possible to save Newman’s and Terrell’s intuition regarding the narrator’s newfound concern with participation, without also committing ourselves to his having in some sense renounced individualism, by taking the participation to which he ultimately turns to be participation in a real universal instead of (or instead of primarily) individual submergence in a plurality. For if the narrator comes most highly to love or to value real universals such as universal delight—that is, properties of individuals, and most crucially of the maiden—then his loving these universal properties or goods would appear to entail his continuing to love his daughter, namely inasmuch as she possesses, exhibits, or is even really identical with these universal goods.
CHAPTER THREE

“Bote Oen in Manhede”: Piers Plowman’s Universal Humanity

1. Toward a Realist Reading

Critics positing a nominalist philosophical foundation for Piers Plowman have tended to do so in order to elucidate Langland’s allegorical style, in particular his alleged break with the convention of creating idealized or transcendent personification figures. For example, the literary-nominalist interpretation Lavinia Griffiths develops in Personification in Piers Plowman centrally postulates a difference between a “realist” and a “nominalist” allegory. The realist reinforces the hypostasis of the metaphysician, translates the ideal into something knowable by the imagination, and thus makes it even more “real.” For the nominalist, on the other hand, what is being transformed by metaphor is not a thing but a name, a term which is formal and functional rather than ontological. (45)

And she continues:

One may go on from this to formulate some stylistic expectations. It would seem likely that the “realist” allegory, which attempts to approach a realm of pure ideas, should imitate this rarefaction with a remote and abstract style. The nominalist will make less audacious claims for the truth value of his poetry. He will not try to represent an idea, per se, but rather an individual who bears a name which could apply equally to many other individuals. He will thus not look to a visionary world of forms, but to everyday experience and to the stylistic conventions of naturalism. (45)

But as Griffiths stresses, Langland’s allegorical style rarely seems to point toward a transcendent realm of Platonic Forms. Certainly his (frequently garrulous or querulous) personification figures do not “hover above the action” in the manner, to take Griffiths’ example, of those in Prudentius’ Psychomachia (59).¹ She concludes that Langland, in tune with his intellectual climate, “operates

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¹ Of course, this observation by no means implies that Prudentius did not influence Langland; cf. footnotes 8 and 81.
from a stylistic position that is close to nominalism” (59). And she further claims that supposing Langland’s allegorical style to assume or harmonize with nominalism permits a fresh perspective on personification’s function in *Piers*. Personification becomes a means of examining properties, not in “abstraction or universality,” but as they exhibit “themselves in a world of phenomena and everyday life” (59). It helps the poem’s readers or auditors—not to mention the dreamer-narrator Will, who encounters personification figures directly—to better comprehend the everyday world, complete with its contingencies and moral perplexities, and to better negotiate life in that world.³

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² In *The Poetics of Personification*, James Paxson, like Griffiths (whom he cites approvingly [35]), paints a literary-nominalist picture of *Piers* that centres on Langland’s use of personification. According to Paxson, “personification in *Piers* can be thought of as a direct expression of nominalist principles in practical poetic terms” (*Poetics* 137, his italics). He bases this remarkable conclusion on two arguments. The first closely resembles Griffiths’: Paxson states that, because Langland’s personification figures do not seem to belong to or fit with “a transcendent Platonic realm-of-ideas,” *Piers* “hardly seems to be a sheer dramatization of Realism” (*Poetics* 138). Especially since he elsewhere mentions (and rejects) the idea that personification figures should be taken “as ‘universals’—as ‘complete,’ eternal qualities belonging to a transcendent ontic realm and describable in a Platonic or Thomistic conceptual framework” (*Poetics* 98), it is clear that, despite his nod to Aquinas’ scholastic realism, Paxson understands real universals in a fundamentally Platonic fashion, i.e., as belonging to a “transcendent ontic realm,” irrespective of the “conceptual framework” to which they might belong. The second argument concerns a particular personification figure, *Anima*. Paxson asserts that “*Anima* stands as the ‘signified’ to many signifiers (Memory, Reason, etc.), and in so identifying her/himself, fulfills a textual need for simplification. That is, such reduction of character numbers can be construed as a means of philosophical or ideological economicalness or frugality. This feature of the *Anima* sequence might thus invoke an unavoidable and perhaps crucial intellectual posture in medieval thought: the ‘frugalist’ proclivity of Ockhamist logic. At the height of character multiplication and actantial diversification in the poem, *Anima* appears identifying itself as the truer, more fundamental and s-

³ Janette Coleman’s *Piers Plowman* and the *Moderni* develops a literary-nominalist reading of *Piers* the influence of which rivals or exceeds that of Griffiths’ analysis. Yet because Coleman’s construal of “nominalism” depends on Heiko Oberman’s (Coleman 197), and accordingly denotes a theological instead of a philosophical position (see our Introduction), her reading need not concern us here. In passing, we may note that Coleman’s use of “the moderni” to refer to nominalists—where, for instance, she speaks of “the moderni, otherwise known as nominalists of terminists” (21, her italics)—is objectionable in the context of fourteenth-century thought, for, as Neal Gilbert has shown, the
I agree that Langland is extremely concerned with experiential reality and the challenge of living morally. However, a serious difficulty for accounts like Griffiths’ is that, as observed in Chapter One, late-medieval realists rejected Plato’s world of separated Forms or natures, instead locating universal natures in re. The realists of Langland’s era were no less interested in or attuned to the contingent world than nominalists were, and hence it by no means follows, from the disharmony Griffiths finds between Langland’s allegorical style and that of Prudentius or the twelfth-century poets writing “under the Neo-Platonic influence of the School of Chartres” (42), that nominalism informs Piers. To the contrary, Griffiths’ stylistic evaluations would be saved equally as well on the assumption that Piers presupposes scholastic realism. Accordingly, even if Langland’s use of personification does often deviate from what we might expect of an author intending to represent numinous Forms, it remains possible that a contemporaneous realist outlook underpins the poem.

“equations, ‘antiqui = reales’ and ‘moderni = nominales,’ have a solid foundation in the sources only from the beginning of the fifteenth century…. Before this time… modernus meant simply ‘contemporary’” (85, his italics). Even Gyula Klima, who like Coleman refers to realism as the “via antiqua,” has misgivings about doing so: Klima admits that “this designation is both somewhat anachronistic and simplistic,” while “the term ‘realist’ is less anachronistic since “in late medieval debates the opponents of the nominalists would often identify themselves as ‘realists’” (“Ockham’s Semantics” 139, his italics). William Courtenay, in “Antiqui and Moderni in Late Medieval Thought,” confirms that “via antiqua and via moderna appear in university and scholastic documents for the first time in the early fifteenth century and do not, as was once imagined, go back to competing schools of thought created by the disciples and opponents of William of Ockham” (3, his italics). Courtenay also, unlike Coleman, distinguishes between “nominalism” and “terminism.” He explains that “[t]erminist logic had its origin in the late twelfth century and was essentially a supplement to Aristotle’s logic that addressed the way in which… terms operated in propositions” (“Antiqui and Moderni” 6), and he names Walter Burley as one important example of a realist terminist (“Antiqui and Moderni” 7).

A further weakness of Griffiths’ position is that, as noted in our Introduction, realism rather than nominalism ruled the philosophical climate of Langland’s England. Thus Griffiths’ affiliation of Langland with nominalism—far from aligning him with his Zeitgeist as she intends—sets him in opposition to the intellectual temper of his time. If indeed Langland “is a man of his century and open to its various intellectual currents” (Bloomfield 228), a poet attuned to “his intellectual context” (Cole and Galloway 142), then Piers should resonate, not with nominalism, but with the realism of “academics like the ‘Oxford Realists,’ including John Wyclif” (Cole and Galloway 138–9).

As Fabienne Michelet and Martin Pickavé succinctly state, “one should not confuse empiricism with nominalism”; a concern with experience, induction, or the contingent does not distinguish nominalists from realists (15). Thus it is misleading to speak—as Rodney Delasanta does, e.g.—of a “nominalistic dependence on experience” (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 154). Even if nominalism had triumphed over realism by the late fourteenth century in England, as Delasanta holds, it would still not follow that “the gradual ascendency of the singular over the universal (the Many chasing out the One) contributed to the slow diminution of allegory as the dominant artistic mode and the intro-mission of naturalism as a competing style” (Delasanta, “Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 148, my italics). Section 3 will examine the literary-critical tendency to associate allegory with realism.
In Section 3 of this chapter, I shall suggest that regarding *Piers* as informed by scholastic realism enables a straightforward and plausible interpretation of Langland’s use of personification. First, however, I shall argue that Langland’s handling of humanity or human nature—the property that Christ assumes at the poem’s affective climax—supports the idea that realism underwrites *Piers*. This chapter will thus proceed from content to form, discussing human nature in Section 2 before revisiting personification in Section 3. More precisely, Section 2 will contend that understanding humanity as a real universal can help to unlock three contexts in which it appears: Faith’s ‘proof’ of the Trinity, Piers Plowman’s identification with Christ, and the C-Text grammatical metaphor. Section 3 will then build on Section 2’s foundation. Focussing on the most striking characteristic of Langland’s allegorical style, the broad “range of things personified” in the poem (Griffiths 1), it will propose that, if a realist acceptance of real universals, and by extension of language-reality symmetry, in fact informs *Piers*, then Langland’s wealth of personification figures may help Will to recognize a correspondingly rich range of entities including, but not limited to, real universals. And finally, Section 4 will consider the possible importance of Langland’s personifying common properties to the plot of *Piers*. As shown in Chapter One, medieval realists considered universals not only necessary for objective knowledge, but also vital for comprehension of divine or hidden truths. Accordingly, Will’s quest for salvific “knowyng” (B 1.138), i.e., his search for the “truþ” (B 1.131) that leads one “to heuene / Ther Treþe is in Trinitee” (B 1.132–3), may depend in part upon his apprehending real universals. More exactly, Will may need, in order to attain salvation

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6 Ronald Waldron observes that Langland “stresses the humanity of Christ at his most triumphant moment,” namely when Christ becomes incarnate to overthrow Satan (73).

7 Cf. C 1.137, C 1.136, and C 1.133–4. Because the C Text of *Piers* is normally considered “clearer” although “less poetic than its B counterpart” (Tavormina 127), and because “[p]resumably the major lines of thought in B and C are much the same” (Wells 115–6), I shall refer to the C Text as well as to the more frequently analyzed B Text. All *Piers Plowman* quotations, including italics and brackets, are from George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson’s edition.
by participating in universal humanity purged of sin’s distortions, to heed reason by intellectually redirecting himself—through images like personification figures—from particulars to universals.

2. Universal Humanity

2.1 Faith’s ‘Proof’ of the Trinity

*Piers* contains a discussion of the Trinity that sheds light on the topic of unity in the poem—both the unity of the Trinity’s Persons in the divine nature and, analogously, the unity of all humans in human nature. Immediately upon waking from an inner dream of the triune image of God planted in humans by the Trinity, Will meets Faith, in the person of Abraham, who fosters Will’s faith in the Trinity by helping him to comprehend it.8 In the C Text, when Will concedes that he finds the

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8 Abraham identifies himself as Faith in the B Text: “‘I am feip’, quod pat freke” (16.176). In the C Text, Abraham’s identity with Faith appears chiefly from the fact that such phrases as “quod faith” follow Abraham’s words (18.198). Prudentius similarly aligns Abraham with Faith in the *Psychomachia*: Faith, a character in the allegory proper, opens the text’s Preface embodied as Abraham, “[i]n the faithful patriarch who first showed the way of believing” (Thomson 275) (“SENEX fidelis prima credendi via” [1–2, Thomson’s capitalization]). Prudentius presents Abraham’s hosting God in the form of three guests (Genesis 18)—a scene also recounted in *Piers* by Faith (B 16.225–46 and C 18.240–64)—as betokening, in particular, faith in the Trinity; he portrays this episode as “showing that we must watch in the armour of faithful hearts” (Thomson 277) (“vigilandum in armis pectorum fidelium” [52]) and declares that if we do so God “will enter the humble abode of the pure heart and give it the privilege of entertaining the Trinity” (Thomson 279) (“parvam pudici cordis intrabit casam, / monstrans honorem Trinitatis hospitae” [62–3]). Abraham serves, then, not just to exemplify that which Faith subsequently personifies, namely faith itself and especially faith in the Trinity, but also to introduce and illustrate the topic of the Trinity—that triune unity mysteriously observed by Abraham and constituting the first subject of the allegory proper. In the initial lines of the allegory itself, Prudentius invokes God as the “one God that we worship under the two names; yet not *merely* one, since Thou, O Christ, art God born of the Father” (Thomson 279, his italics) (“unum… Deum colimus de nomine utroque, / non tamen et solum, quia tu Deus ex Patre, Christe” [3–4]). In this way he signals the centrality to his poem of the theme of the divine nature’s unity in its diverse Persons and urges us, like Abraham, to strive to apprehend and cultivate faith in that unity-with-diversity. Langland’s Abraham, or Faith, plays a comparable albeit more fully developed role in *Piers*. Just before meeting Faith, Will beholds the “ymago dei” (C 18.7) as “a full trie tree” (B 16.4) (“a wholly choice tree,” but also “a wholly triune tree”; see Bernard Huppé on Langland’s punning use of “trie” [180]) growing in the heart’s garden (B 16.15) or “cor hominis” (C 18.4). Planted in the human heart by the Triune God (C 18.9), this image of God—otherwise the ‘Tree of Charity’ (B 16.3–4)—is not only supported by three props signifying the three divine Persons (C 18.26), but also itself symbolizes the Trinity (“pe Trinite it mene” [B 16.63]). The Tree of Charity scene thus sets the stage for Faith’s talk of the uncreated Trinity and its created counterpart—human nature, the image of God. And in turn, Faith seeks to help Will entertain and believe in the Trinity by helping him to understand it, proceeding from the image of God to God Himself by likening human nature to the divine nature insofar as each is one thing in diverse particulars.
Trinity unintelligible and so does not accept it (18.196–7), Faith responds by maintaining that the Father, Son, and Spirit stand to the divine nature as Adam, Eve, and Abel stand to human nature:

“That he is thre persons departable y preue hit by mankynde, And o god almyhty, yf alle men ben of Adam. Eue of Adam was and out of hym ydrawe And Abel of hem bothe and alle thre o kynde; And thise thre þat y Carp of, Adam and Eue And abel here issue, aren bot oen in manhede. Matrimonye withoute moylere is nauht moche to preye As þe bible bereth witnesse, A boek of þe olde lawe, That acorsede alle couples þat no kynde forth brouhte: Maledictus homo qui non reliquit semen in Israel. And man withoute a make myhte nat wel of kynde Multiplie ne moreouer withoute a make louye Ne withoute a soware be suche seed; this we seen alle. Now go we to godhede: in god, fader of heuene, Was þe sone in hymselfe, in a simile as Eue was, Wh[om] god wolde oute of þe wey [d]rawe. And as abel of Adam and of his wyf Eue Sprang forth and spak, a spyre of hem tweyne, So oute of þe syre and of þe sone þe seynt spirit of hem bothe Is and ay were [& worþ wiþouten ende].

And as thre persons palpable is puy[r]lich bote o mankynde, The which is man and his make and moilere here issue, So i[n] god [and] godes sone i[s] thre persons, the trinite. In matrimonye aren thre and of o man cam alle thre And to godhede goth thre and o god is all thre. Lo! treys encountre treys,” quod he, “in godhede and in manhede.” (18.214–38)⁹

⁹ “‘That He is three separable Persons, I prove by mankind, / And one God almighty, if all men are from Adam. / Eve was from Adam, and drawn out of him, / And Abel from them both, and all three are one nature; / And these three that I speak of, Adam and Eve / And Abel their issue, are but one in manhood. / Matrimony without offspring is not much to praise / As the Bible bears witness, a book of the Old Law, / That cursed all couples that brought forth no child: / Cursed is the man who has not left his seed in Israel. / And a man without a mate might not well naturally / Multiply, nor moreover love, without a mate; / Nor might there be such seed without a sower—this we all see. / Now let us turn to Godhead: in God, Father of heaven, / Was the Son in Himself, in a simile as Eve was, / Whom it pleased God to draw from the man. / And as Abel from Adam and from his wife Eve / Sprang forth and spoke, a sprout of those two, / So out of the Sire and the Son the Holy Spirit of them both, / Is and ever was and will be without end. / And as three palpable persons are but one mankind purely, / Which is man and his mate and a child, their issue, / So in God and God’s Son are three Persons, the Trinity. / There are three in matrimony, and all three came from one man, / And three go into Godhead, and one God is all three. / Lo! Three-ace meets three-ace;’ said he, ‘in Godhead and in manhood.’” I have rendered “treys encountre treys” as “Three-ace meets three-ace” because, as M. Teresa Tavormina observes, “‘treys’ may be the contracted form of trey-as, ‘three-ace,’ a throw of three and one…. This word, attested in the fourteenth century, would be an excellent linguistic symbol of tri-unity” (126, her italics). And as she also notes, the “whole line looks back to the beginning of the passus, to the multiply
Faith deploys the example of Adam, Eve, and Abel to make two distinct points about the Trinity. The first is peculiar to these persons and rests on Revelation: Faith alleges that Eve’s emergence from Adam resembles the Son’s emergence from the Father and that the Spirit’s procession from the Father and Son together parallels Abel’s procession from both Adam and Eve. He also seems to imply that, just as marriage without children is “nauht moche to preyse,” so the conjunction of the Father and Son would be lacking were it not, per impossibile, productive of the Spirit. Faith’s second and more fundamental point, however—more fundamental since more directly concerned with what Will finds “myrke” (C 18.196) about the Trinity, namely how “o lorde myhte lyue [in] thre” (C 18.197)—does not involve properties accidental to Adam and Eve. Faith states that the divine Persons’ unity in the divine nature (“godhede”) mirrors the unity diverse humans enjoy in human nature (“manhede”). He seeks to illuminate how “o god” can be “all thre” divine Persons, although they are “departable fram opere” (C 18.198), by likening the Persons’ oneness to that of Adam, Eve, and Abel—who, although individually “palpable,” are yet “bote oen in manhede.”

Faith thus attempts to shed light on the divine Persons’ unity in the divine nature by comparing it to the unity of diverse people in human nature. But the divine Persons unite, that is, are identical, just insofar as the divine nature is one and the same nature essential to each Person. Thus, Faith’s “analogic proof” will work best if humanity is similarly one and the same nature essential to each human (Tavormina 123). In other words, his ‘proof’ or reasoning makes sense if human nature is a common nature. For in that case, all people unite, or are identical, in a common essence (human nature) much as all three Persons unite, or are identical, in a common essence (the divine nature).

threefold Tree of Charity [see previous footnote], and ahead, with Faith, to the encounter of godhede and manhede in the Incarnate Redeemer” (126, her italics).
10 “obscure”; “one Lord might live in three”
11 “distinguishable from one another”
Likewise, humanity’s being a common nature would explain why Faith says that Adam, Eve, and Abel are “bote o mankynde”: universal humanity is essential to each, although one thing in itself. Faith could thus be proposing that recognition of real universals can help us to fathom the Trinity inasmuch as the Persons’ identity in divinity resembles the identity obtaining among humans, for instance, in universal humanity. On this realist interpretation, Faith’s analogy perfectly matches the analogy that Wyclif draws between the identity that the three Persons enjoy in their common divinity and the identity that all humans enjoy in their common humanity. However, his ‘proof’

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12 Of course the resemblance would not be complete, but Faith never suggests that it is. Crucially, the Persons would constitute one individual instead of three despite their real distinction. Or as Clergy tells Will, God is “Thre [propre] persones, ac noyt in plurel nombre, / For al is bot oon god and ech is god hymselue” (B 10.245–6) (“three Persons of themselves, but not plural in number, / For all are but one God and each is God Himself”) (cf. C 11.151–2).

13 See Chapter One, footnote 148. In the fifth chapter of his Tractatus de universalibus, Wyclif affirms an especially close “parallel between the divine nature and a specific nature on the supposition that, for example, the species of man had only three supposits” (Kenny 37) (“[c]onvenientia… inter naturam divinam et naturam specificam, verbi gratia, specie hominis habente, exempli gratia, tantum tria supposita” [p. 105]). Langland’s Faith develops the same parallel. It would seem that, for Faith as for Wyclif, “Our human difficulties with universals are closely linked with the mysteries of the Trinity. A proper understanding of the individuation and interdependence of the persons of the Trinity would explain also the mode of existence of all created things” — and, conversely, a firm grasp of universals as related to their individuals would help us to comprehend the Trinity as related to its three Persons (Shepherd 285). Richard Cross explores philosophical and theological accounts of the divine essence as, or as like, a real universal in “Two Models of the Trinity?” Here he explains that, although Eastern and Western accounts alike “accept a sense in which the divine essence is somehow ‘shared’ by the three persons” of the Trinity (107), “the Eastern view does, and the Western view does not, generally accept a sense in which the divine essence is a shared universal” (108, his italics). But if only the “Eastern teaching” openly says “that the divine essence is a shared universal property,” Cross believes “that, despite their explicit claims to the contrary, the Western theologians accept this too” (“Two Models” 116). He notes that “Augustine, for example, wants to deny that the divine essence is a universal… on the grounds that species [i.e., universals] are divisible into their natures in a way that the divine essence is not” (“Two Models” 117), but adds that Augustine’s denial arises “simply from the lack, in his ontology of created substance, of anything like an immanent, singular universal of the sort accepted by the Cappadocians”— although in fact Augustine’s “own solution to the Trinitarian problem… entails accepting something like the Cappadocian claim” (“Two Models” 118). In other words, since Augustine is a Neoplatonist, i.e., a type of Platonist, and since like all Platonists “Neoplatonists are nominalists on the question of in re universals” (see Section 3 of Chapter One), Augustine lacks the resources to account for the relationship between the divine essence and its Persons in the way obtaining, on “a more Aristotelian variety of realism,” between a real universal and its particulars—for after all, if “the available model of universals is nominalist [with respect to in re universals] and Neoplatonist, then the divine essence cannot be a universal” (Cross, “Two Models” 118, his italics). Nonetheless, Augustine does, in effect, wind up conceiving of the divine essence in much the manner of an in re universal (Cross, “Two Models” 118). And as Cross proceeds to point out, at least one later, scholastic realist, i.e., Scotus, “notice[s] that the claim that the numerically singular divine essence is shared by all three persons entails that the divine essence is a universal” (“Two Models” 125). Yet Scotus denies that there are any real universals in actuality; a moderate realist, he maintains that real universals have potential existence only (cf. Section 3 of Chapter One). Thus, Scotus concludes that “the only truly [i.e., actually] universal essence is the divine essence” (Cross, “Two Models” 125). And in fact, “the metaphysical differences between Scotus and the rest of the Western tradition are not great here, although the terminology is” (Cross, “Two Models” 125), since “the established Western view—springing from Augustine—is that the divine essence is a numerically singular property [actually] shared by all three persons” (“Two Models” 126). But this position “is precisely the Eastern view too” (Cross, “Two
also dovetails with the realist stance described in Section 4 of Chapter 1, namely that knowledge of real universals is an invaluable, though inadequate, step toward grasping God’s mystical unity. For like Anselm or Wyclif, Faith implies that one who would know God or would see Him as He is—a quest completed only with the beatific vision, but begun on earth through faith—surmounts disbelief by proceeding intellectually from unity in common natures to unity in the divine nature.

Suppose, however, that there are no real universals; how then can we understand Faith’s ‘proof’? On a nominalist account, Adam, Eve, and Abel have each an individual humanity, but there is no one humanity essential to each and shared by all three. Hence it would follow, from Faith’s claim that the Father, Son, and Spirit stand to the divine nature as Adam, Eve, and Abel stand to human nature, that the Father, Son, and Spirit have each an individual divine nature but do not share one divine nature essential to all three. This conclusion does not explain or illuminate the Trinity, but rather undercuts it. It suggests that the three Persons are three completely distinct divinities, three gods instead of one. Further, it considerably complicates the task of explicating Faith’s assertions that Adam, Eve, and Abel are “alle thre o kynde” and that they are “bote o mankynde.” He might mean merely that all three individuals are human (since each has a particular humanity). Yet then his analogy between Adam, Eve, and Abel and the Father, Son, and Spirit would indicate not that all three Persons are one divinity, but just that all three are divine. Such a reading robs his ‘proof’ of its intended effect. Alternatively, Faith might be thinking of humanity not as a property, but as an aggregate—a whole or set requiring, it appears, at least three parts or members. Thus when he

Models” 126). In brief, whether or not Western theologians are willing to describe the divine essence as a universal, as their Eastern counterparts are, they nevertheless at least grant a close likeness between the divine essence and real universals inasmuch as they consider the divine essence and a given real universal each to be one entity shared by or really common to several instances (in potency if not in actuality), each of which in turn constitutes a unique subject.
asserts that “thre persons palpable is puy[ry]lich bot o mankynde,” he could mean that humanity would be imperfect or incomplete if fewer than three persons existed. But if humanity is only an aggregate, then the unity among particular humans amounts to their making up that whole or set. And it follows from Faith’s analogy that the unity among the divine Persons likewise amounts to their making up a whole or set. So on this construal, Faith reduces the Trinity to a group of gods.

If the above reflections are valid, it would appear that, in the context of Faith’s C-Text discussion of the Trinity, the “manhede” in which Adam, Eve, and Abel merge must be a common nature—and thus that Faith affirms a realist viewpoint. His analogy between humanity and divinity is less streamlined or direct in the B Text, where it is more entangled with talk of wedlock, widowhood, and virginity. Yet Faith still seems to see humanity as a real universal in B, for he states that God

“þere hym likede and [he] louede, in þre persons hym shewed.
And þat it may be so and soo þ[he] shewed: Wedlok and widwehode wip virginite ynempned,
In tokenynge of þe Trinite, was [taken out of a man],
Adam, oure aller fader. Eue was of hymselue,
And þe issue þat þei hadde it was of hem boÞe,
And eÞper is oÞeres ioye in þre sondry persons,
And in heuene and here oon singuler name.
And þus is mankynde and manhede of matrimoyne yspronge
And bitokne þe Trinite and trewe bileue.
Migh[t] is [in] matrimoyne þat multiplieþ þe erþe
And bitokne þrewely, telle if I dorste,
Hym þat first formed al, þe fader of heuene.
The sone, if I dorste seye, resembleþ wel þe widewe:
_Deus meus, Deus meus, vt quid dereliquisti me?_
That is, creatour weex creature to knowe what was boÞe.
As widewe wipouten wedlok was neuere ȝit yseyȝe,
Na moore myȝte god be man but if he moder hadde.
So widewe wipouten wedlok may noȝt wel stande,
Na matrimoyne wipouten Mul[eri]e is noȝt muche to preise:
_Maledictus homo qui non reliquit semen in Israel._
Thus in þre persons is parfitliche [pure] manhede,
That is man and his make and mulliere children;
And is noȝt but gendre of a generacion bifeore iesu crist in heuene:
So is þe fader for þe sone and fre wille of boþe,
*Spiritus procedens a patre & filio &c*,
Which is þe holy goost of alle, and alle is but o god.” (16.201–24)

As in the C Text, Faith likens the interrelations between three of the first people to those between the three divine Persons (though he proceeds, in the B Text alone, to compare each Person to one of the degrees of chastity named earlier in the same passus). Faith states that humanity signifies the Trinity insofar as, much as the Godhead exists in three Persons, all of Whom are “but o god,” “parfitliche [pure] manhede” exists in at least “þre persones,” all of whom are but one species or “gendre.” He thus implies that—just as the Persons are “o” or identical through a shared essence, i.e., the Godhead or divinity—so too all people are one or identical through a shared essence, i.e., “manhede” or humanity. And at the same time, Faith seems to indicate that Adam, Eve, and Abel alike fall under “oon singuler name,” or in other words, a *single* name, which name in context is presumably “human,” in virtue of human nature, the “manhede” that exists “in þre persones” as the divine nature exists in three Persons. Yet as A. V. C. Schmidt’s translations of lines 220 and

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14 “...where He liked and loved, He showed Himself in three Persons. / And that it may be so and truth, manhood shows: / Wedlock and widowhood, named along with virginity, / Signifying the Trinity, were taken out of a man, / Adam, father of us all. Eve was from him, / And the issue that they had was from them both, / And each is the other’s joy in three distinct persons, / And in heaven and here one single name. / And thus is mankind or manhood from matrimony sprung, / And signifies the Trinity and true belief. / Power is in matrimony, that multiplies the earth, / And truly signifies, if I dared tell, / Him that first formed all, the Father of heaven. / The Son, if I dared say, well resembles the widow: / *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* / That is, the Creator became a creature to know what both were. / As a widow without wedlock was never yet seen, / No more might God be man but if He had a mother. / So a widow without wedlock may not properly exist, / And matrimony without offspring is not much to praise: / *Cursed is the man who has not left his seed in Israel*. / Thus perfectly pure manhood is in three persons, / That is, man and his mate and children born of woman, / And is nothing else but a species from an act of generation before Jesus Christ in heaven: / So also is the Father with the Son, and Free Will from both, / *The Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, etc.*, / Which is the Holy Ghost of all, and all are but one God.”

15 Will beholds wedlock, widowhood, and virginity as the fruit of the Tree of Charity in the scene starting at line 20 of Passus 16 in the B Text and from the first lines of Passus 18 in the C Text (see footnote 8). Since all of Charity’s fruits seem to be apples, i.e., fruit of one kind, although they grow at different levels on the Tree (matrimony lowest, virginity highest, and widowhood in between [B 16. 67–72]), Langland may well be suggesting in this scene that the degrees of charity represented by Charity’s fruits differ only in degree, not also in kind or species. This conclusion is confirmed in the C Text when Will asks whether the fruits are “all [of] o kynde” (18.57) and is told, unambiguously, that “Hit is al of o kynde” (18.59). Marriage, widowhood, and virginity thus share the same nature, exactly as Adam, Eve, and Abel and the Father, Son, and Spirit do—although, of course, they differ in perfection in a way unmatched by the Adam, Eve, and Abel or the Father, Son, and Spirit triads. For more on the three degrees of chastity in *Piers*, see Morton Bloomfield’s “*Piers Plowman* and the Three Grades of Chastity” and Tavormina’s “Kindly Similitude.”
222–3a attest, the most plausible way to understand Faith’s assertions is to regard human nature as a real universal. “Thus human nature subsists in its totality in (at least) three persons,” renders Schmidt, “And is nothing else than one species related through one common nature… Such is the relationship accordingly between the three persons of the Trinity” (287). Schmidt’s glosses make it clear that he finds realism to inform Faith’s B-Text analogy no less than its C-Text counterpart.

In the process of comparing human nature and the divine nature, Faith, by focussing precisely on human nature as exemplified by Adam, Eve, and one of their children, inevitably draws attention to Adam and Eve’s fall from grace and the resulting vitiation of human nature in their progeny. 16 And in fact, Faith mentions the origin of humanity and human sin immediately prior to providing his C-Text ‘proof’ when he tells Will that God “man made and wrouhte / Semblable to hymsulue ar eny synne were” (18.210–1). 17 His description of “man” as similar to God depends, of course, on the account of humanity as made in God’s image and likeness in Genesis 1:26, a passage that medieval thinkers, following Augustine, took principally to mean that human nature includes the

16 As Tavormina comments, “Langland does not elaborate his reasons” for Faith’s use of “Adam, Eve, and Abel, not Adam, Eve, and Seth” in his analogy (121). She explores several “possible explanations,” one of which is that “since Abel had no offspring and Adam and Eve no parents, the Adam-Eve-Abel trinity has a self-containment that would be spoiled were Seth the third person” (121). This suggestion is appealing because it tends to reinforce the similarity between the three divine Persons and the three humans in Faith’s ‘proof’: Just as the Father proceeds from no prior Person, the Son proceeds from only one Person, and the Spirit proceeds from two Persons while no Person proceeds from It, so Adam proceeds from no prior human, Eve proceeds from only one human, and Abel proceeds from two humans while no human proceeds from him. Additionally, this proposal could account for Faith’s use of Adam, Eve, and Abel instead of Adam, Eve, and their first child, Cain—although as regards Faith’s preferring Abel to Cain, it is tempting to add that, much as God casts out Cain (as He later casts out the Old Law) and prefers Abel because of his sacrifice (which prefigures that of Christ), so Faith ‘casts out’ Cain, or bypasses the Old Law, in favour of Abel, i.e., Christ (and the New Law) prefigured. Beyond cohering superbly with Faith’s character as a personification of faith, this latter suggestion agrees particularly well with Faith’s pointing to the condition of human nature via his analogy, inasmuch as human nature is true or faithful to God in Adam and Eve (prior to their fall) and in Abel (especially as a prefiguration of Christ), but is not true to God in Cain. Whatever Faith’s reasons for choosing Adam, Eve, and Abel instead of Adam, Eve, and Seth (or Adam, Eve, and Cain) may be, however, it should be noted that his selecting one of Adam and Eve’s offspring other than their first (or even their second) effectively highlights the fact that any three people can serve to convey the main point of his analogy — namely, that the three Persons’ unity in the divine nature importantly parallels diverse humans’ unity in human nature. I would only add that Faith’s bypassing Cain involves, I think, the notion (explored above and in subsequent sections) that faithlessness to God vitiates one’s human nature.

17 “made and wrought man / Similar to Himself before any sin existed.”
three faculties of memory, intellect, and will. Yet Faith adds that sin impedes or distorts human nature’s likeness to God, a point that Wit also, and more elaborately, makes in C-Text Passus 10. According to Wit, humanity is “semblable in soule to god but if synne hit make” (158) because, much as “the sonne sum tyme for cloudes / May nat shyne ne shewe… / So let lecherye and other luther synnes” (159–60). Wit’s simile implies that human nature is not affected, in itself, by sin (any more than the sun is by clouds), but that instead it is obscured (or ‘clouded’) only in relation to sin as to a further or extrinsic factor. And although Wit has sins like lechery in mind, Faith is preeminently concerned with Adam and Eve’s transgression—the first sin to dim God’s likeness.

In the context of original sin, a realist affirmation of real universals could again be important. For medieval Christian realists, Adam and Eve’s children, or those born “by natural descent” (Lahey 178), shared in Adam and Eve’s sin (and its culpability) since common humanity—not of itself, but in or as realized by all of its instances then alive, namely Adam and Eve—lapsed with Adam and Eve. Hence in undertaking to explain original sin, Aquinas, for example, promptly declares

18 Augustine develops his psychological interpretation most thoroughly in Books 9 and 10 of the De Trinitate, where he explains “that the image of God in which man is created resides primarily in the ‘trinitarian’ relationship between memory, understanding, and will” (Carruthers, Search 16). Langland signals his respect for Augustine’s Trinitarian thought, presumably including Augustine’s account of the ‘inner’ memory-intellect-will trinity reflecting the Trinity, when he labels “Austyn” (B 10.459, C 11.285) “The doughtiest doctour and deuino ur of þe trinitee” (B 10.458; cf. C 11.284) (“the doughtiest doctor and expounder of the Trinity”).

19 “similar in soul to God if sin does not interfere.” Of course, the human soul is the human form, i.e. human nature.

20 “the sun sometimes because of clouds / May not shine or show… / So do lechery and other evil sins obstruct” (i.e., obstruct the divine likeness).

21 As Barbara Raw notes, the “imprint of the divine nature” in humanity “was something permanent and inalienable. It could be obscured by sin but never completely destroyed” (150). In itself, then, the divine likeness remains intact. “ex traduce” (Wyclif, Trialogus 220). Those born of “natural descent” from Adam and Eve are those who, unlike Christ, receive common humanity, i.e., the human form, as transmitted from Adam by means of the seminal power.

22 “ex traduce” (Wyclif, Trialogus 220). Those born of “natural descent” from Adam and Eve are those who, unlike Christ, receive common humanity, i.e., the human form, as transmitted from Adam by means of the seminal power.

23 Odo of Tournai (1060–1113), who like later realists held that “nominalism threatened to undermine the ‘orthodox’ teaching” not only “on the nature of the soul and its origins,” but correlativelly on “original sin and its transmission” (Resnick 7), helped to lay the philosophical foundations for subsequent realist theories of original sin. In De peccato originali, he asserts that “in Adam’s soul and in Eve’s soul, which personally sinned, the whole nature of the human soul is infected with sin. That nature is a common substance and specific to each” (Spade, “History” 63) (“In anima Adam ergo et in anima Evae, quae personaliter pecceverunt, infecta est peccato tota natura humanae animae; quae communis substantia est, est specialis utriusque” [col. 1081–2]). Yet although, according to Odo, it cannot be denied that “the species sinned” (Spade, “History” 63) (“speciem pecasse” [col. 1082]), he adds, “But we do not say that the
that “all men born of Adam may be considered as one man, inasmuch as they have one common nature, which they receive from their first parents” (952). Because all people unite in humanity with Adam and Eve, an injury to Adam and Eve’s humanity is an injury to everyone’s humanity, or as Aquinas goes on to clarify, through the first humans’ sin their human nature lost the state of equilibrium (original justice) that was proper to it, so that Adam, in transmitting human nature to his offspring, transmitted a nature lacking equilibrium, a nature deprived of original justice. Yet though original sin befalls common humanity, a real universal, Aquinas insists that it does so just insofar as one “receives his nature from his first parent” (952). Human nature is not impaired in itself or in the abstract, but only in Adam, Eve, and those who receive it from them as affected by original sin—i.e., as deprived of its true and pristine condition, the state of original justice proper to humanity. If Piers presupposes a realist picture of this sort, Wit and Faith may be saying that

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24 “omnes homines qui nascuntur ex Adam possunt considerari ut unus homo, inquantum convenit in natura, quam a primo parente accipiant” (ST I–II q. 81 a. 1).
25 “Original justice… was a gift of grace, conferred by God on all human nature in our first parent. This gift the first man lost by his first sin. Wherefore as that original justice together with the nature was to have been transmitted to his posterity, so also was its disorder” (953) (“Justitia originalis… erat quodam donum gratiae toti hominum naturae divinitus collatum in primo parente, quod quidem primus homo amisset primum peccatum. Unde sicut illa originalis justitia traducet fuisse in posteros simul cum natura, ita etiam inordinatio opposita” [ST I–II q. 81 a. 2]).
26 “recipit naturam a primo parente” (ST I–II q. 81 a. 1)
27 The extreme realists of late fourteenth-century England substantially concurred with moderate realists including Aquinas on the core questions about original sin. Wyclif, for example, maintains that “anyone following by natural
original sin distorts human nature, the likeness of God, but only insofar as that nature is received from Adam and Eve. It afflicts universal humanity not as it is in itself, but as concretely realized.

By calling attention to humanity *qua* real universal and linking it with Adam, Eve, their children, and sin, Faith would be reminding Will that, although his human nature still resembles the divine nature insofar as each is one entity shared by multiple persons or Persons, the humanity Will has received from Adam and Eve is imperfectly “semblable” to God. More precisely, original sin has disordered the memory-intellect-will trinity, disturbing the will’s subordination to the intellect or reason.\(^\text{28}\) This result of original sin is of the utmost importance for a character who, beyond being a particular person, personifies the will. Will proceeds irrationally, for, as he tells Holy Church,
he lacks “kynde knowyng” of truth (B 1.138, C 1.137). In the absence of intellectual guidance or knowledge of truth, Will wanders from Truth or strays volitionally from God. Uncorrected, he must finally forfeit salvation since, as Holy Church insists, truth alone will save his soul. Faith, however, offers Will “kynde knowyng” of truth—even of the truth about Truth—by appealing to common “mankynde.” And so doing, he promotes Will’s faith or helps him to be truer to Truth. In Faith’s ‘proof,’ universal humanity, which for realists fell with Adam and Eve to the detriment of their descendants, becomes a step toward cognitive and volitional realignment with the divine.

2.2 Piers Plowman’s Identification with Christ

Shortly after Faith’s analogy between human nature and the divine nature, Will, in two visions of Christ, encounters human nature and the divine nature together. In the first revelation, he beholds “Oon semblable to þe Samaritan and somdeel to Piers þe Plow[man]” (B 18.10), two characters Will has already met. He asks Faith about the identity of this person come to “Iuste in Ierusalem” (B 18.19), and Faith replies that Will in fact sees Christ arrayed “in Piers armes, / In his helm and in his haubergeon, humana natura” (B 18.22–3). Faith then adds that Jesus wears human nature to hide His identity: “That crist be noȝt [y]knowe here for consummatus deus / In Piers paltok þis

29 "‘Truth,’” Samuel Overstreet points out, appears “throughout the poem as a name for God, as well as for a certain quality of human character” (“Langland’s Elusive Plowman” 301). But according to William Rogers, Langland also uses “truth” in the sense of “propositional truth,” and in that way associates it with knowledge or coming to know—a salvific or even deifying matter, given that “Jesus explicitly connects being God-like with receiving propositional truth” (95). Holy Church overtly identifies Truth with God when she names Truth the “fader of fayth and formor of alle” (C 1.14; cf. B 1.14) (“father of faith and creator of all”).

30 See footnote 46.

31 Because as Mary Carruthers observes the “word kynde means ‘nature,’” it would seem that “to understand kyndely would be to understand a thing in its essential being, its ‘quiddity’” (Search 82, her italics). Hence Faith offers Will “kynde knowyng” of God insofar as he helps Will to understand God’s trinitarian essence—although, of course, the divine essence is not quidditative. And since Faith does so on the basis of humanity, he could even be said to ground “kynde knowyng” of God’s nature in “kynde knowyng” of human nature.

32 “One similar to the Samaritan, and somewhat to Piers the Plowman” (cf. C 20.8)

33 “joust in Jerusalem” (cf. C 20.18); “in Piers’ arms, / In his helm and in his mail, human nature” (cf. C 20.21–2)
prikerie shal ryde” (B 18.24–5). Christ thus appears to Will entirely as human nature, and, if He resembles the Samaritan and Piers, He can do so only in virtue of the humana natura He puts on.

In his second revelation, Will dreams that “Piers þe Plowman was peynted al blody / And com in wiþ a cros before þe comune peple, / And riʒt lik in alle [lymes] to oure lord Ies[u]” (B 19.6–8). Whereas Will had before seen Christ and found Him similar to Piers, he now beholds Piers, so he says, and finds him similar to Christ. And upon asking Conscience whether he is seeing Christ or Piers, Will receives the same answer that Faith had provided: Will perceives “Piers armes, / Hise colours and his cote Armure; ac he þat comeþ so blody / Is crist wiþ his cros” (B 19.12–4). Will again sees just “Piers armes,” i.e., human nature, and detects a likeness between Piers and Christ.

Will’s seeing Jesus thus amounts to his perceiving human nature. But what human nature does he discern? Since Faith and Conscience name the humanity that Will sees “Piers armes,” that nature must in some sense be Piers’. Can it, then, be Piers’ particular human nature? It would seem that it cannot—for had Christ assumed Piers’ particular nature, Christ would completely be Piers. But Conscience denies this when he identifies the “blody” person not with Piers, but with Christ. The human nature Will sees could only be Christ’s nature, i.e., the particular humanity that Christ, for realists as well as for nominalists, assumes at the Incarnation. For if Will sees human nature but

34 “So that Christ may not be known here as perfect God, / This horseman will ride in Piers the Plowman’s plate-armour” (cf. C 20.23–4)
35 “Piers the Plowman was painted all bloody / And came in with a cross before the common people, / And was, in all his limbs, much like our lord Jesus” (cf. C 21.6–8)
36 “Piers’ arms, / His colours and his coat armor; but He that comes so bloody / Is Christ with His cross” (C 21.12–4)
37 As Richard Cross observes, medieval thinkers “tended to see Christ’s human nature as an individual in the genus of substance” (Metaphysics 6), i.e., as a particular human nature instead of common human nature, because Christ’s “assumption of common human nature would result in the Word’s being every human being” (Metaphysics 16, his italics). He adds, however, that most “accepted some version of realism on the question of universals” (Metaphysics 11) and so also claimed that Christ participates in or “exemplifies the universal human nature” (Metaphysics 5, his italics). Even Wyclif holds that Christ assumes an individual humanity categorically inferior to common humanity,
does not see Christ’s particular nature, then, contrary to Faith’s and Conscience’s claims, he does not see, in particular, Christ. But at the same time, if Will perceives Christ’s particular nature and only Christ’s particular nature, then it would seem that he does not, again contrary to Faith and to Conscience, detect anything that could be said to belong to Piers upon beholding *humana natura*.

At this point, let us suppose that nominalism underpins *Piers*. In that case, Will, in seeing human nature, must observe a human nature altogether particular. And since he sees Christ, that singular nature can only be Christ’s. In perceiving human nature, then, Will indeed sees nothing of Piers’. Of course, Piers has his own singular humanity; both Christ and Piers are human. They may even be importantly similar people, and perhaps the likeness between Christ’s humanity and Piers’ can account for Will’s finding a resemblance between Christ and Piers. Nonetheless, it remains false, strictly speaking—and it seems at best misleading—to say, as Faith and Conscience do, that Will sees anything of Piers’ in perceiving human nature. The “armes” Christ wears are altogether His.

These reflections do not imply that taking *Piers* to presuppose nominalism precludes all coherent interpretations of Will’s visions of Christ. Some readings may be compatible with either a realist or a nominalist view. (Perhaps, for instance, Faith and Conscience describe Christ’s humanity as Piers’ just because the nature Christ assumes is, like Piers’ nature, human.) Yet be that as it may, taking nominalism to underpin *Piers* also does not yield any obvious insights into Will’s visions. By contrast, taking realism to underpin the poem enables a straightforward and plausible reading.

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i.e., the human species: Christ “in his humanity… is inferior to his species. And thus, considered as a supposit of the human species, he has a lower degree of perfection” (Kenny 94) (“secundum humanitatem est species sua inferior. Et sic, inquantum suppositum / speciei humanae, est ipsa imperfectior” [*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 10 p. 214]).
If *Piers* presupposes realism, then Will, in seeing Christ’s individual human nature, sees a nature that, in fact, is also Piers’ nature. Of course, Christ’s humanity and Piers’ humanity differ insofar as they are singular: Insofar as human nature is *this* nature (Christ’s), it is not *that* nature (Piers’). Of itself, however, human nature is indifferent to *this* or to *that*—i.e., is a common nature or real universal. A literary realist may thus say that, in beholding Christ’s particular human nature, Will sees a nature common of itself. And *qua* common nature, humanity is Piers’ as much as Christ’s. In this fashion Piers, or his armour, becomes “a figure of Christ’s universal humanity” (Newman, *God and the Goddesses* 34).

Since the senses perceive singulars, Will’s bodily eyes could only detect Christ’s singular nature. Yet over the course of the poem, Will has been learning to be more like Piers, and accordingly to “parceyue… moore depper” (B 15.199). In his dream visions, with his bodily eyes shut and his mind’s eye open, Will may well, by this point in *Piers*, be beginning to penetrate through images to underlying truths. In other words, he may be coming to obtain “kynde knowyng” of truth, for he may be starting to see through dream sensations and to apprehend common natures or kinds. In this way, Will may, in perceiving Christ, discern His identity in universal humanity with Piers. Moreover, Will’s so doing could account for his finding a resemblance between Christ and Piers. According to M. Teresa Tavormina, “Langland sees likeness and analogy as signs of deeper, and at times even ontological, relationships”; more precisely, he thinks that “likeness between things represents a near or complete sharing, perhaps… an identity, of their natures” (124). The likeness

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38 “perceive… more deeply.”
39 For Margaret Goldsmith, “Will’s dreams are a window on reality, a reality which exists whether perceived or not” (2). I add that Will has begun, by his visions of Christ, to peer through this window to real, though invisible, natures.
40 Mary Davlin may connect “kynde knowyng” with common natures when she states that Will, who finally acquires “treathe, the object of kynde knowyng” (“Kynde” 19, her italics), does so on the basis of the “human nature” that he “shares” with Christ (“Kynde” 18). More broadly, Davlin sees “kynde knowyng” as “knowledge by connaturality,” knowledge rooted in, for instance, the human nature that all people “share” with Christ (“Kynde” 14).
between Christ and Piers, then, could be grounded on their sharing universal human nature—i.e., on the identity between Christ’s and Piers’ singular natures qua instances of one common nature. For if realism underwrites 

_Piers_, then Christ and Piers, both being human, unite in human nature, and Will, seeing Christ’s human nature, might glimpse the real identity between Piers and Christ.

In fact, Christ and Piers do seem to be, not only similar, but somehow identical. _Anima_ identifies Piers with Christ, and may imply that both are identical with St Peter, when he refers to “Piers þe Plowman, _Petrus id est christus_” (B 15.212). Here it seems clear that, as Walter Skeat said long ago, “Piers is Christ” (xxviii). Or at the least, it appears that Piers “is identified in some way with Christ” (Overstreet, “Langland’s Elusive Plowman” 304). Yet as Barbara Raw remarks, although _Anima_ “seems to identify Piers completely with Christ” (148), nonetheless “Piers is distinct from Christ” (167). Piers possesses properties Christ lacks, such as being married and having children, so presumably they cannot be the very same individual. Nevertheless, taking _Anima_’s “equation between Piers and Christ” seriously does indeed seem to require granting _some_ sort of identity—some relation more robust than mere resemblance—between Piers and Christ (Kirk 163). Piers is one person and Christ is another, yet they also, in a way, converge as “Piers–Christ” (Salter 101).

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41 “Piers the Plowman, Peter, i.e., Christ.” Cf. 1 Cor. 10:4 (“petra autem erat Christus”). Carruthers argues that Piers is “identified with Peter, with Christ” (Search 169–70), and also with the Samaritan (Search 136). It must be noted, however, that “Piers” is a standard form of “Peter” in Langland’s English (Goldsmith 31). Accordingly, it is possible that in _Anima_’s statement “Petrus” and “Piers” denote the same person (i.e., Piers) instead of both St Peter and Piers.

42 Piers’ wife and children appear in B-Text Passus 6, C-Text Passus 8. As observed in Section 3 of Chapter 1, items that are really identical must, according to medieval nominalists (as well as realists like Walter Burley), have all and only the same properties. So if items have different properties, they cannot be really identical. And for nominalists, it follows (since all entities are individual) that items having different properties must be really distinct individuals. Nominalists would therefore have to admit that Piers and Christ are two individuals instead of one. Some realists, by contrast, held that items with different properties must be _formally_ distinct, but could be really identical. Proponents of this sort of view could in principle claim that Piers and Christ are formally distinct yet comprise the _selfsame_ res. But although it might be thought that Piers and Christ fuse into the same individual substance in Will’s twin visions of Christ, overall Piers and Christ seem to be different individual substances, namely two people with separate lives. As suggested above, a literary realist would do better to regard them as two individuals joined in common humanity.
Perhaps Piers and Christ are identical (though not completely identical) in some mystical manner transcending comprehension.\footnote{Davlin proposes that Anima identifies Piers with Christ because “Piers is the whole Christ, the mystical Christ, the mystical body” (“Petrus” 281). If Piers is the mystical body of Christ, then he is the Church. But the Church appears as a distinct figure in Passus 1 and 2, and, in the poem’s final two passus (where the Church reappears as a building), Piers seems to be St Peter, i.e., a particular member of the Church. Instead of seeing Piers as Christ’s whole mystical body, Davlin would do better to regard him as one limb of that body, and, in fact, her argument does at times appear to present Piers in this way. If we take Davlin to be claiming that Piers is “in some way one in Christ” just insofar as he somehow participates in Christ’s mystical body (Davlin, “Petrus” 282, her italics), however, then we must either rest content to deem this participation wholly mysterious and suprarational, or else perhaps align it, as Davlin herself may when she appeals to the “notion that man was united to God or shared his nature with God at the incarnation” in order to illuminate participation in Christ’s mystical body (“Petrus” 285), with participation in the nature that Christ assumed at the Incarnation, i.e., human nature. If Davlin construes the shared human nature of which she speaks as a common nature, common humanity, her reading may bleed into my own, for in that case Piers is Christ—participates in Christ’s mystical body—by participating in common humanity (or more precisely, as I shall suggest momentarily, by participating in true common humanity, common humanity undistorted by sin). But if instead of taking Jesus and Piers to share in universal humanity Davlin believes, nominalistically, that Christ and Piers each count as human just insofar as each has a particular humanity, then Christ and Piers cannot be said to really unite in human nature, i.e., to be really identical in humanity. In that case, participation in Christ’s mystical body remains altogether suprarational.} However, the strong impression that Piers and Christ converge in \textit{humana natura}—rather than in divinity or some similarly numinous value—in Will’s revelations seems to speak against this proposal. Or maybe, when Anima equates Piers with Christ, he means that Piers signifies Christ.\footnote{According to Edward Vasta, Anima’s equation between Piers and Christ “prompt[s] us to view Piers as a symbol of Christ” (\textit{Spiritual Basis} 138). Yet as Vasta himself admits, Anima’s words, if read in this way, “be-cloud the role of Piers” (\textit{Spiritual Basis} 138).} But Piers’ importance in \textit{Piers} centrally involves the fact that, if he is somehow divine, he is not divine in his own right, as presumably he would be were he but Christ under a figure. Rather, he is only human in himself, “a simple English plowman of the fourteenth century” (Schmidt, “Inner Dreams” 29), and if he acquires divinity, he does so via his conformity with Truth. Upon his very first appearance, Piers declares himself Truth’s “folwer al þis [fourty] wynter” (B 5.42).\footnote{“follower all these forty winters” (cf. C 7.189) \footnote{In answer to Will’s overriding request—“tell me this very thing, / How I may save my soul” (B 1.83–4; cf. C 1.81) (“tell me this very thing, / How I may save my soul”)—Holy Church says, “When alle tresors arn tried treu þe is þe beste” (B 1.85; cf. C 1.81). She therefore connects truth with salvation, going on to speak of the person having this best of “tresors” as “a god.” As Hugh White remarks, the “trewe man [i]s, according to Holy Church ‘a god by the gospel’” (106, his italics). And if true people gain salvation, false people stand condemned: Holy Church avows that all who} Hence it would seem that Piers represents not so much Christ as the fulfillment of Holy Church’s assertion that the true person alone attains salvation or “is a god by þe gospel” (B 1.90, C 1.86).\footnote{In answer to Will’s overriding request—“tell me this very thing, / How I may save my soul” (B 1.83–4; cf. C 1.81) (“tell me this very thing, / How I may save my soul”)—Holy Church says, “When alle tresors arn tried treu þe is þe beste” (B 1.85; cf. C 1.81). She therefore connects truth with salvation, going on to speak of the person having this best of “tresors” as “a god.” As Hugh White remarks, the “trewe man [i]s, according to Holy Church ‘a god by the gospel’” (106, his italics). And if true people gain salvation, false people stand condemned: Holy Church avows that all who}
Piers’ alignment with Truth explains why Will, perceiving human nature in his visions of Christ, sees Piers (and the Samaritan) but does not discern all people—in realist terms, all participants in human nature as in a real universal. Because of original and subsequent sins, many have declined from full-fledged humanity; God’s likeness in them has become deformed or obscured. Langland acknowledges that sinners are still human, tied by humanity to Christ, for Christ himself calls all people his “brethren of blood” (B 18.376). Yet Langland also implies that sinners are somehow less than truly human, for they are less connected to Christ than those in whom humanity is pure: sinners are just Christ’s “[halue]brethren” (B 18.393), whereas those purged of sin are His “hole brethren” (B 18.377). Indeed, Anima’s comparison between sinners and “lussheburwes,” which look like sterling coins but are “false” (Huppé 173), indicates that sinful people are equally false:

“As in lussheburwes is a lufer alay, and yet lokep he lik a sterlyng;
The merk of þat maynee is good ac þe metal is feble;
And so it farþ by som folk now; þei han a fair speche,
Crowne and cristendom, þe kynges mark of heuene,
Ac þe metal, þat is mannnes soul, [myd] synne is foule alayed.
Boþe lettred and lewed beþ alayed now wiþ synne
That no lif louþ oþer, ne oure lord as it semeþ.” (B 15.349–55)

adhere to Wrong, “Fader of falsheede” (B 1.64, C 1.60) (“Father of falsehood”), “wende… shulle / After hir deþ day and dwelle with þat sherewe” (B 1.128–9, cf. C 130–1) (“will go / After their death-day and dwell with that rogue”).

47 “blood brothers” (cf. C 20.418)
48 “half brothers” (cf. C 20.437); “whole brothers” (cf. C 20.419). More exactly, Christ says that his ‘whole brothers’ are those who are both human and baptized: “alle þat be þe myne hole breþeren, in blood and in baptisme, / Shul noþt be damned” (B 18.377–8; cf. C 20.419–20) (“all that are my whole brothers, in blood and in baptism, / Shall not be damned”). Baptism, along with the subsequent sacraments, is the normal channel, since the Incarnation, of that grace which purges sin and restores the true image of God. However, Langland also suggests, through the example of Trajan (B-Text Passus 11, C-Text Passus 12), that some lack baptism (and the subsequent sacraments) and yet receive grace and salvation. Ultimately, the key to ‘whole brotherhood’ with Christ would appear to be not so much baptism as the elimination of sin—the cleansing of the divine image, i.e., human nature—that baptism effects. Thus as a “trewe” (B 11.141, C 12.76) although unbaptized person, Trajan would be among Christ’s ‘whole brothers’—as his own remark that “trúþe” breaks down “helle yates” (B 11.164) (“hell gates”), coupled with his explicit claim to be among Jesus’ redeemed “breþeren þoruþ hym ybouþt” (B 11.208; cf. C 12.116) (“brothers through Him bought”) appears to imply.

49 “As a base alloy is in Luxembourg coins, and yet such a coin looks like a sterling— / The imprint on that money is good, but the metal is feeble— / So it now fares with some folk: They have fair speech, / Tonsure and Christianity, the mark of heaven’s king, / But the metal, that is, man’s soul, is foully alloyed with sin. / Both the educated and the uneducated are now alloyed with sin / So that no one living loves another or, as it seems, our Lord.” Cf. C 17.73–85.
One enfeebled by sin receives the divine imprint—God’s image, human nature—in a manner that invalidates and devalues it, yielding a false human, a person deficient in truth. However, Will has met true humans before his visions of Christ, including Piers and the Samaritan. In such people, God’s unobscured image shines out. Hence if “Piers and the Samaritan have merged in the figure of Christ” in Will’s visions, they seem to have joined in true humanity (Davlin, “Kynde” 7). That Christ embodies true or uncorrupted humanity no Christian would deny, and that Piers embodies undistorted human nature appears from Robert Frank, Jr.’s observation that, by Langland’s time, “the plowman had become a symbol of… uncorrupted human nature” (14). Furthermore, St Peter appears to share undistorted human nature with Christ and Piers, since by B-Text Passus 19 or C-Text Passus 21, “Piers is quite unmistakably St Peter” (Goldsmith 14, her italics). Thus Margaret Goldsmith accounts for Piers’ identity with Christ and St Peter by appealing to a “‘Piers-quality’ shared by the ploughman, Christ, and St Peter” (15), a “quality” she later identifies as “the imago dei, the ‘true nature’ of human beings” (26, her italics). Piers, Christ, St Peter, and the Samaritan, then, coincide just insofar as they share true human nature—i.e., human nature undimmed by sin.

That Piers shares human nature with Christ (and St Peter and the Samaritan) makes perfect sense if realism underwrites Piers, for then Piers and Christ unite in universal human nature. Their real

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50 Of course, Will has encountered true people other than Christ, Piers, and the Samaritan, e.g., Trajan (see footnote 48). His discerning Piers and the Samaritan in particular in his visions of Christ probably flows from their exhibiting truth especially clearly. Christ Himself perfectly embodies the likeness of God, as Tavormina notes when she names Him “the perfect image of God in man” (124), and Piers’ forty-year adherence to Truth has already been mentioned. For his part, the Samaritan, having compared the Trinity to “a torch or a tapur” (B 17.206; cf. C 19.172) (“a torch or a taper”), turns to the inner trinity or human nature when he says that “euery manere good [man may] be likned / To a torche or a tapur to reuerence þe Trinite” (B 17.281–2; cf. C 19.262–3) (“every manner of good man may be likened / To a torch or a taper with which to revere the Trinity”). On his account, “the good man is a true image of the Trinity,” i.e., exhibits true human nature, “in virtue of th[e] flame of love” blazing inside him (White 105). Love, charity, or kindness restores one to true humanity as, conversely, “unkynenedesse prevents man being a true image of the Trinity” and so “distorts man’s nature” (White 106, italics). But the Samaritan himself so overflows with charity that—especially given Langland’s placement of him alongside Faith and Hope—he seems almost to personify love, the third theological virtue. As Goldsmith succinctly asserts, “the Samaritan represents caritas in the poem” (76, her italics), e.g., when he hurries to save the man whom Faith and Hope have deserted (B 17.55–126, C 19.53–95). Thus like Christ and Piers, the Samaritan, by his own account, exhibits the true image of God—that is, true human nature.
identity in common humanity grounds *Anima*’s equation between Piers and Christ, clarifies how Faith and Conscience can refer to human nature as “Piers armes” even while Christ wears it, and explains why Will, perceiving the humanity that shines out unobstructed in Christ, Piers, and the Samaritan, detects a resemblance between them. However, Piers and Christ (and St Peter and the Samaritan) do not share human nature in this straightforward way if nominalism underpins *Piers*. In that case, Piers and Christ are not really identical in humanity or any other property, and Piers’ identification with Christ, in Will’s revelations and in *Anima*’s equation, remains to be unlocked.

### 2.3 The Grammatical Metaphor

Langland elaborates the theme of identity with Christ in human nature in the C-Text grammatical metaphor, a section of Passus 3 that encompasses more than seventy lines and constitutes “one of the most important additions to the poem made in C” (Economou 227). Conscience advances this analogy to elucidate how one should, and how one should not, relate oneself to God. To that end, he compares entities—namely, people and God—to terms in two different but overlapping ways. Conscience first likens people to adjectives and God to a noun or substantive.\(^{51}\) An adjective that

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\(^{51}\) It may be objected that Conscience’s comparison of people to adjectives and God to a substantive does not sit well with the symmetry between language and reality endorsed by realists, for, if language indeed maps straightforwardly onto reality, then adjectives should not map onto substances, e.g., people, but only onto accidents, while substantives should map onto substances such as people—but not onto God, Who transcends the category of substance. However, fourteenth-century realists like Wyclif are perfectly willing to grant that there is a sense in which God is a substance, in fact the one true substance, and that correlatively there is a sense in which categorical substances including people do stand to God as accidents to a substance. In *De materia et forma*, Wyclif tells us that “the whole created universe, though it is an accident to God, is nevertheless divided into substance and accident. A substance is a thing of the first category because, though it cannot exist except by God, still among the created genera of beings substance is prior to the others. Thus the name of substance is analogically and famously applied, and they [i.e., the other created genera] are ordered to it [i.e., to substance]. So it implies a contradiction that a substance exists unless it is in God, and I take it that the name of accident or accidental form is appropriated analogically to its [i.e., to substance’s] nine accidents” (“tota universitas creata, licet sit accidens deo, tamen ipsa dividitur in substanciam et accidentis. Substancia est res prime cathegorie, quod, licet non possit esse nisi a deo, tamen inter genera encium creata est prius substantia alis. Ideo anoloyce et famose sortitur nomen substancie, et [alia] sibi ordinata sunt. Sic claudit contradiccionem substanciam esse, nisi deo insit; et illius novem accidentibus suppono anoloyce appropriari nomen accidentis vel forme accidentalis” [c. 1 p.169, brackets Dziewicki’s]). Most properly speaking, then, “substance” names God alone because all creatures exist by God or in God, i.e., in dependence on God; “substance” is applied to creatures, namely
correctly modifies or finds “vnite” with a noun aligns with it “in case, in gendre and in noumbre” (395). Or as Conscience, exploiting the fact that “gendre” means “both grammatical gender and the genus and species of the human race, mankind” (Overstreet, “Grammaticus” 256), also says, an adjective in unity with a noun agrees with it “in kynde, in case and in nombre” (337). Just so, he avows, a person in unity with God agrees with Him (as Christ) in nature, case, and in number.

Second, Conscience compares people to relative pronouns and God to their antecedent. Precisely as a relative pronoun in direct relation to its antecedent accords with it “in kynde and in case and in cours of nombre” (347), a person in “relacion rect” to God again matches Him in nature, case, and number. And by means this twofold analogy between beings and words, Conscience makes the point that, in order to stand correctly or directly to God, one must, in some crucial way, agree

creatures of Aristotle’s first category, only by analogy—that is, insofar as creatures of the other nine categories exist in dependence on creatures of the first category. And correlative, most properly speaking “accident” applies to any creature, regardless of its category, though by analogy “accident” is also applied specifically to creatures of the other nine categories. Hence when realists like Wyclif allege that substance-terms stand isomorphically to substances, i.e., to created substances, they mean that substance-terms stand isomorphically to creatures that, while not substances in the most proper sense of the word, are nonetheless, by way of analogy, to be understood as substances. Conscience’s comparison no more invalidates or undermines this realist claim than Wyclif’s above reflections do. Instead, it tends to draw attention to the notion that reality is extremely language-like, as realists believe, and it links the fundamental conformity between language and reality to morality and salvation or transcendence—much as some realists do also. It should also be noted that Conscience’s metaphor belongs to a poetic tradition of likening relations among entities to relations among terms, a tradition inextricably associated with Meter 1 of Alan of Lille’s realist poem De planctu naturae. There, Alan appeals to grammar to develop his claim that, through sin (and in particular, through sodomy), a man lapses from his true nature: “A man turned woman blackens the fair name of his sex. The witchcraft of Venus turns him into a hermaphrodite. He is subject and predicate: one and the same term is given a double application. Man here extends too far the laws of grammar. Becoming a barbarian in grammar, he disclaims the manhood given him by nature” (Sheridan 68) (“Femina uir factus sexus denigrat honorem, / Ars magice Veneris hermafroditat eum. / Predicat et subicit, fit duplex terminus idem. / Gramatice leges ampliat ille nimis. / Se negat esse uirum Nature, factus in arte / Barbarus” [p. 806]). Whereas Alan uses grammar figuratively to portray his concern specifically with sodomy and a man’s resulting loss of harmony with his, or human, nature, Langland does so to illustrate not only the loss of human nature in its true state through sin in general, but also the possibility of humanity’s restoration to truth. 52 “in kind, in case, and in due course in number”; “direct relation.” Overstreet emphasizes that “Langland compares two… ‘accords’ to one another: the agreement between noun and adjective, and that between relative pronoun and antecedent” (“Grammaticus” 254), where the “basis of the comparison is that each requires the threefold agreement of gender, case, and number” (“Grammaticus” 255). I render “in cours” as “in due course” in accordance with MED, n. “cours,” 8. It is not immediately clear why Conscience states that a relative pronoun agrees with its antecedent, or a person in direct relation to God agrees with Christ, in kind, in case, and in due course in number. However, on the reading offered below, one’s agreeing in number with Christ amounts to her ultimately enjoying life everlasting with Christ as a member of His mystical body—i.e., to her attaining salvation. So by “in cours,” Conscience may, at least on one level, be suggesting that a person directly related to God attains salvation in the fullness of time.
with Christ ‘grammatically,’ namely in “gendre,” case, and number. Only in this manner can one evade “moral solecism” (Alford 746) and affix oneself to her or “his sustantif sauacioun” (353).53

Conscience’s metaphor depends on extramental reality’s so paralleling language that linguistic or grammatical relationships, i.e., how adjectives stand to nouns and relative pronouns stand to their antecedents, faithfully reproduce ontological or moral relationships, i.e., how individuals stand or should stand to God. Jill Mann calls attention to the close correspondence between language and reality implied by the grammatical metaphor when she states that “for Langland… language… is the means by which we can grasp the different dimensions of reality, its complex structures and relationships” (81). Along the same lines, Andrew Cole and Andrew Galloway maintain that “for Langland grammar means something more philosophically than writing or speaking well…. It is the structure of all. It is what comprises the ‘book of the world’” (158). Again, John Alford holds that Langland “stresses the verbal nature of creation” in the grammatical analogy and accepts an “identification of language and nature” (754), and he adds that the metaphor displays Langland’s “deep interest in language and… faith in its validity as a guide to truth” (755–6). Priscilla Martin takes the metaphor to indicate that “correct grammar is an analogue of the divine ordering of the cosmos” (173). And Anne Middleton sees so thoroughgoing a parallelism between language and reality in the grammatical metaphor (and elsewhere in the poem) that she associates “the sense in which Langland invokes… grammar” with the principles of the speculative grammarians and the “realist metaphysics” that their “grammatical paradigm” implies (185). She thus finds a harmony between Conscience’s analogy and the belief that “[g]rammar reflects the structure of mind, but,
more important, the relation of concepts in the human mind corresponds to relationships of real
entities” (185). However, Middleton does not pursue the possibility of realism’s informing Piers.

Insofar as the grammatical metaphor presumes a close correspondence (or even identity) between
words or concepts and things in the world, it does seem to resonate with the realist affirmation of
extensive language-reality symmetry (or even identity). Conscience only reinforces the sense that
there exists a symmetry between words and the world when, at the end of the analogy, he depicts
the Incarnation as a simultaneously semantic and metaphysical operation. Conscience asserts that
God so “coueuted oure kynde and be kald in oure name” that He assumed human nature (402).

And so, he continues, God “is man and mankynde in maner of [a] sustantyf, / As hic & hec homo
askyng an adiectyf” (404–5). Just as an adjective may modify a singular noun phrase, e.g., “this
man,” so, through the Incarnation, “man and mankynde” comes to modify the Word (Christ), and
conversely the Word comes to stand to “man and mankynde” as a noun modified by an adjective.
Hence to have both “oure kynde” and “oure name,” God—who is both the ultimate substance or
“the ground of al” (354) and the ultimate substantive—at once assumed “man and mankynde” as
a quasi-accident and received “man and mankynde” as a quasi-adjective. Moreover, this sacred

54 “coveted our kind and to be called by our name”
55 “is, in the manner of a substantive, man and mankind / Like such-and-such a person requiring an adjective”
56 “By His manhood,” Margaret Amassian and James Sadowsky note, “Christ sanctifies accidental humanity, makes
it truly adhere in… the substantial and permanent” (474). It is curious, though, that Conscience asserts that the Word
qua substance assumes “man and mankynde.” What explains the apparent redundancy of this expression? If realism
informs Piers, it may be proposed that “man” denotes the singular humanity that Christ assumes, while “mankynde”
designates the universal humanity in which He comes to participate by assuming His particular humanity. Langland
appears normally to use “man” to designate an indefinite singular person, i.e., some one person or other, for example
in the phrase “man and his make” in Faith’s ‘proof’ of the Trinity (B 16.221, C 18.234). However, I have previously
suggested that at least sometimes “mankynde,” again for instance in Faith’s ‘proof,’ denotes universal human nature.
“sustantyf” remains one Word regardless of its “thre trewe termisonus, trinitas unus deus” (406), and subsists forever in nominative case: “Nominatiuo, pater & filius & spiritus sanctus” (406a). That Conscience concludes the grammatical metaphor by mentioning God’s case underscores the key role of case throughout his analogy. Case agreement first comes into focus when Conscience discusses “relacion rect and indirect” between relative pronouns and their antecedents (342). In this context, according to Margaret Amassian and James Sadowsky, his “strategy is to emphasize that lack of case agreement between antecedent and relative [pronoun] is the earmark of indirect relationship and… to remind us how essential it is to direct relationship” (472). Conscience says that “þe most partie of peple puyr indirect semeth / For they wilnen and wolden as best were for hemsulue” (383–4). Those who “lakketh case” or case agreement with God (387), and so relate indirectly to Him, are “inparfit peple” (386), people who prioritize their private, particular goods over “þe comune” good (385). Moreover, to ‘lack case’ is to lack reason. Conscience states that these same imperfect individuals “repreueth alle resoun” (386). It is to wander from Truth into folly and falsehood—for, if “man is relatif rect yf he be rihte trewe” (355), then one is indirectly related to God if she or he is not “rihte trewe,” i.e., if she or he is false. Such remarks show that “case,” in application to people, refers to truth, to that fidelity or adherence to Truth required for direct relation to God. Divine Truth abides in the only direct or non-oblique Latin case, namely, 

57 “three true terminations, Trinity one God: / In the nominative, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” As Economou observes, “Langland puns here, nominatiuo (‘in the nominative case’) on the opening In nomine of the formula, ‘In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit’” (207, his italics).
58 “direct relation and indirect relation”
59 “the majority of people seem purely indirect / For they will and want what is best for themselves”
60 “lack case”; “imperfect people”; “the common”
61 “all reason reproves”
62 “a man is directly related if he is right true”
63 Hence Amassian and Sadowsky identify “case agreement” between a person and Christ with “faithfulness” to God (469) and point out that “being trewe… is a necessary part of man’s fides in God” (462, their italics).
*nominatiuo*. Likewise, a person agrees in “case” with Truth, and becomes directly related to God, when she or he reflects the directness of “the divine antecedent” by exhibiting truth (Alford 757).

Conscience explains that anyone in direct relation to God attains “good ende and gret ioye aftur” (340): a good death and heavenly bliss. Direct relation thus “takes on spiritual significance” and “becomes a condition of salvation” (Alford 756). By contrast, indirect relation leads to perdition. Conscience makes it clear that to lack “the case agreem [357]nt of treuthe,” and hence to be indirectly related to God, is “to be morally false” (Amassian and Sadowsky 470, their italics)—a state little consonant with Truth and heaven. Accordingly, “we are to scorn the ‘indirect thyng’” (Amassian and Sadowsky 468). In the overall context of the grammatical metaphor and its strong suggestion of symmetry between words and things, Conscience’s approval of direct relation and disapproval of indirect relation in language and reality may again cohere with the realist philosophical vision of direct, one-to-one correlation between signs and their significates. As we saw in Chapter One, realists took language to reflect or stand directly to reality, holding that language’s standing more refractively or indirectly to reality jeopardized objective knowledge. Conscience does not discuss signification as such, but, since he both closely aligns language with reality and censures indirect relations, it seems unlikely that he would endorse indirect relations between language and reality.

Of course, *Piers* need not presume realism in order for Conscience to present a certain symmetry between terms and things and to scorn (at least some) indirect relations. Nothing would prevent a nominalist from comparing beings to signs as Conscience does, for after all language’s mirroring reality to the extent Conscience affirms does not entail, but merely sits well with, the realist view
that language as a whole parallels the extramental world. However, other considerations, such as
Conscience’s depiction of direct and indirect relations, also imply that realism informs the poem.

In line 363, Conscience dubs indirect relation an “Indirect thyng.” His calling it a “thyng” seems
to imply that indirect relation is an entity of some sort, a being in its own right, and by extension
that relations are things. But as observed in Section 2.2 of Chapter One, medieval realists granted
that relations are things—extramental beings—whereas nominalists denied real relations. Scotus,
for instance, “calls relations ‘things’” (Henninger 69). More precisely, he “accords these relative
things… an existence of their own really distinct from that of their foundations” (Henninger 69).
For Scotus, “the relation is posterior to its foundation,” i.e., is a relative thing that inheres in that
foundation (Henninger 82). By contrast, Ockham believes that “there are no relative things in the
category of relation really inhering in absolute things” as their foundations (Henninger 128). For
him, categorical relations are not real, though relative, beings; in other words, they are not really
things. They are “only intentions or concepts in the soul” (Henninger 127). Yet Conscience calls
direct relation “hardy relacoun” (353), a phrase which seems to suggest that this relation, at least,
is something solid or robust—something more than a mere intention or concept. Conscience also
describes direct relation as “Folowyng and fyndynge out þe fundement” (345) and claims that it
undertakes “styfliche stande forth to strenghe þe fundement” (346).\footnote{Following and finding out its foundation”; “to stand forth stoutly to strengthen its foundation”} If direct relation follows its
foundation, then it is posterior to that foundation. But since it is able to ‘stand’ on its foundation,
direct relation seems to be a thing which inheres in or is supported by that foundation. Moreover,
“styfliche” again implies that direct relation is a robust thing of itself, and its ability to strengthen
or fortify its foundation suggests that direct relation has a positive, extramental being beyond that
of its foundation. Such reflections tend to confirm D. Vance Smith’s view that, in its treatment of relations, Conscience’s analogy has “affinities with late medieval philosophical realism” (157).

If a realist acceptance of real relations indeed underpins the grammatical metaphor, then a realist affirmation of real universals plausibly does too. More exactly, Conscience may regard humanity as a real universal when he provides his fullest account of what standing in direct relation to God involves. According to Conscience, one directly related to God:

“acordeth with crist in kynde, verbum caro factum est; / In case, credere in ecclesia, in holy kyrke to bileue; / In nombre, Rotye and arysye and remissioun to haue, / Of oure sory synnes to be assoiled and yclansed / And lyue as oure crede vs kenneth with crist withouten ende. / This is relacioun rect, ryht [as] adiectyf and sustantyf / Acordeth in alle kyndes with his antecedent.” (356–62)

One agrees with Christ in kind or nature insofar as, since the Incarnation, she or he shares human nature with Christ. As Alford notes, it “is easy to see how our shared humanity with Christ might be referred to as an agreement in ‘kynde’” (757). However, merely sharing humanity with Christ

65 Smith attempts to set the grammatical metaphor within the framework of “the intensive scholastic debate over the nature of relation,” and, in so doing, he opens to door to interesting lines of potential inquiry (159). But although he is right to observe that medieval realists admitted the real category of relation while nominalists regarded relation as “simply a mental category” (169), the philosophical background he offers is very general and his presentation of it is in places misleading. For example, Smith speaks of “realist epistemology” (158), but Michelet and Pickavé point out that, since realists and nominalists alike insist “that all human cognition starts with the sensory cognition of singular objects,” phrases like “realist epistemology” and “nominalist epistemology” miss the mark (12–3). Smith also states: “[l]ike the nominalists, the realists define relation as something ‘ad aliud’; unlike them, they argue that this ‘aliud’ is something real and that the whole relation depends on the reality of this referent” (169). Here he seems confused, for nominalists do not deny that relations refer to real or extramental things, but that relations are themselves real things. Furthermore, to the extent that Smith proceeds from sources or historical context to literary-critical interpretation, he turns quickly from medieval thinkers to twentieth-century Marxists such as Louis Althusser, holding that Langland’s “realist epistemology recapitulates a materialist epistemology” and accordingly considering the grammatical analogy with respect to “the origins of epistemological and labor relations” (158). In this way, he does not so much explicate the grammatical metaphor in terms of philosophical realism as associate what he calls the “real object,” by which he may mean a real entity (such as a relation) countenanced by realists but rejected by nominalists, with “raw material” in “the Marxist concept of production” — going on to examine Conscience’s analogy in light of Marxist theory (157).

66 “acords with Christ in nature, the Word became flesh; / In case, believe in the Church, to believe in Holy Church; / In number, to rot, arise, and have remission, / To be absolved and cleansed of our sorry sins / And live, as our creed teaches us, with Christ without end. / This is right relation, just as adjective and substantive / Accord, in all kinds, with their antecedents.”
does not suffice to place one in direct relation to God, for those indirectly related to Him are also human. One who would be directly related to God must be not just human, but a true human, i.e., “faithful or trewe” to Truth and His Church (Amassian and Sadowsky 468, their italics). Only in the “case” of truth or fidelity does one stand to God as a relative pronoun in direct relation stands to its antecedent, and only in that “case,” too, does one correctly modify the Word as an adjective modifies a noun. What, though, could it mean for one to agree in “nombre” with Christ? Christ is one individual, as is each other person; in a trivial sense, Christ and each other individual may be said to accord in number insofar as each is singular (rather than plural). But Conscience must mean something else by numerical agreement with Christ. He clearly associates it with salvation, life everlasting with Christ. However, we have seen that only true people arrive at heavenly bliss. It would seem that those directly related to God accord with Christ not only in humanity, but also in truth—and that, since they agree with Christ in truth, they agree with Him also in number, i.e., gain salvation. By contrast, those indirectly related to God unite with Christ in humanity, but not in truth or in number. Somehow, all and only true or faithful people agree in number with Christ.

Because numerical accordance with Christ amounts to salvation, Amassian and Sadowsky equate numerical agreement with Him with participation in Christ’s mystical body, that is, Holy Church. They explain that true or faithful people unite with Christ by coming to “inhere in the substantive Mystical Body of Christ, represented by ‘holy kirk’” (473). If Christ’s mystical body is one thing instead of many, then all who inhere in that body merge into one being insofar as they participate in Holy Church. But to identify numerical accordance with Christ with inherence in His mystical body is not yet to say enough. What exactly is Holy Church, such that participation in the Church

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67 Overstreet points out that Langland not only uses “case” in its grammatical sense, but also “has in mind the more general meaning of case as ‘condition, state’” (Overstreet, “Grammaticus” 259–60, his italics).
renders many people numerically one with Christ (and presumably with each other)? If we take a nominalist position like Ockham’s to underpin *Piers*, Holy Church is an aggregate of individuals who are in no way really one and the same. Ockham “conceives of the Church simply as the sum of individual believers,” not as “a mystical or organic body that exists in its own right” (Flanagin 355). On his account, in other words, the “Church is real persons, not a real person. It is the sum of individuals, not a reality in its own right” (Flanagin 356). Thus in his *Opus nonaginta dierum*, Ockham insists that Holy Church is “not one true person but many true persons,” namely “many faithful professing one faith” (Kilcullen and Scott 151). And indeed, it is difficult to see how, if all entities are singular as nominalists claim, the Church could be anything but a group or totality of singular things. Yet if Holy Church is an aggregate—many beings rather than one—then those who participate in the Church do not really unite or become identical in a shared reality. Instead, they remain altogether numerically distinct. Accordingly, the faithful could be called “one” only in the weak or collective way in which many members of a team or squad might be called “one.”

Taking *Piers* to presuppose nominalism does not reduce Conscience’s words to incoherence. For example, one could interpret sharing humanity with Christ merely as a matter of being, like Him, human, and one could construe numerical agreement with Christ as co-membership in one group. But if supposing that nominalism informs the poem does not undercut the grammatical metaphor, it does not offer any clear insights into it either. On the other hand, taking realism to inform *Piers* positions us to unlock the grammatical metaphor in a straightforward way. More exactly, we may say that one shares humanity with Christ by fusing with Him in humanity as in a common nature.

68 “non est una vera persona, sed est plures verae personae;” “multi fideles unam fidem profitentes” (c. 6 p. 372). In this context, Sheila Delany correctly remarks that, for Ockham, the “so-called ‘representative’ body—the Church, a Church council, a city, a kingdom—remains nothing more than a group of individuals, a collective noun, a plurality which no legal fiction can reduce to true unity” (“Substructure and Superstructure” 262).
However, converging with Christ in universal humanity does not set one in direct or full-blooded relation to Him, but only renders one a ‘half brother’ of Christ. To be directly related to God, one of Christ’s ‘whole brothers,’ one must also hold faithfully to Truth, allowing universal humanity, unhindered by sin, to shine out undistorted. And in this “case,” one ipso facto belongs to Christ’s mystical body and agrees with Him in number. For on a realist account like Wyclif’s, the Church is constituted by a common form—namely, universal humanity in its true state of fidelity to God.

In *De Ecclesia*, Wyclif maintains that through the Incarnation Christ became the head of a single, mystical body, the universal Church comprised of all and only the elect. The Church is no mere aggregate, but one real body or person, “una persona” whose members, all the elect from all eras, stand united, like the limbs of a corporeal body, by partaking of the selfsame form (c. 1 pp. 2–3). Wyclif stresses that all participants in Christ’s mystical body converge as numerically one being through their common form, and he identifies that form with Christ’s human nature. But though he insists that Christ’s humanity is the form of the Church, Wyclif does not have in mind Christ’s *singular* human nature. Christ’s particular humanity vivifies His particular physical body, but the Church is universal—meaning, for Wyclif, that its form is universal. More precisely, he contends that the form of Christ’s mystical body is universal humanity, i.e., universal humanity purified by

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69 Wyclif asserts that “corpus Christi misticum” (c. 1 p. 3, Loserth’s italics) is comprised “omnium predestinatorum” (c. 1 p. 2). He later identifies Christ’s mystical body with the “universal Church,” the “Ecclesia… universalis que est totum corpus Christi misticum” (c. 1 p. 22).

70 Replying to the question of whether Christ by His humanity is the form of the Church (“utrum Christus secundum humanitatem sit forma ecclesie” (c. 6 p.132), Wyclif answers affirmatively, for His humanity stands intrinsically (as Christ’s divinity stands extrinsically) to the Church as a substantial form to the body that it quickens and moves: “Et videtur mihi quod sic; nam sicut forma vivificat et movet corpus ad actus suos… sic se habet nedum divinitas Christi extrinsecus sed humanitas eius intrinsecus ad sanctam matrem ecclesiam” (c. 6 pp. 132–3). And after he responds to this question, Wyclif goes on immediately to give an affirmative answer to another question, i.e., whether Christ and any member of the Church constitute numerically one and the same Church (“utrum Christus et quodlibet membrum ecclesie sit eadem ecclesia in numero” [c. 6 p. 133]). He clearly affirms that Christ and the other parts of the Church do constitute numerically one entity (Christ’s mystical body or Christ Himself in a mystical way), for instance when he declares that each member of the Church is Christ (“quodlibet membrum eius sit Christus” (c. 6 p. 134).
Christ the second Adam of the first Adam’s (and subsequent) sin. Accordingly, Wyclif speaks of the Church as a generation or universal person spiritually begotten by Christ and intermixed with the generation or universal person naturally begotten by the first Adam.\(^{71}\) And he clarifies that all members of Holy Church, Christ’s spiritual issue, differ from those outside of the Church insofar as the former are faithful and the latter are not: each elect individual, Wyclif says, exhibits “faith formed by the charity of predestination, by which the Church or a member of it is constituted.”\(^{72}\) One shares in the universal person begotten by Christ through one’s predestined fidelity to Truth.

If a realist view similar to Wyclif’s underwrites the grammatical metaphor, then those who agree ‘grammatically’ with Christ both in kind and in “case” also unite in number with Him as one real though mystical person. Since on Wyclif’s account the Church is a single integrated entity rather

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\(^{71}\) Wyclif says that the whole human race is a person (“totum genus humanum sit homo quidam” (c. 3 p. 60), namely a universal person arising from the first Adam. “Sed preter illum hominem naturalem,” he states, “oportet secundum Adam generare spiritualiter unam generationem priori permixtam que est sancta mater ecclesiae” (c. 3 p. 60). A view of the elect as a generation distinct from, though intermixed with, the generation arising from Adam seems to inform Piers, too, where Trajan asserts that “mennes sones men calle[d] vs / Of Adames issue and Eue ay til god man deide; / And after his resurexcion Redemptor was his name, / And we hise breþereþ ym þy þym ybouȝt” (B 11.205–8; cf. C 12.113–6) (“men called us ‘sons of men’ / Of Adam and Eve’s issue forever, until the God-man died; / And after His Resurrection, ‘Redeemer’ was His name, / And we were His brothers, bought through Him”). All people were Adam and Eve’s children before Christ’s redeeming Resurrection, after which those remaining clean of “synne” (B 11.204, C 12.112) became Christ’s siblings and “children” (B 11.209; cf. C 12.117). Wyclif likewise holds that the members of the generation or universal person spiritually generated by Christ are free of sin, at least ultimately. He states that, among the members of Holy Church (that is, the elect), some receive Christ’s purifying influence or “medicine” and cleave to it, continuing in the sinless condition that distinguishes that spiritual generation from its natural counterpart (“sanantur virtut e meriti Christi nec unquam post incident in mortale” [c. 3 p. 60]), while others receive it, slip again into sin, and ultimately return to Holy Church (“receperunt medicinam et post lapsum ad sanctam matrem ecclesiam reveruntur” [c. 3 p. 60]). Such remarks emphasize that the humanity informing the Church is itself undimmed by sin.

\(^{72}\) “fidem formatam caritate predestinacionis secundum quam constituitur ecclesia vel eius membrum” (c. 5 p. 110). I think we may paraphrase Wyclif’s view thus: faith or truth to God stands to common humanity as a quasi-difference to a quasi-genus, dividing the Church or the body of the elect, i.e., Christ’s mystical body, from that quasi-genus and rendering it a quasi-species. Both the quasi-genus humanity (naturally begotten by Adam) and the quasi-species true or faithful humanity (spiritually begotten by Christ) may be regarded as universal people. Wyclif also admits that, in parallel to the quasi-species divided by truth or faith from the quasi-genus humanity, there is a quasi-species divided by falsity or sin from the quasi-genus humanity—namely, the “body of the devil” (“corpus diaboli” [c. 5 p. 103]). In particular, he considers “final disobedience or pride” to be that quasi-difference which, added to common humanity, constitutes the body of the devil (“finalis inobediencia vel superbia” [c. 5 p. 103]). Truth or faith may accordingly be regarded as constituting the Church much as a difference may be regarded as constituting a species, but the ‘specific form’ of the Church, as it were, itself constituted of truth or faith plus common humanity, is true universal humanity. For this reason, true or undistorted common humanity may perhaps most properly be said to constitute Holy Church.
than a collection of altogether separate people, supposing that realism informs *Piers* allows us to take Conscience’s talk of numerical agreement with Christ quite seriously. But if the text in fact presupposes realism, then the grammatical metaphor does not only elaborate Holy Church’s prior claim that truth assimilates one to Christ. It also hints that language leads to truth or reality in a forthright fashion—that one can, and should, proceed directly from terms and grammar to beings and the ultimate Being, “god, the ground of al” (354). *Animia* underlines the value of language or grammar as a guide to truth when, later in the poem, he parallels “god, the ground of al” with an expression of his own, “Grammer, þe ground of al” (B 15.372; cf. C 17.108). However, Will still lacks “case” or truth when he encounters the grammatical analogy, and accordingly he prioritizes his private, particular goods over common goods. To achieve “kynde knowyng” of truth and gain

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73 To emphasize, a realist like Wyclif would claim that multiple individuals unified by their co-participation in a real universal are numerically one in a broad sense, although not in the strict sense by which an individual is numerically one. Wyclif discusses this topic in Chapter Nine of his *Tractatus de universalibus*, stating that sometimes “number” is taken to mean the number that is counted, that is, the multiplicity of things counted. And in this sense it has many degrees. Sometimes it is taken in a very broad sense for any kinds of things, whether really distinct or only mentally distinct” (Kenny 78) (“numero… accipitur pro numero numerato, hoc est pro multitudine rerum numeratarum. Et sic habet quotlibet gradus: Ut quandoque largissime sumitur pro quibuscumque rebus vel re vel ratione distinctis” [p. 184]), but “[s]ometimes it is taken more strictly for a manifold of perceptible substances discontinuous from each other” (Kenny 78) (“Quandoque strictius sumitur pro multitudine substantiarum sensibilium quae discontinuavantur ab invicem”) [p. 184]. “Number,” then, applies only to perceptible individuals in the strictest sense of the term, but in a broader sense “number” applies to beings of all sorts, including real universals. Thus when Wyclif says that “many inferiors taken in gross are one superior” (Kenny 84) (“multa inferiorea sunt grossim unum superius” [*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 9 p. 195]), he means that, for instance, many individual people taken together are one humanity: one in number, where “number” is broadly construed to indicate that they constitute a single species instead of many. So too, when in Chapter Eight of the same work he states that “each and all particular men are this specific man, and in that sense one and the same man. And that is called specific unity and identity, and contrasted with numeric unity or identity” [Kenny 62]) (“omnes et singuli homines particulars sunt iste homo specificus et sic unus et idem homo. Et tunc vocatur ‘unitas ac identitas specifica’, non autem singulorum illorum hominum ‘unitas vel identitas numerais’” [pp. 153–4]), he means “numeric” only in the strict sense of “number.” Because any unity is a kind of oneness, and so in some sense numerical, even the specific unity enjoyed by diverse humans must be a oneness in number broadly construed. Indeed even Aristotle, according to Edward Halper, recognized the necessity of a broad or “weak sense of numeric unity” applicable to real universals (123). Halper tells us that “Aristotle’s ascription of numeric unity to the universal”—like that of later, scholastic realists including Wyclif—follows from the “idea… that the universal is a single entity and thus a numeric unity”: “The universal is one in number in the sense that it can be distinguished from other universals. For example, we speak of horse as one species and human being as another, and we count both together as two” (Halper 123). Accordingly, “in a way the universal is numerically one” for Aristotle (Halper 123), as well as for at least some medieval Aristotelians.

74 As noted in Section 2.2, Holy Church describes the true person as “a god by þe gospel.” She proceeds to state that the true person is “lyk [to] oure lord” (B 1.87; cf. C 1.91), making it clear that salvation or divinization is a matter of coming to resemble—and maybe even of coming to be, in regards to truth as well as in regards to humanity—Christ.
salvation, Will must redirect his intellect and will from the singular to the common by relying on signs. He must trust dream images, including personification figures or the concepts they convey, to stand directly or non-obliquely to their significates if he is ultimately to stand likewise to God.

3. Personification

Section 2 offered reasons for construing humanity in *Piers* as a real universal. Moreover, Section 2.3 considered the possibility that a realist affirmation of real relations underwrites the poem and called attention to a language-reality parallelism in the C-Text grammatical metaphor. Separately and together, these reflections suggest that *Piers* presupposes a realist view. But if it does, then it is reasonable to suppose that realism informs not only the poem’s content, but also its form—and especially the formal “element which predominates in *Piers,*” i.e., “personification” (Griffiths 3).

In fact, personification allegory has long been linked to realism, as Mann observes when she says that it “has often been noted” that “this type of allegory quasi-inevitably involves a ‘Platonizing’ tendency” (67). Carolynn Van Dyke gives us a particularly forceful statement of personification allegory’s ostensible connection to realism, and specifically to Platonic realism. In *The Fiction of Truth,* Van Dyke defines allegory as “the narrative of universals” (63) or “narrative whose agents are universals” (40). She explains that “pure allegory,” i.e., personification allegory, “is modeled on philosophical realism” insofar as figures named by abstract or common terms, personification characters such as Goodness or Idleness, are real parts of their literary worlds—and so imply, by

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75 Similarly, Richard Utz’ blithe phrase “allegorical personae (universals)” assumes that personification allegory and realism are closely connected (170). More strikingly still, no less a figure than Jorge Luis Borges links allegory with realism when he describes a “passage from the allegory to the novel, from the species to the individual, from realism to nominalism” (166). Borges thinks that this “passage” must have “required several centuries,” but still attempts “to suggest an ideal date when it occurred”: “[t]hat day in 1382 when Geoffrey Chaucer, who perhaps did not believe he was a nominalist, wished to translate a line from Boccaccio into English, *E con gli occulti ferri i Tradimenti* (‘And Treachery with hidden weapons’), and he said it like this: ‘The smyler with the knyf under the cloke’” (166).
their very presence, that real beings answer to abstract or common terms in those worlds (Fiction 40). These real entities are Platonic Forms, “transcendent realities” (Fiction 39). Mann makes the same point, i.e., that personification allegory “assumes or implies that abstractions such as Truth, Justice, Love, Hate, Pride, Avarice and the like are not mere words, but reflections of Ideas that have a real, albeit supra-sensible existence” (67). Mann assumes what Van Dyke asserts, namely that only realists granted that “abstract terms may be said to designate real entities” (Fiction 39)

For realists, abstract or common terms signify universals, or Forms. For nominalists, by contrast, they are “merely mental constructs” that do not signify real beings at all (Van Dyke, Fiction 39).

A ‘realist’ outlook on personification allegory like Van Dyke’s invites ‘nominalist’ adaptations.76 Priscilla Jenkins admits that allegory “suggests idealization” or a turn to Ideas (125), but goes on to address “the breakdown of pure allegory” and of the Platonic “habit of thought it encourages” in Piers (140). And if Jenkins does not state that Langland’s “apparent allegorical improprieties” presuppose a nominalist rejection of real universals (140), Griffiths does take this step. Griffiths says that “personification metaphor, insofar as it brings together an abstract tenor and a concrete vehicle, finds hospitality in Platonic epistemology and metaphysics” (41). The Platonist assumes

76 In Saving the Appearances (1965), Owen Barfield offers a ‘realist’ view of personification which in a certain way anticipates the position that Van Dyke and others defend, but which also merits independent consideration. Barfield proposes that allegory flourished in the Middle Ages because, whereas modern audiences see personification figures as “mere words” artificially reified, medieval audiences understood them as representations of entities “real to begin with” (86). Words “could not then be regarded as mere words,” for “the connection between words and things” was “very much closer” than is normally affirmed today (84, Barfield’s italics). Indeed, language so perfectly conformed to reality that, for most medieval thinkers — albeit least for “the Nominalists” (91) — “to learn about the true nature of words was to learn about the true nature of things” (84). And since terms so perfectly corresponded to realities, since the distance between words and the world was so slight, poets writing in the realist intellectual climate of the Middle Ages proceeded readily from signs to entities, e.g., by presenting personification figures answering straightforwardly to terms. With Barfield, I find it intuitive that authors presupposing realism or working within a realist milieu might tend to favour personification allegory. However, Barfield does not suggest — and lest we fall into circular reasoning, we should not assume — that in itself a given poet’s use of personification argues for her or his presupposing realism. For an account akin to Barfield’s, but suffering from the defect of reducing all realism to Platonic realism, see Johan Huizinga’s classic study The Waning of the Middle Ages. Huizinga asserts that “[a]ll realism, in the medieval sense, leads to anthropomorphism” because, “[h]aving attributed a real existence to an idea [i.e., a Platonic Idea], the mind wants to see this idea alive, and can only effect this by personifying it. In this way allegory is born” (205).
“the pre-existence of ideas… to which words refer,” and, in personification allegory, these Ideas “are translated into sensual or imaginative terms” (41). But although “[t]ranscendent metaphysics and allegorical poetry have much in common” (42), Griffiths argues, Langland reveals himself as an “artist who is not a realist” because he does not attempt through a given personification figure “to make an idea concrete” (53). Rather, he deviates from the conventions of allegory by creating personification figures that exhibit a “readiness to revert to discourse” (9). Such characters, many of whom “have little substance except a name” (5), are just mental constructs or “literary beings” (61). They aid thought but do not lead, in any clear or stable way, to extramental beings or Ideas.

Beyond mistakenly equating realism *simpliciter* with Platonic realism, the traditional association of personification allegory with realism (presumed even by literary nominalists such as Griffiths) goes awry by implying that, for nominalists, common terms or signs do not represent real beings. To the contrary, nominalists, as we saw in Chapter One, held that common signs properly signify totalities of particular things, say, all singular humans or all singular rednesses. Thus if in a given work personification figures signify real things, it does not follow that realism informs that work. In brief, the absence of Forms in a given personification allegory would not entail that that poem presupposes nominalism, and the presence of real things represented by personification figures in a given allegory would not imply that that poem presupposes realism—unless, of course, some of the represented things were entities realists admitted and nominalists denied, e.g., real universals.

When Lawrence Clopper wonders “[w]hether an allegorist is necessarily a philosophical realist,” then, we should reply with a definite “no” (35). Still, there may be reasons to think that a realist

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77 Clopper himself “remain[s] uncertain” (35). He speculates that Piers and Will could be seen as exemplifications of real universals, entertaining the idea that Piers “is an individual manifestation of the substance apostolus” and asking
or nominalist viewpoint informs a given author’s use of personification in a particular poem. For instance, Langland’s presentation of Wrath may suggest that this figure signifies a real universal. And in that case, it appears that a realist perspective underpins Langland’s use of personification.

Wrath, “his nekke hangyng,” is male on “his” first appearance in the poem (B 5.136). However, Wrath’s claim to have lived with nuns and monks both (B 5.153–6, C 6.128–31) implies that ‘he’ somehow is, or can be, female as well as male. In the C Text, Wrath likewise seems female when or qua sitting in church pews, “provided originally for women” (Economou 231), among “wyues and wydewes” (6.143). Wrath, then, can either metamorphose or be multiple people, some male and some female, at once. And the C Text favours the latter reading, for there Wrath, speaking of two women who had “chydde” one another (6.147), declares, “y, wrath, was war and w[o]rthe on hem bothe” (6.148). Without ceasing to be one and the same being—that single entity to whom the pronoun “y” applies—Wrath pervades or “possesses” both women, becoming each or part of each (Economou 231). Accordingly, Wrath, or rather the property that Wrath represents, namely wrath, is a single thing that can somehow simultaneously be or be present in sundry individuals.

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78 “his neck hanging” (cf. C 6.104)
79 “wives and widows”
80 “chided”; “was aware, and was in them both” (or as Economou translates, “was ready, and filled both” [53])
81 For comparison, properties personified in the Psychomachia also seem able to be embodied by individuals without foregoing their own distinct existence, in token of which—as is the case with Wrath and the women Wrath possesses in Piers—a given personification figure in Prudentius’ poem may have one gender while a particular embodiment of the property personified by that figure has another. As said in footnote 8, for example, Prudentius’ Abraham appears to embody faith, the property personified by Faith, yet Abraham is male while Faith (“Fides”) is female. As a realist, Prudentius might be implying by this dynamic that a character such as Faith personifies a real entity, i.e., a universal property, distinct from the concrete individuals exhibiting that property. And as a Platonic realist, more precisely, he would in that case presumably regard Faith as personifying a Platonic Form (the Form of faith) imitated by concrete individuals such as Abraham. I do not think that Platonic realism undergirds Piers, but, as will be said momentarily, I do think that taking Piers to presuppose realism, namely scholastic realism, can help to elucidate Wrath’s situation.
Now, one might object that the “y” in “y, wrath” refers to Wrath, not qua tenor as the property wrath, but qua vehicle or as the concept of wrath conveyed by a humanoid dream-image. Since a single ‘person’ speaks, “y” is apt, but it does not follow that one and the same wrath pervades the two women. Instead, each woman may have her own, irreducibly singular wrath. If “y” denotes a concept when Wrath states, “y, wrath... w[o]rthe on hem bothe,” however, then what imbues the women and stirs them to savagery, making them claw one another until “here hedes were bare and blody here chekes,” is not wrath but the concept of wrath (C 6.150). And this seems false, since surely one can conceive of wrath without becoming violent! Hence “y” appears to refer to Wrath, not qua vehicle, but qua tenor or as the property wrath—a single property pervading both people.

If Wrath represents one wrath imbuing multiple individuals, exactly what wrath might this be? If nominalism underwrites Piers, then it could only be a singular wrath because, for nominalists, all entities are singular. But though a nominalist could agree with the statement “wrath is in multiple people” by understanding it as “multiple people exhibit some singular wrath or other,” she would deny that there is any one wrath present in multiple people. And this seems to be exactly Wrath’s implication. For “y” denotes some being—some one wrath—even before Wrath’s ‘possession’ of the two people. Since “y” refers to one wrath while Wrath is still merely “war” of the women, a

82 “their heads were bare and their cheeks bloody.” It might be suggested that Wrath imbues the women qua vehicle, but not as a concept—that is, that Wrath pervades them as a dream-image ‘possessing’ other dream-images. But qua dream-images, Wrath and the women are people, and it is hard to see in what sense one person could pervade others. A realist would not say that a real universal (e.g., universal wrath) exists prior to its instances by temporal priority. However, she would say that a real universal exists prior to its instances by natural priority. As Scotus puts the point, “[e]very quidditative entity (whether partial or total) in some genus is of itself indifferent as a quidditative entity to this individual and to that one, in such a way that as a quidditative entity it is naturally prior to this individual entity insofar as it is ‘this’” (Spade, Five Texts 106–7) (“omnis entitas quiditativa—sive partialis sive totalis—alicuius generis, est de se indifferentes ‘ut entitas quiditativa’ ad hanc entitatem et illam, ita quod ‘ut entitas quiditativa’ est naturaliter prior ista entitate ut haec est” [Ord. II d. 3 part 1 q. 6 n. 214 p. 931]). Wyclif takes the same position; see Chapter One, footnote 154. Accordingly, if Wrath represents universal wrath, the fact that “y” refers to universal wrath before Wrath’s ‘possession’ of the women could suggest, not that universal wrath exists prior to its instances by temporal priority, but rather that it exists prior to its instances by natural priority.
wrath subsequently present in both people, “y” cannot, in any clear way, denote a singular wrath. And similarly, the fact that one and the same character appears to be both female and male might indicate that there is some wrath, which could not be individual, present in both women and men.

A straightforward solution emerges if realism underpins *Piers*. In that case, Wrath, and the “y” in “y, wrath,” can refer to universal wrath, i.e., to a real universal. Universal wrath can be in diverse people at once, both women and men, because any number of people can participate in it. Thus if realism informs the text, it makes good sense that Langland portrays Wrath as not only present in diverse people (the women), but also both female and male, while remaining one being in itself. 84

84 One might object that, if one of Wrath’s attributes, namely the ability to be present in multiple individuals at once, is to be accounted for as applying to a real universal allegedly represented by Wrath, then with equal reason Wrath’s other attributes should be accounted for as applying to the same real universal. However, some of Wrath’s attributes, e.g., the ability to talk, obviously cannot apply to or be accounted for as applying to any real universal. And because some of Wrath’s attributes cannot be accounted for as applying to a real universal, none of Wrath’s attributes should be accounted for as applying to a real universal. In response to this objection, let us first note that critics of allegory, including both literary realists and literary nominalists, typically account for some of a given personification figure’s attributes as applying to that figure *qua* vehicle and for others as applying to that figure *qua* tenor. Van Dyke asserts that “[w]e can think of each [personification] agent as a vertical space, dominated at the top by the abstract noun that designates its essence and grounded in an embodiment that engages in the action” as a concrete individual (*Fiction* 39–40). A personification figure is thus “a compound agent” made of an abstract significate (a designated “essence”) and a concrete sign (that essence’s “embodiment”) (*Fiction* 41)—to each of which distinct “narrative propositions” apply (*Fiction* 40). Similarly, Paxson tells us that a “personification figure is the material translation of one quantity (often ideational or abstract) into another (usually a person). But the abstract ontological status of ‘translation’ is figured in terms of a strong material metaphor: containment. Given this conception, we can see that the hierarchical inner/outer form of the personification figure resembles that of the sign understood by structuralists,” for whom a “sign consists of two components, the significifier and the signified. The former is the material (phonic or graphic) agent by which the latter (conceptual) is given expression or contained. When schematically represented, the personification figure has the same structure: personification ‘figure’ = personifier/personified” (*Poetics* 39–40). Here, “the ‘personifier’ conforms to a standard narrative actant: s/he is a mobile and active human being, endowed with speech,” while “[t]he ‘personified’ can be found among a range of abstract essences, inanimate objects, animals, etc…. It is figurally translated into the personifier. The personification figure is thus a compound entity,” and, in accordance with its “compound or duplex nature,” enjoys some attributes *qua* personifier or signifier, i.e., vehicle, and others *qua* personified or signified, i.e., tenor (*Paxson, Poetics* 40, his italics). Such accounts show that there need be no *a priori* difficulty involved in assigning some attributes to a personification figure, for instance Langland’s Wrath, *qua* vehicle and other attributes to the same figure *qua* tenor. Rather, given the compound nature of personification figures, doing so is precisely what personification allegory requires of us. Accordingly, Wrath’s “being endowed with speech,” together with other attributes befitting “a standard narrative actant,” should belong to Wrath *qua* vehicle—i.e., to Wrath insofar as Wrath is human (or more accurately, since Wrath appears in a dream, to Wrath insofar as Wrath is the concept of wrath conveyed by a humanoid dream-image). What ought we to say, though, of Wrath’s ability to be present in multiple individuals at once? Should this attribute too be applied to Wrath *qua* vehicle? As remarked above, it is hard to see how it could plausibly be accounted for if applied to Wrath in this way, for no human has such an attribute and, while the concept of wrath could in some sense exist in diverse people
Langland’s portrayal of Wrath as ‘possessing’ multiple people illustrates an observation Griffiths makes about a whole group of personification figures, the Seven Deadly Sins. Griffiths notes that “although the sins impress us with a sense of their being real and present, they do not cohere into individuals. Except perhaps for Covetousness… none of the sins amounts to any single person” (61). Instead, each Sin seems to constitute multiple individuals, for each Sin’s “anecdotes belong to different sinners” (62). So for Griffiths, each Sin enjoys or appears to enjoy a robust presence in *Piers*, yet each is portrayed, not as an individual, but as somehow constituting multiple people.

Griffiths considers the Sins’ lack of individuality odd, though entirely consistent with the overall “strangeness” of Langland’s use of personification (1). At the beginning of her study, she defines “personification” as that metaphorical “translation whereby things absent, abstract, inanimate are made human or present” (1). Each Sin, then, translates something—but what? Presumably, Envy translates envy; Lechery, lechery; etc. But since Griffiths holds that nominalism underpins *Piers*, she cannot say that Envy, for instance, translates universal envy. Nor can she say that it translates some one singular envy, because no one singular envy is or is present in diverse individuals. Can she say that Envy translates *all* singular envies? Not obviously. For if Envy were a translation of all singular envies, then Envy’s ‘possessing,’ say, the friar whose garment Envy wears upon first appearing to Will would amount to all envies’ pervading that friar. To clarify, it would seem that everything predicated of a given personification character, e.g., Envy, should apply to that figure either *qua* tenor (as what it signifies and translates) or *qua* vehicle (as a concept in human form).

at once, it is unclear why the presence of the mere concept of wrath in the two women should make them violent. It seems better, then, to account for Wrath’s ability to be present in multiple individuals simultaneously as applying to Wrath *qua* tenor—to Wrath insofar as Wrath is an entity represented by the figure in Will’s dream. And presumably that entity is wrath itself, a property which, since it is present in diverse individuals at once, must be a real universal.
But Envy does not imbue multiple individuals *qua* vehicle, as a concept in human form. If Envy pervades diverse people, it must do so *qua* tenor. What Envy translates, namely envy, must be or be present in multiple people, in this person and in that one. Yet it is hard to see how all singular envies could be or be present in this person and in that one. Each could have an envy, but not all.

Accordingly, Griffiths does not assert that the Sins translate singular sins. Rather, she insists that, just as Langland’s handling of the personification figure Meed works to “plunder her reality” and reduce her to a concept (30), his portrayal of the Sins leaves their words “without a subject” (62). In the last analysis, she thinks, the Sins lack reality and are purely conceptual, translating ideas in Will’s mind. And indeed, Griffiths’ generalizes the point. “Each personification” figure in *Piers*, she maintains, is “no more than a mask through which the dreamer analyzes and creates himself” (62). The poem’s personification figures show Will, not real things, but merely his own thoughts.

I find Griffiths’ interpretation of Langland’s personification figures implausible. For after all, the personification characters Will meets are his main sources of “kynde knowyng”—of that “natural knowledge” or knowledge of natures that he needs “in order to discover truth” and gain salvation (Karnes 35–6). If all the personification figures Will encounters reveal or signify nothing beyond Will himself, how should they further his understanding of the natures of things? But at the same time, it is far from clear that taking *Piers* to presuppose nominalism recommends any better way of explicating the Sins. By contrast, taking the poem to presuppose realism allows for a plausible and straightforward reading. In that case, we may say that each Sin lacks individuality because it translates a real universal. Envy pervades multiple individuals because diverse people instantiate universal envy, and each other Sin is present in diverse individuals for precisely the same reason.
I am not claiming that taking *Piers* to presuppose nominalism precludes all coherent explications of the Sins. Perhaps Langland is speaking loosely when he depicts Wrath as one wrath present in two women, for example, and just means that both people grew angry. However, I am suggesting that taking *Piers* to presuppose realism provides an intuitive way to unlock or explain Langland’s depiction of the Sins, a way unavailable to a literary nominalist. On this reading, at least some of Langland’s personification figures represent real universals—and so signify the very entities that, for realists, constitute the objects of knowledge. Such figures would serve well as guides to truth.

If personification figures such as Wrath or Covetousness, whose names suggest that they convey common concepts, signify common entities—real universals—it stands to reason that Langland’s other personification figures should likewise reflect real entities in a straightforward manner. Just as common things, e.g., universal covetousness and universal wrath, answer to Covetousness and Wrath, or the common concepts they relate, with one-to-one correlation, so for example complex things—real states of affairs or “real sentences,” in Burley and Wyclif’s phrase—would answer straightforwardly to sentence-named personification figures or the complex concepts they relate. And in fact Langland, somewhat unusually, offers a number of sentence-named figures. The best known of these have concise names which are, nevertheless, sentences: “Dowel... and dobet and dobest” (B 8.78). As Piers’ pardon shows, “Dowel” names a condition for salvation required of all people by God. And although “Dowel” is an imperative sentence, Middleton points out that,...

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85 See Section 2.3 of Chapter One.
86 “Do well... and Do better and Do best” (cf. C 10.76)
87 Piers’ pardon “a pena & a culpa” (B 7.3, C 9.187) (“from punishment and guilt”), excerpted from the Athanasian Creed, states: “Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam; / Qui vero mala in ignem eternum” (B 7.113, C 9.286–7) (“And they who have done well will enter eternal life; however, they who have done ill will enter endless fire”). To be saved, one must do well. Piers receives this pardon, which applies to everyone, directly from Truth (B 7.1, C 9.1).
according to Priscian, “grammatically the imperative may always be ‘resolved’ into an indicative first-person command or wish with an object clause in the infinitive: *ambula becomes impero te ambulare*” (176, her italics). “Dowel” is therefore equivalent to an indicative sentence such as “I order you to do well,” God’s decree to humans. If realism informs *Piers*, Do well (or the idea Do well relates) could accordingly signify the real state of affairs God’s ordering humans to do well.

Do well, Do better, and Do best are not Langland’s only sentence-named personification figures. Other characters in this category include Piers’ family members: his wife, “werch-whan-tyme is” (B 6.78), his daughter, “do-riȝt-so-or-þi-dame-shal-þee-bete” (B 6.79), and his son—who, one hopes, has a nickname—“Suffre-þi-Soureyns-to-hauen-hir-wille- / Deme-hem-noȝt-for-if-how-doost-þow-shalt-it-deere-abugge- / Lat-god-þworpe-wip-al-for-so-his-word-techeþ” (B 6.80–2).88

If realism underwrites the poem, then all such figures (or the concepts they convey), their names ‘resolved,’ could represent parts of the world’s ontological furniture, that is, real states of affairs.

What might such sentence-named personification figures represent if nominalism informs *Piers*?

Griffiths says that “Langland translates into persons not only substantives but verbal phrases and entire portions of discourse” (5). Langland’s personification characters are just units of language, including sentences, given human shape. This interpretation coheres with her view of the poem’s personification figures as “masks” of the dreamer, products of Will’s mind, especially if the units of language translated into persons are ultimately units of *mental* language, i.e., concepts. Again, however, personification characters act as Will’s chief conduits to truth, and, if they translate and

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In passing, we may note that, especially because the command to do well flows immediately from Truth, doing well may characterize the true person, the person who, in the grammatical metaphor’s terms, stands in the “case” of truth. 88 “Work when it is time” (cf. C 8.80); “Do just so or your mother will beat you” (cf. C 8.81); “Suffer your superiors to have their will; / Judge them not, for if you do, you will pay for it dearly; / Let God be, moreover, for so His word teaches” (cf. C 8.82–3)
represent nothing outside of Will himself, they can offer little in the way of objective knowledge. They should, it seems, signify extramental beings of some kind. But as observed in Section 2.3 of Chapter One, nominalists held that sentences do not properly name or signify real things. Rather, for Wodeham sentences represent complexly signifiables, which do not count as things, while for Ockham and Holcot sentences, as such, lack significance. Only the individual terms of sentences, taken piecemeal, signify real things. On either nominalist account, it would appear that sentence-named personification figures (or the complex concepts they relate) do not represent real entities.

It might be objected that, though sentence-named personification characters (or the concepts they convey) would not as such signify extramental things if nominalism underpins Piers, their terms, taken piecemeal, could still signify real entities if the poem presupposes a view like Ockham’s or Holcot’s. In that case, personification characters would not signify beings just insofar as they are sentences—they would not properly signify beings—but they would still signify beings in a way.

This seems possible. However, I think it improbable for two reasons. First, Langland, by making sentences proper names of characters, treats sentences as proper names. But Ockham and Holcot deny that sentences properly name or signify beings. Second, take “Dowel.” As observed above, “Dowel” can be ‘resolved’ into an indicative sentence such as “I order you to do well,” where “I” refers to God and “you” refers to humans. Ockham and Holcot would of course admit that “God” and “humans” properly signify beings, but they would deny that “do” does so. As an action-term, “do” signifies improperly or obliquely. Thus like every other sentence, “Dowel,” or its indicative counterpart, contains no term that properly names or signifies action—and indeed, “Dowel” itself contains no term that properly signifies anything. But this seems peculiar, for, insofar as he turns
an imperative sentence into a character’s name, Langland appears to focus, not on God or people, but on action, or more precisely right action. Mary Carruthers accordingly interprets Do well as “manifested action” (Search 128), and Kirk regards Do well as “right action” personified (175). If Do well (or the concept it conveys) properly signifies right action, then Piers presumes a view that countenances actions—i.e., a realist outlook. And if as I believe Do well properly signifies a real state of affairs (God’s ordering humans to act rightly), then again Piers presupposes realism.

If realism about universals and about states of affairs underlies Langland’s use of personification, then Langland, at least for poetic purposes, grants or assumes a rich realist ontology. And in fact, he may embrace an extensive ontology indeed. For much as Wyclif and the other Oxford Realists broadened “ens” to include, for instance, “death” and “the false” (Conti, “Wyclif’s Logic” 79, his italics), Langland appears to translate death and the false into humans through his personification figures “Deeþ” (B 18.29) and “þe fals” (B 2.4). By supposing that a brand of realism similar to those dominant in the intellectual milieu of Langland’s time underpins Piers, we stand positioned to regard each of his personification figures, even these, as signifying exactly one real being. But on this view, a thorough parallelism between language and reality, such as may also be suggested by the grammatical metaphor, obtains between personification characters and extramental things.

Like the realist philosophers of his day, Langland may deem an extensive ontology indispensible for objective knowledge or the search for truth. If so, the personification figures Will encounters

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89 Ralph Hanna emphasizes that the “three states” Do well, Do better, and Do best “are inherently similar in insisting on the infinitive ‘do,’ the act of action” (83).

90 Carruthers also speaks of Do well as “a command to action” (Search 82). This explication indicates that Do well is not just right action, but right action precisely as enjoined upon humans by God. Such a reading approaches my own interpretation of Do well as representing a real state of affairs.

91 “Death” (cf. C 20.28); “The False” (cf. C 2.4)
enable him to move toward truth in part because of their straightforward correlation with entities. But if each personification figure or dream-image directly reflects one entity, then why, it will be asked, does Langland create not one, but two metaphorical translations of the Church: Lady Holy Church (or just “Holy Church”) in the poem’s first two passus and Unity Holy Church (or simply “Unity”) in its last two? Now, realists granted that multiple spoken or written terms could convey the same concept without this violating the parallelism between concepts and things (this is what happens in the case of synonyms). And similarly, it seems possible, if realism underwrites Piers, for multiple personification figures or dream-images in the poem to convey the same ideas. Holy Church and Unity could each relate the same concept of the Church without thereby undermining a realist affirmation of symmetry between concepts and beings. Nonetheless, the language-reality parallelism indicated by the grammatical metaphor appears to hold, at least on one level, between spoken or written terms and things in the world. Thus Langland’s offering two translations of the Church, while not subverting the realist endorsement of symmetry between concepts and entities, sits uneasily with his own intimation of extensive symmetry between signs in general and things.

In God and the Goddesses, Barbara Newman offers a reading of Holy Church that paves the way to a solution. For Newman, Holy Church represents the divine Idea or “transcendental aspect” of the Church (25). Holy Church is a “Platonic” rather than an “Aristotelian” personification figure, belonging among those characters in medieval allegory that signify “epiphanies or emanations of a superior reality” rather than among those that signify “accidents existing in a substance,” since she exhibits traits that mark her out as numinous or divine, i.e., a facet of God (34). For example, Holy Church both abides within the divine circuit, the “Castel” or tower of Truth (B 1.4), and, as
the “doughter” of God, partakes of the nature of Truth (B 2.30). Such considerations suggest that Holy Church translates the Church, not as it obtains in creation, but as it preexists in God’s mind. However, Newman states that “very few personifications enjoy the same transcendental status as Lady Church” (34). Most personification figures in Piers are “Aristotelian” instead of “Platonic.”

In Chapter One we saw that, although the debate between realists and nominalists centred on real or in re universals, scholastic philosophers made room for divine Ideas or ante rem universals as exemplary causes of things. Realists and nominalists alike granted Ideas of at least some singular beings, though only realists went on to admit Ideas of real universals. Thus it is certainly possible that Holy Church represents an Idea. Griffiths herself acknowledges that Holy Church, among all the personification characters in the poem, stands out as “archetypal and numinous” (3). Now, if Holy Church is archetypal or signifies an archetype, i.e., an exemplary cause, then she must be or signify an Idea. I thus agree with Newman that Holy Church signifies an Idea—although, just as scholastic realists usually focussed more on in re universals than on ante rem universals, in Piers there are more personification figures representing real universals than representing divine Ideas.

If Holy Church represents the divine or transcendental aspect of the Church, Unity should signify the created facet of the Church: people, namely the elect, united as Christ’s mystical body. Unity would suitably signify a community because, as a building instead of a person, it contains people and brings them together. Yet it also enjoys a special connection to Piers. It is called “Piers bern”

92 “castle” (cf. C 1.4); “daughter” (cf. B 2.34). Newman proposes several “guidelines” for identifying a “Platonic” personification character, each of which Holy Church meets (God and the Goddesses 34). These criteria are: “the figure’s centrality to the conceptual scheme of the text; expressions of love, awe, and reverence on the part of the narrator; the appropriation of biblical and liturgical language to give the figure a numinous aura; the predominantly serious, rather than ironic or parodic, character of the figure’s discourse; and perhaps most important, the presumption of an intimate relationship between the figure and God” (God and the Goddesses 34–5).
(B 19.344), and Piers establishes Unity by begging Grace to build it.\textsuperscript{93} Piers seems to be a “fitting founder of Unity” since, as David Mills says, Piers is “the symbol of an ultimate unity” (209), or of a “unifying principle,” in the poem (210). But according to Section 2.2, the unifying principle Piers (or his armour) symbolizes is nothing other than universal humanity in its undistorted state. As suggested in that section, Piers, Christ, St Peter, and the Samaritan unite or are really identical insofar as they share true universal humanity, i.e., humanity unobscured by sin. These reflections tend toward the conclusion that Unity represents the elect not only as united, but more exactly as united by true universal humanity. And in turn, this possibility harmonizes well with the fact that late fourteenth-century realists like Wyclif, as noted in Section 2.3, regarded universal humanity, in its true state of fidelity to God, as the form of the Church. If realism informs Langland’s use of personification, then, Unity may represent the elect as united by true universal human nature, and Holy Church may signify the Idea of this unity. Each would therefore represent a different entity.

We have seen that, even though personification allegory does not necessarily presuppose realism, realism plausibly underpins Langland’s use of personification. More precisely, we have observed that a rich realist ontology including but not limited to real universals may well underwrite \textit{Piers}. Because on this proposal extrametal entities answer straightforwardly to personification figures and other dream-images, or to the concepts they convey, the ongoing revelation Will experiences over the course of the poem permits him to better apprehend reality by means of mental contents. And by advancing in “kynde knowyng,” knowledge of things and their natures, Will can proceed to a better understanding of God. Nowhere is this intellective climb to God clearer than in Faith’s ‘proof’ of the Trinity, which, as suggested in Section 2.1, attempts to illuminate the divine nature

\textsuperscript{93} “Piers’ barn” (cf. C 19.344)
on the basis of universal human nature. But if cognitively grasping extramental entities including real universals, and especially universal humanity, is in a sense a means in Will’s journey toward salvation, common humanity, or rather true common humanity, may also be the end of his quest. For if the above interpretation of Unity is valid, Will’s progressing toward Unity at the end of the poem amounts to his advancing toward participation in universal human nature unclouded by sin. In the next section, we will more closely consider Will’s journey toward true universal humanity.

4. Intellective Redirection

Section 3 proposed that, if *Piers* presupposes realism, Will’s pursuit of salvation can be regarded as a quest to unite with Christ and the elect in true humanity as in a common nature. In that case, Will’s dream-visions constitute an overarching vision of unity resting on realism. And because it relates Will’s quest to readers or listeners, *Piers* itself may be considered a realist vision of unity.

Will’s revelation crucially concerns his coming to will and act rightly, i.e., in accord with reason. However, it even more fundamentally involves an attempt to understand things and their natures, for in Langland’s poem, as Carruthers points out, “[d]oing well depends on knowledge” (*Search* 10). Only by arriving at truth can Will align himself with Truth, becoming rational and so willing rightly; accordingly, Will’s “‘inward journey’... is directed not only inward but also outward and upward, toward the external and transcendent” (Kruger, “Mirrors” 74). In brief, only by pursuing truth, via reflection and intellectual apprehension of created natures, can he become a true human or participate in true universal humanity—finally attaining Truth and salvation. “Wyclif argues,” as David Jeffrey remarks, “that the right end of interpretation is, like the right end of philosophy, a moral life—particularly, he says, right action” (116). Comparably in *Piers*, Will’s coming to do
well, or to act in accordance with the Truth “in Trinitee,” requires his interpreting creation aright. He must duly apprehend natures, including common natures, if he would unite with Christ in true universal humanity and, in the beatific vision, gaze forever upon the Trinity’s transcendent unity.

But to that end, Will needs a vision of unity now. For as Piers begins, he behaves irrationally and exhibits no awareness of natures. Like his counterpart Haukyn later in the poem, he takes himself to be “singuler by hymself,” a wholly particular person in a world of singular things (B 13.282). He attends exclusively to the perceptible and hence to the particular, focussing, for instance, on a stream’s beauty and its music (B Prologue 10, C Prologue 6) and on the “softe” morning sunlight (B 1, C 1). Wandering “wide in his world wondres to here,” he exhibits no desire to peer through the world’s ‘wonders’ to their imperceptible or intelligible natures (B Prologue 4). And since he follows his senses without comprehension, he is “vnholy of werkes,” out of step with Do well (B Prologue 3). Will is the very picture of the errant will, the will at odds with God’s true likeness.

However, his first dream-vision depicts the world Will knows, replete with “alle manere of men” (B Prologue 18), in a fashion that forces itself upon him as significant and moves him, as Passus 1 begins, to examine what each dream-image “bymeneth” (B 1). Having entered into the mental space of dream, he starts, haltingly, to use his intellect. And just as he does so, Holy Church—in keeping, perhaps, with her role as an Idea—appears before Will to illuminate him, revealing that only true people gain salvation and accordingly enjoining him to seek “kynde knowyng” of truth. Thus between Holy Church’s manifestation and his arrival at Unity, Will endeavours to perceive

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94 “singular of himself”
95 “wide in this world to hear wonders” (cf. C Prologue 4)
96 “unholy of works” (cf. C Prologue 3)
97 “all sorts of people, the poor and the rich” (cf. C Prologue 20); “signifies” (cf. C 1)
more deeply, i.e., to see with his mind’s eye instead of his bodily eyes. Nevertheless, he routinely attends only to apparent sensations, and accordingly he asserts “the primacy of... the individual” well into the poem (Mills 191). Crucially, Will often heeds personification figures not qua tenors or significates, but just qua vehicles or signs—perceiving them only, that is, as individual people. Hence in the case of Do well, for example, he goes astray by “mistaking a verb for a noun,” or in other words by thinking Do well an object rather than an action or state of affairs (Kasten 130). Until Will can reliably see beyond signs to significates, he cannot and does not progress to Unity.

Will hits his lowest post–Holy Church point roughly halfway through Piers. Induced by Fortune to gaze “in a Mirour þat hiȝte middeler þe” (B 11.9), he wastes “fourty wynter and a fifte moore” (B 11.47) under the sway of “Coueitise of eiȝes” (B 11.14), thinking neither “of dowel ne dobet” (B 11.48). Again caught up in sensory delights, he forgets that the perceptible world is simply a “Mirour” of truth, a sphere of signs, instead seeing it as reality itself. So regarded, “this mirror... offers nothing like transcendent vision” (Kruger, “Mirrors” 80). Only when God directly steps in as “kynde” or Nature (B 11.321, C 13.131), i.e., “Natura naturans” (White 62, his italics), lifting Will to “a mountaigne þat myddeler þe hiȝte” from the lofty vantage of which he can perceive the “Mirour” for what it is, does Will begin to see the true natures of things and to approach, through these, to Nature (B 11.324). Here he realizes that the “beasts demonstrate their proper kynde in

98 Mills and Carruthers make the same point. Mills explains that “Dowel is very clearly a ‘verb-adverb’ construction suggesting a finite action, but the Dreamer, oddly, treats it as if it were a noun, that is, as if it were a definite thing which could be sought out and found” (194–5, his italics). Carruthers remarks that “In [Piers’] pardon, Dowel is an imperative verb... But as Will uses the word, it is a noun” (Search 81–2).
99 “in a mirror that was named ‘Middle Earth’” (cf. C 11.168); “forty-five winters”; “Covetousness of eyes” (cf. C 11.173); “of Do well nor Do better” (cf. C 11.311)
100 “a mountain that was named ‘Middle Earth.’” In the C Text, Langland excises the Mirror of Middle Earth. Rather than transporting Will to a mountain, Nature bids Will look anew into the Mirror of Middle Earth. This time, though, Will is not to revel in appearances, but, as on the Mountain of Middle Earth in B, to “knowe by vch a creature kynde to louye” (13.133; cf. B 11.325–6). Fascinatingly, it is possible—and I think Langland intends us—to read “by vch a creature kynde to louye” in two different, yet complementary, ways. We may interpret it either as “by each creature,
response to the instincts given them by Kynde” (Carruthers, *Search* 100, her italics). Here too, on the Mountain of Middle Earth, he grasps that “Reson rewarded and ruled alle beestes / Saue man and his make” (B 11.370–1). Humanity is corrupted; it has become “unreasonable, inimical to nature” (Kruger, “Mirrors” 86). Hence if he would regain the true image of God or participate in true humanity, Will must, he is reminded, recover the use of his reason. As Steven Kruger notes, the “mirror scene is... a call for human reform, for the rejection of sin and submission to Kynde and Resoun” (“Mirrors” 87), soliciting Will to seek to understand the “wondres of þis world” (B 11.323). This is Holy Church’s lesson repeated, yet Will’s will continues to err. Will reacts to his vision of humanity’s irrationality by castigating Reason (B 11.373)—an “impugning of wisdom” that “points to a basic disturbance in his own thought” (Kruger, “Mirrors” 88). And so doing, he prevents himself, as he subsequently admits, from learning “moore þorȝ Res[on]” (B 11.414).

In the Mirror and Mountain of Middle Earth episodes, as in related scenes, one discerns a certain scorn for signs or images in themselves. The sensory world is wonderful, but wonder must move thought. One must not linger in appearances, excessively coveting perceptions, but must proceed from signs or images to truths. A like contempt for excessive attention to signs informs Wyclif’s dismissal of nominalists as mere “doctors of signs” (Kenny 16). Wyclif states that those “never turning the gaze of their minds away from signs” to signified natures (Kenny 3), and especially

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Footnotes:

1. “Reason rewarded and ruled all beasts / Save man and his mate.” Thus as Schmidt notes, Will on the Mountain of Middle Earth sees the “disorder evident” in humanity since “man has been put out of paradise” (“Inner Dreams” 35). In the C Text, Langland changes “Saue man and his make” to “Saue man and mankynde” (13.181), a revision which may make more explicit the idea that humanity itself, and not just this or that particular person, is corrupted in Adam and Eve’s lineage. Cf. C 3.404 and footnote 56.

2. “more through reason” (cf. C 13.222)

3. “doctores signorum” (*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 2 p. 65)

4. “dirigentes aciem mentis pure ad signa” (*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 1 p. 23)
to common natures, cannot ascend the “ladder of wisdom” to God (Kenny 74). Nominalists, of course, would reject this caricature, rightly protesting that they do proceed to realities from signs. Nevertheless, scorn for fixation on signs in themselves is prominent in late medieval realism, and such an attitude resonates with Langland’s poem insofar as Will, by failing to turn the gaze of his mind away from dream-images or signs in themselves, pointedly fails, here, to ascend to Truth.

Yet Will starts to make genuine intellective progress immediately after the Mirror and Mountain of Middle Earth scenes, when he learns from Imaginative to learn from mental images instead of fixating upon them. Imaginative teaches Will that “[i]ntellectual understanding requires that one comprehend a thing’s nature” by reaching through signs or images to signified natures, “and the subsequent development of the poem indicates that Will has taken Ymaginatif’s words to heart” (Karnes 54). Will’s meeting with Imaginative marks a pivotal moment in Piers, for here he truly begins to look with his mind’s eye—and hence becomes capable of apprehending real universals.

Faith’s Trinitarian ‘proof’ attests to the importance for Will’s journey of grasping real universals. And that Will in fact does start to apprehend real universals, and in particular common humanity, becomes evident, according to the reading advanced in Section 2.2, in his twin visions of Christ. In a way, Will’s visions of Christ constitute the culmination of his overarching revelation, for, in perceiving Christ’s identity with Piers (and the Samaritan), Will enjoys a vision of unity attained.

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105 “scala[m] sapientiae” (Tractatus de universalibus c. 8 p. 175)

106 This agreement between Wyclif’s thought and Langland’s text, along with the others noted throughout the current chapter, reminds us that Wyclif and Langland, as Michael Wilks says, “clearly came out of the same stable, the royal court during a period when it was dominated by John of Gaunt” (46). Wilks focusses, not on philosophy, but instead on such points of concord between the two authors’ views as the “prophetic programme” both writers favour, noting that, when Langland “urged the need for a new Peter and a new apostolic priesthood—because contemporary clergy, for all their learning, could not use English, the true apostolic language, and so could not communicate properly with their people—he was voicing sentiments that must have awoken a lively response in Wyclif” (46). We may now add that, beyond expressing similar stances on the Church’s current and future states, Wyclif and Langland seem to offer similar philosophical outlooks (realism) and accordingly kindred views of the Church’s very nature (cf. Section 2.3).
Though he sees Christ and Piers conjoined in undistorted universal human nature, however, Will himself does not yet exemplify true humanity. He enters Unity later—and then in a dubious way.

Unity appears to Will as an edifice besieged. Antichrist has come, and with Pride and their troops assails Piers’ barn. In these circumstances, Unity wavers and might “falle” (B 20.228, C 22.228). Its situation resembles that, not of Christ’s mystical body, which of course stands firm, but of the institutional or visible Church in the late fourteenth-century—that sign or reflection, in creation’s ‘mirror,’ of Christ’s mystical body. And accordingly, when Will reaches Unity, this beleaguered building, it is unclear whether he enters it only as a structure, i.e., *qua* sign or vehicle, or also as Christ’s mystical body, i.e., *qua* significate or tenor. If the latter, Will is saved. But if the former, then his arrival at Unity no more ensures his salvation than does his belonging to the institutional Church. In that case, Will ultimately recurs to his pattern of conflating appearances with realities.

It might be objected that, since Unity’s imperilled position so clearly resembles that of the visible Church, Unity signifies the visible Church—and not, as suggested in Section 3, Christ’s mystical body. Even if it does proximately signify the institutional Church, however, Unity still represents Christ’s mystical body remotely. For as the Mirror of Middle Earth episode makes clear, in *Piers* the perceptible world is a realm of reflections or signs. Just as one must proceed from concepts to entities, one must progress from appearances to underlying truths. Langland thus emphasizes, as his poem ends, that to join the institutional Church is not to participate in Christ’s mystical body.

Yet though uncertainty surrounds Will’s salvation—though we may continue to wonder, as Will does earlier, whether he “were chosen or noȝt chosen” by God—there may be, nonetheless, good
grounds for optimism (B 11.117). Immediately before he reaches Unity, Will speaks to Nature directly, as he has previously only on the Mountain of Middle Earth. His doing so indicates that, having upon the Mountain forfeited further understanding by asserting his individual, errant will in defiance of Reason, Will has at last returned to Truth or Nature through knowledge of natures. And now Nature steers Will into Unity, teaching him to “Lerne to loue” (B 20.208, C 22.208). In Langland’s poem, to learn to love is, in a way, to obtain the treasure of truth—for if truth leads to salvation, love is likewise, Holy Church declares, the “gate þat goþ into heuene” (B 1.205). By learning to love or attaining truth, then, Will seems bound for salvation. This consideration could imply that he has achieved his quest. Perhaps accordingly, he here disappears from Piers’ action.

If Will has become a member of Christ’s mystical body, then he finally exemplifies the humanity Piers symbolizes, namely true human nature. Having like Piers become a person true to Truth, he has merged with Christ and other true people in God’s undistorted likeness. And in consequence, Will now wills and acts aright. He prioritizes common over singular goods, loving all “creatures, in commune” (B 10.362). But if Will at last wills correctly, he is no longer the errant will; rather, having gained true humanity, he now wills and acts humanely. And because Will has symbolized the fallen will throughout the poem, it is again apposite that he should exit the text at this instant.

Whatever fate awaits Will, the poem continues. Readers or listeners have not reached Unity; like Conscience at Piers’ conclusion, they remain pilgrims seeking salvation, and thus pursuing Piers.

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107 Cf. C 12.52
108 “way that goes into heaven” (Cf. C 1.200). In the C Text, Holy Church seems to equate truth with love when she asserts, “Tha[n] treuthe and trewe loue is no tresor bettre” (1.136) (“no treasure is better than truth and true love”). It would appear that, just as God or Truth is equally Love (C 10.169–70), created truth is in some way convertible with love—and thus that to gain love is to acquire the treasure of truth and to become a true person. As White comments, “It is in virtue of… love that the good man is a true image of the Trinity” (105).
For if realism indeed underpins *Piers*, one *can* unite with Christ in true universal humanity—but, as Conscience’s grammatical metaphor stresses, one’s doing so depends partly on her perceiving, and maintaining fidelity to, Truth. In brief, Langland emphasizes that salvific unity is attained (or is found to have been attained) only via struggle, via lifelong intellectual and moral labour aimed at reading Nature’s text aright and writing—and rewriting and rewriting—one’s life accordingly. Not only his poem’s narrator, but even Langland himself seems to be engaged in such a struggle, for Will’s unresolved and tortuous quest is mirrored by Langland’s unremitting authorial labours, i.e., his production of version after version of *Piers*.\(^{109}\) It appears that both Will’s journey toward participation in common humanity undimmed by sin and Langland’s efforts to relate that journey defy definite fulfilment (or certainty of fulfilment), for only “trūpe woot þe soþe” of salvation, of one’s belonging to the mystical body of Christ (B 6.130).\(^{110}\) Yet it is to be hoped that, by heeding Will’s lapses and advances, as well as Langland’s struggle to convey them, readers or listeners, if not Will as well, will ultimately redirect their minds and wills from perceptible particulars to real universals—uniting with Piers and Christ in the true universal humanity *Piers Plowman* displays.

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\(^{109}\) Langland may have spent over twenty years writing and rewriting *Piers*. As Schmidt summarizes, it is generally believed that “the Z-text, which is not universally accepted as authentic” but would be the earliest version of *Piers* (“Introduction” xvii), “cannot be earlier than 1362,” whereas the A Text seems to have been written “between 1367 and 1370” (“Introduction” xxiv). The B Text appears to have been composed “between 1377 and 1379”; the C Text, “around 1385–6” (Schmidt, “Introduction” xxv).

\(^{110}\) “Truth [i.e., God] knows the truth.”
CHAPTER FOUR

“Fro Fantome and Illusion / Me Save!”: The House of Fame as Anti-Nominalist Nightmare

1. Toward a Realist Reading

Literary critics have frequently found—and traced to nominalism—a skeptical vein in Chaucer’s House of Fame. Robert Edwards locates the poem “in a tradition of skepticism and nominalism” (120), for example, while William Franke claims that a nominalist belief “in the intrinsic lack of representational integrity of language” underwrites the work’s “profound skepticism” (104).¹ For these and other literary-nominalist readers of Chaucer’s text, nominalism impugns knowledge by sundering language from reality and so, as Holly Boucher says, making “thought an autonomous and limited sphere, not securely bound to… truth” (215).² Accordingly, they maintain that Fame

¹ Laurence Eldredge and Sheila Delany, the first scholars to see nominalism in Fame, are convinced that nominalists amount to skeptics. For Eldredge (who mistakenly calls nominalism “the Via Moderna”; on this label, see footnote 3 of Chapter Three), the acceptance of a “third value in logic justifies the application of the term ‘skeptic’ to followers of the Via Moderna” (“Chaucer’s Hous of Fame” 109, his italics). For Delany, the rejection of real universals leads nominalists to a “[s]keptical fideism” (Chaucer’s House of Fame 21). She explains that a nominalist like Ockham, asked such questions as “how, if the abstract class ‘mankind’ has no real existence, mankind can be said to have sinned in Adam or to be redeemed in Christ” (Literary Politics 37), “could make no other defense than pure faith” (Literary Politics 168). In turn, these critics’ interpretations have influenced subsequent scholarship. As Ann Astell observes, “[m]uch has been made of what Sheila Delany calls Chaucer’s ‘skeptical fideism,’ of the possible impact of nominalist philosophy… on his world view and artistic creation” (22). For instance Edward Foster, in his book on Chaucer’s so-called Nominalist Fiction, asserts that “what Delany says about The House of Fame” is “apt,” although in his view Delany does not take her characterization of Chaucer as a nominalist far enough (5, his italics). A. Inskip Dickerson founds his study of how “skepticism is manifested and expressed by the poetic method of The House of Fame” (171, his italics) not only on Delany’s, but also on Eldredge’s work (171). Franke, for whom “the nominalist controversy” undermined faith in the “tenet that signs signify real things” (89), approvingly cites Delany’s argument (105); Edwards refers favourably to Delany, Eldredge, and Dickerson (166–7).

² More fully, Boucher’s influential “Nominalism: The Difference for Chaucer and Boccaccio” defends the thesis that “[n]ominalism entailed a critical shift in thinking about language, which necessarily affected contemporary concepts of literature” (214). Boucher asserts that, due to nominalism’s rise, by the era of Boccaccio and Chaucer “[c]oncepts and the words that expressed them had become relative” because “[t]he firm bonds between signifier and signified… had become unraveled,” as “had the necessary tie between sign and reality” (215). “Words,” she declares, “could no longer be assumed to fit the shape of reality because of their origin in a real world of ideas beyond the mind,” and as
embraces nominalism insofar as it skeptically depicts a division between words and the world—a disjunction that cleaves the work’s narrator from truth or reality and leaves him trapped in signs.\(^3\)

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\(^3\) For example, Hugo Keiper and Robert Jordan alike claim that *Fame* in particular (and Chaucer’s poetry in general) joins postmodern literature in “foreground[ing] the problematic, shifting and multiple relationship between signifiers and signifieds, thus undercutting their potentially stable, unambiguous relation in favor of multiplicity of meanings and ambiguity of (textual) semiosis” (Keiper, “I wot myself” 207). Keiper states that *Fame* very nearly constitutes his “hypothetical idea of a nominalist ‘text’” because it consistently undermines the relation between signs and their signifieds (“I wot myself” 232). But like other nominalist texts, including “(Post)Modern” ones (“I wot myself” 208), *Fame* therefore implies that “verbal signification, and language in general,” is “contingent,” “its referents… no more than concepts in the human mind”—that is, that signs “need not necessarily correspond to the ‘actual’ order of things, or refer to any ultimate or ‘solid’ reality ‘out there’ that can be recuperated through language in any reliable or binding ways” (“A Literary ‘Debate’” 48–9). Hence according to Keiper, the poem finally subverts the possibility of one’s reliably reaching through language to extramental reality. Similarly, Jordan, for whom “the postmodernists’ rejection of the old verities of recognizable characters, logical plots, and unambiguous meaning” produces “a critical climate of controversy and uncertainty in many ways analogous to the realist-nominalist situation in the fourteenth century” (25), proclaims that *Fame* concurs with “avant-garde” literature “in a mutual dissociation from the realist’s assumption that truth is unambiguously accessible through language” (26), abandoning “the realist requirement that the language of fiction appear to emanate from the object rather than from the mind” (32). On his view, Chaucer and postmodern authors alike suggest a kind of “[s]olipsism… in which the viewer’s mind and the medium of perception define the ‘objective’ world subjectively” (28) because *Fame*, like much postmodern work, interrupts the connection or continuity between language and extramental reality by offering consistently “self-reflexive narrative” (38). Both readings illustrate Stephen Penn’s point that literary scholars have often “found in nominalist sign theory a linguistic relativism” (162), seeing in nominalism “a world of sliding signifiers which, liberated from the centralizing force of the ‘transcendent’ signified, float free of the particular signifieds in the language system,” with the result that reality grows opaque or becomes “reduced to a kind of linguistic play” (163). Yet as Penn asserts, “these are conspicuously modern ideas” (162) which would have been “foreign and unwelcome” to “Ockhamist thinkers of the Middle Ages” (169). (Even literary nominalist Richard Utz admits that “the view of a nominalist Chaucer developed coevally with postmodern notions of the twentieth century’s own radically contingent character” [171]. For some discussion of the tendency to associate Chaucer with postmodernism, see Andrew Taylor’s “Chaucer our Derridean Contemporary?”) However, the claim that *Fame* cleaves language from reality, and thereby hinders access to the extramental world, in a “nominalist” way is not limited to critics who approach *Fame* from a postmodern perspective. Kathryn Lynch, for instance, nowhere links the text to postmodernism, but still holds, with Keiper and Jordan, that “[f]or the nominalist” there must be “something slightly arbitrary, slightly undependable, about the relation of significans to significatum” (Dream Vision 14–5, her italics). Thus because she takes *Fame* to portray the relation between signs and significates as tenuous or uncertain—and correspondingly believes the work to present “a world of individuals whose behaviors do not easily translate into any universal truth” (Philosophical Visions 79), offering “singular details” which “remain just that: singulars not universals” (Philosophical Visions 81)—she maintains that the poem “suggests that even for a soul with insight and stability of purpose the world may be so singular, so diverse, so confusing, that knowledge and dissemination of truth may still not be possible” (Philosophical Visions 82). According to Lynch, in other words, the text undercuts knowledge and communication of truth inasmuch as it depicts an irreducibly particular world (“easily recognizable as the ‘real world’” [Philosophical Visions 79]) in which signs, divorced from the “universals essential to a knowledge of God” and immutable truth (Dream Vision 30), have lost their “sacramental” character and become arbitrary (Dream Vision 14). On Lynch’s account as much as on Keiper’s or Jordan’s, *Fame*’s narrator finds himself
However, such interpretations of *Fame*, like Stephen Russell’s construal of *Pearl*, founder on the fact that medieval nominalists were not skeptics. I do not deny that the poem warrants evaluation as to some extent skeptical. To the contrary, Section 3 will grant that *Fame* does after a skeptical fashion cast doubt on the possibility of objective knowledge or extramental truth, although I shall submit that the work might be better described as containing an *idealist* strain. Nor do I deny that there are at least plausible grounds for connecting *Fame* with nominalism. For as will be clarified shortly, the poem may indeed constitute an imaginative answer of a certain kind to the nominalist philosophical vision of division between language and reality. Nevertheless, since nominalism is not of itself skeptical, *Fame*’s affirming nominalism would not account for skepticism in the text.

In Chapter One we saw that medieval nominalists denied that their perspective imperils objective knowledge. However, we also noted that realists remained unconvinced. Nominalists would have rejected Russell Peck’s allegation that “[n]ominalistic thought” indicates “the likelihood of one’s being prisoner to his own ideas,” but for their part realists held that nominalism leads to idealism (757). These reflections invite the realist reading of *Fame* advanced in the present chapter. More exactly, they position us to propose that, if the work resonates with the fourteenth-century realist-nominalist debate at all, it is more reasonably regarded as informed by a realist outlook on which nominalism begets idealism than as affirming an essentially skeptical or idealist nominalist view. *Fame*’s presupposing a realist opinion of nominalism could explain why the text, as we shall see, can more plausibly be taken to parody than to portray the nominalist vision of division. In brief, I

in a condition John Gardner has characterized as “nominalist befuddlement” (“Signs” 206): trapped in the text, in a linguistic domain explicitly presented as “the realm of thought” (Lynch, *Philosophical Visions* 74), he experiences firsthand the “nominalist position” that individuals, sundered by signs from external reality, cannot acquire objective knowledge through language and, consequently, “can never understand each other” (Gardner, *Poetry* 206).
suggest that literary-nominalist critics may in a way be right to think that nominalism informs the poem—because it is possible that a realist picture of nominalism whimsically underwrites *Fame*.

Elaborating on this claim, Section 2 will propose that at least three episodes in the poem—that of the temple of glass, that of the narrator’s flight, and that of the labyrinth—may advance a kind of caricature of the nominalist account of the relation between signs (e.g., the contents of the temple of glass or of Fame’s realm) and their significates (e.g., the scant contents of the desert outside of the temple). Section 3 will then build upon Section 2’s foundation. It will submit that, in keeping with the realist belief that nominalism yields idealism, the text presents divergence between signs and significates as obstructing one’s access to extramental reality. Finally, Section 4 will contend that *Fame* can be understood as upholding realism by reducing nominalism to idealist absurdity. On such a reading, Chaucer ultimately implies that nominalism not only interferes with objective knowledge, but even hinders transcendence, impairing the soul’s ability to rise toward the divine. And in so doing, he shows that his interests in *Fame* reach beyond questioning the nature of fame in the sense of renown, and even beyond interrogating matters of truth or falsity in love. Like the *Pearl* poet and Langland, Chaucer is concerned with the journey of the mind or soul toward God.

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4 In a way, my interpretation of the text resembles Eldredge’s construal. Eldredge maintains that “in one dimension” *Fame* “amounts to a rejection of… the Via Moderna,” i.e., nominalism (see footnote 1) ("Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*" 106, his italics). More specifically, Eldredge contends that the poem rejects the skeptical dimension of nominalism, although not, it would seem, nominalism’s other alleged dimensions (e.g., the emphasis it places on “the importance of the separate individual thing and our perception of it” ["Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*” 109] or its “leanings toward empiricism” ["Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*” 115]). Therefore while, according to Eldredge, the text advances “an anti-skeptical argument,” it does not reject nominalism outright ("Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*” 116). He proclaims that the work, or rather its narrator, “never does fully state a position opposed to skepticism,” much less a position opposed to nominalism; *Fame* does not ultimately affirm a realist outlook ("Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*” 116). Nonetheless, on Eldredge’s reading, as on mine, *Fame* does at least depart from a “thoroughgoing” form of nominalism ("Chaucer’s *Hous of Fame*” 112).
2. Language and Reality

2.1 The Temple of Glass

In the proem to Book 2 of *Fame*, the narrator, who is later called “Geffrey,” invokes the intellect or power of thought (729). “O Thought,” he says, “that wrot al that I mette, / And in the tresorye hyt shette / Of my brayn, now shal men se / Yf any vertu in the be / To tellen al my drem aryght” (523–7). Personifying thought as a writer (“wrot”) and a speaker (“tellen”), Geffrey stresses that the intellect is a linguistic power. First, it is the author of his dream—and that dream, conversely, is a kind of text or composition which “Thought” has written and recorded in Geffrey’s “brayn.” And second, the intellect (if it has sufficient “vertu”) inspires Geffrey’s own, derivative text, i.e., *The House of Fame*. The poem thus exists on two levels: in Geffrey’s mind, and on his page. The words of “Thought”—or the thoughts of the dream—precede and enable “Englissh” words (510).

These reflections suggest that Geffrey, and perhaps also Chaucer, sees thoughts as mental words. Like medieval philosophers, he seems to accept a language of concepts prior to and presupposed by the spoken and written languages of human convention. Geffrey’s dream would participate in

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5 All Chaucer quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, and all translations into modern English are mine (taking *The Riverside Chaucer*’s translations, where available, into account).

6 “O Thought, that wrote everything I dreamed, / And enclosed it in the treasury / Of my brain, now people will see / If there is any power in you / To relate my dream accurately.” As Beryl Rowland notes, Chaucer’s invocation adapts Dante’s in *Inferno* 2.8; however, “Dante specifically addresses Memory” instead of thought (“Art of Memory” 162). Michael St John comments that Chaucer “seems to ascribe a much more active function to this faculty [i.e., thought] than Dante does to memory,” inasmuch as Chaucer’s “Thought” is “responsible for both enabling [dream] images to be understood, and stored in the ‘tresorie’ ‘Of my brayn’, and then enabling what has been stored there to be read as a coherent narrative” (69). And for St John, “[t]his makes the ‘brayn’ or ‘tresorie’ seem a separate and more obvious representation of memory” than “Thought” is, so that “Thought,” in turn, means not memory but the “intellect” (69).

7 In Ruth Evans’ words, in this invocation “Chaucer represents dreaming as writing, copied down by the mind” (59).

8 Medieval philosophers tend to mistrust intellecction performed or attempted during sleep. According to Aquinas in the *Summa theologica*, for instance, an element of falsity is involved whenever the imagination represents something that is not immediately present to the senses, although normally, when one is awake, the intellect rightly judges that such-and-such a merely imagined entity is not present. Yet when the senses are suspended—as the sense of sight is during sleep—the intellect fails to play this role, misjudging whether a given imagined entity is present if it judges at
this mental or conceptual language insofar as the dream-images he beholds convey concepts, for, as a tissue of ideas made available by the imagination, it would signify whatever its ideas signify.

Geffrey considers the “signifiaunce” of his dream, and dreams in general, in the proem to Book 1 (17). He takes it for granted that “swevenes” have significance, do mean or represent something, though he wonders what a given dream may signify, and what causes it to signify as it does (3). In particular, Geffrey insists that some dreams are veridical, representing situations that actually obtain in waking life, while others signify merely possible situations not obtaining outside of the mind. By thus calling attention, in Fame’s first lines and before imparting his own dream, to the significance of dreams, Geffrey not only implies that ideas are mental signs, but also foregrounds the topic of the relation of dreams—and by extension, mental language—to extramental reality.

In fact, it has often been noted that Fame centrally explores “the relationship between literature, language, and reality” (Boitani, Chaucer 189) or “the nature of language, the relation of signs to truth” (Edwards 94). The work explicitly examines conventional language (i.e., spoken or written

all. Accordingly, Aquinas asserts that “it is not possible for our intellect to form a perfect judgment, while the senses are suspended, through which sensible things are known to us” (p. 430) (“impossibile est quod sit in nobis judicium intellectus perfectum, cum ligamento sensus, per quem res sensibles cognoscimus” [ST I q. 84 a. 8]) and that, “if a man syllogizes while asleep, when he wakes up he invariably recognizes a flaw in some respect” (p. 431) (“illi qui dormiendo syllogizant, cum excitantur, semper recognoscunt se in aliquo defecisse” [ST I q. 84 a. 8]). But although intellectual judgments go astray during sleep, conceptualization itself can and does occur; indeed, one can still form syllogisms (“contingit tamen quandoque quod aliquis dormiens syllogizat” [ST I q. 84 a. 8]), even if these are later found to be flawed. Thus the mental language of concepts may certainly be present to one while one is asleep no less than while one is awake.

9 Akio Oizumi defines “signifiaunce” as “significance, symbolic meaning” (795). Geffrey, then, is contemplating his “dream as a complete message,” i.e., as a meaningful, complex concept conveyed via symbolic images (Swinford 8).

10 “dreams.” Having listed types of dream in lines 7–11, Geffrey ponders the “gendres” (“kinds”) of significance that dreams of these sorts might possess (17). He illustrates possible causes of dreams and their meanings in lines 21–51. Throughout the proem, as Rosemarie McGerr notes, Geffrey focusses on the problem of interpreting or “judging the true significance of dreams,” going so far as to beg God (in lines 81–106) “to reward those who interpret [Geffrey’s own] dream correctly and to punish those who misinterpret it” (63).

11 In Geffrey’s words, “th’effect folweth of somme, / And of somme hit shal never come” (5–6) (“the realization of a dream follows some, / And of some this never comes about”).

12 As A. C. Spearing states, Fame’s “first proem… is concerned with the uncertainty of the relation between dreams and truth” (84).
language), as will be seen in Section 2.2, yet it has not gone unnoticed that *Fame’s* concern with language extends to mental language (i.e., concepts). The remainder of the current section will suggest that the first episode of Geffrey’s vision, which starts in “a temple ymad of glas,” depicts the relation between ideas and entities that contextualizes the dream’s subsequent scenes (120).

Upon finding himself in the temple of glass, Geffrey beholds a wealth of images: “ther were,” he tells us, “moo ymages / Of gold, stondynge in sondry stages, / And moo ryche tabernacles, / And with perre moo pynacles, / And moo curiouse portreytures, / And queynte maner of figures” than he has “ever” seen before (121–7). Already by Chaucer’s time, “temple” could denote the head, or forehead, as well as a shrine; accordingly, this image-laden temple is apt to stand for Geffrey’s image-stocked mind. We have seen that “Thought,” in the proem to Book 2, hoards its works in the “tresorye” of Geffrey’s brain; the glass temple—packed with golden images, rich niches, and precious jewels—not only immediately precedes that proem, but also constitutes a treasury itself. The shrine would thus appear to stand out as a symbol of the treasury of Geffrey’s mind or brain. Moreover, the temple and its contents recall the mental spaces and “mental pictures” described in ancient and medieval accounts of memory (Yates 33). Frances Yates points out that, according to texts including the anonymous *Ad Herennium*, Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* (2), and Aristotle’s *De memoria et reminiscentia* (33), “memory is like an inner writing” (6) any element of which is

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13 For instance, Ashby Kinch takes the work to be interested in the “verbal form of an idea as registered in the mind” (309), while Donald Howard’s analysis of *Fame* distinguishes between “speech as it exists in objective reality” and mental words or “inner speech” (“Idea” 46). B. G. Koonce likewise finds “inward speeches” of “the soul” in *Fame* (171). Lynch—noting that, in “medieval logic, there are three kinds of oratio (that is, speech or language): these are written, spoken, and thought or ‘conceived’” (*Philosophical Visions* 73, her italics)—claims that Book 3 of *Fame* to some extent explores “the language of thought” (*Philosophical Visions* 74).

14 “a temple made of glass”

15 “more images / Of gold, standing on sundry pedestals, / And more rich niches / With more bejeweled pinnacles, / And more curious portraits, / And quaint manner of figures”

16 Cf. “temple, n.2” *OED*.
an “image” or “portrait” (33). One could buttress one’s memory artificially by arranging mental portraits in an imaginary building—particularly, in the Middle Ages, “a church” (Yates 63)—and authors often applied “the word ‘thesaurus’” to such memory structures (Yates 46). Because the edifice of which Geffrey dreams is a treasury as well as a “chirche” (473), then, and also because it contains “ymages” and “portreytures” set each in its proper place, Beryl Rowland characterizes the temple of glass as “an ideal memory house” (“Bishop Bradwardine” 48). Yet if the shrine is indeed a memory structure, it must be a mental space, i.e., Geffrey’s mind or a part of his mind. Accordingly, Linda Holley describes the temple as the “space of [Geffrey’s] own thought” (113), while T. S. Miller—who observes that, “[i]n the medieval intellectual tradition, the interior of an architectural space was well established as a metaphor for… the invisible space within the mind” (479)—takes it, like other interior areas in Fame, to figure the “interior space of the mind” (484).

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17 Karla Taylor not only recognizes that, in ancient and medieval thought, “memory is verbal, and the inner words of memory (verba concepta) are themselves based on mental images,” but also aligns the verbal and visual associations of memory with “the scenes in the Temple” of glass (27, her italics).

18 Mary Carruthers similarly states that one favourite “metaphor used in ancient and medieval times for the educated memory was that of the thesaurus,” another being “a library of texts” (Book of Memory 33, her italics). Like Yates, Carruthers stresses the persistence in memory treatises of the notion “of mental image as writing” (Book of Memory 23), and she further notes that some authorities, e.g., Cicero, interchange “figures” with “images,” as Chaucer seems to do in the glass-temple scene (Book of Memory 22).

19 More broadly, Rowland deems Fame “an externalization of th[en] memory process” provided in the Ad Herennium and by Cicero as well as in a work by Thomas Bradwardine (“Bishop Bradwardine” 48), the last of which she labels a “possible source” for Chaucer’s poem (“Bishop Bradwardine” 43). Elizabeth Buckmaster elaborates on Rowland’s depiction of the glass temple as a memory structure, commenting that the church’s “images… are of the general type recommended in memory treatises—human in form, decorated with gold and jewels, set in niches so that they stand out from their settings, strikingly beautiful or grotesque” (283).

20 In passing, it must be noted that an important study of theories of memory, Janet Coleman’s Ancient and Medieval Memories, is in one respect deeply misleading. In the section entitled “Later Medieval Theories of Memory: The Via Antiqua and the Via Moderna,” Coleman declares that “the Scotist and Ockhamist epistemologies deal not only with how mind receives sense data, but how mind acts to transform such data, once internalised, and thereby gives sense experience meaning. The problem, in medieval and modern terms, is one between realists and nominalists” (464). In brief, she implies that a realist epistemology can be distinguished from a nominalist one (that of the via antiqui from that of the via moderna). But beyond the fact that the tags “via antiqua” and “via moderna” are not correctly applied to realism and nominalism, at least in Scotus’ and Ockham’s era (see footnote 3 of Chapter Three), epistemology, as observed in footnote 65 of Chapter Three, lies outside of the proper parameters of the realist-nominalist controversy.
Now because the temple is fashioned of glass, one might expect Geffrey to be able to see directly through its walls to the outside world. Indeed as Holley says, the “image of the temple of glass is itself an invitation to see through to some other space,” i.e., “to the real” (134). And granted that the shrine stands for the mind, Geffrey’s doing so would presumably stand for his perceiving the extramental through the mental, that is, to his apprehending exterior reality through his thoughts or via the “vision of his mind” (Holley 128). However, Chaucer offers no indication that Geffrey does perceive external reality.  

Geffrey merely wanders “up and doun” (140), without any sense of his or the temple’s location (129). Even when he directly faces “a wall” (141), brass obstructs its glass: “writen on a table of bras,” Virgil’s *Aeneid* hinders Geffrey’s view of the world (142).

On this occasion, mental contents—in fact mental language, a text in Geffrey’s mind—do not, as a realist might assume, reveal or mirror reality; to the contrary, they interfere. Mental words are not transparent windows on the world, Chaucer appears to imply, but opaque, obscuring reality’s contents. Importantly too, while the work Geffrey sees is a version of Virgil’s, it is not in Virgil’s original Latin. Whereas an author like Langland freely and often integrates Latin quotations into his own poem, Chaucer, or rather Geffrey, renders the *Aeneid* in an idiosyncratic way that makes

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21 Dickerson says that the temple or its contents “cannot be taken to show reality, but only [Geffrey’s] representation of it” (174). Similarly, John Finlayson asserts that here “nothing is seen *directly* and nothing that is seen is real” (50, his italics). Though filled with images, the shrine does not lead the mind through these representations to real beings.

22 Koonce identifies Geffrey’s “inability to see through” the glass temple (and its contents) as a key problem for him in this scene, taking Geffrey’s failure of vision to indicate that he “must learn to distinguish between appearance and reality” (103). By contrast, in *The Book of the Duchess* “the story of Troye” again appears as an architectural feature of the building in which the narrator’s dream begins, but does not seem to obscure the narrator’s apprehension of the outside world (326). Set not in brass but “in the glasynge” (“in the glasswork”) of the edifice itself (325), in *Duchess* the same tale by no means blocks the narrator’s sight of the “bryght, clere” morning illuminating the chamber (340).

23 Joseph Grennen notes, with respect to the glass temple, that “glas” means “not only glass but *speculum* or mirror” (“Chaucer” 254, his italics); similarly, Laurence Shook states that the “Temple of Glass is more than likely a temple of mirrors” (348). Regarding Wyclif and the other Oxford Realists’ conviction that mental signs perfectly blueprint, reveal, or mirror reality, see Section 2.3 of Chapter One.
it unmistakably his.24 “I wol now synge, yif I kan, / The armes and also the man” (143–4): “yif I kan” has of course no counterpart in the Aeneid’s “Arma virumque cano.”25 Dido’s monologue on Aeneas’ falsity and “wikke Fame” is likewise not from Virgil (349), and in fact does not even derive wholly from “the Epistle of Ovyde” (Heroides 7) (379).26 Thus the text on the table is not literally Virgil’s, for it strays from Virgil’s conventional language, Latin, and from his assertions. Instead, it is Geffrey’s translation and revision of Virgil—the Aeneid as recomposed by his mind. Hence Geffrey at one point announces, “Non other auctour alegge I” (314).27 As a text, a body of signs, the Aeneid on its brass plaque exemplifies language occluding the world; at the same time, however, Chaucer seems to stress that the problem, fundamentally, pertains to mental language.28

That the table of brass’ blocking Geffrey’s view of the temple’s surroundings denotes language’s obfuscating rather than revealing reality appears to be confirmed by the lesson the table provides. Geffrey’s inner Aeneid is devoted almost exclusively to one tale from Virgil’s poem, that of Dido and Aeneas, which in turn emphasizes the capacity of signs to obstruct perception of what is real, or at least what is actual. Dido’s death follows, we learn, from her failure to see through Aeneas’

24 In Karla Taylor’s words, “the dreamer’s recreation of the Aeneid differs from the original in a way that is almost a personal signature of a new authorship” (28). Similarly, María Hernández Pérez states that Geffrey “supersed[e]s the Virgilian account and… present[s] the narration from his own point of view” (16). Albert C. Friend takes Chaucer’s poem “to follow the arrangement of the Ilias of Simon Aurea Capra,” but simultaneously insists on the “free” nature of Chaucer’s adaptation (317) and the “marked… difference” between Chaucer’s text and Simon’s (323). As regards Langland’s use of Latin quotations, see Tim Machan’s “Language Contact in Piers Plowman.”
25 “I will now sing, if I can, / The arms and also the man”; “Arms and the man I sing” (“Arma virumque cano” [1.1]).
26 “wicked Fame”; “the Epistle of Ovid.” J. A. W. Bennett states that Geffrey “is reading Virgil, as Ovid himself had taught him to do, through Ovid’s eyes” (Chaucer’s Book of Fame 35). Despite the influence of “the pathetic epistle in Heroides, vii” on Fame, though, Bennett stresses the discrepancy between Ovid’s Dido and Chaucer’s (Chaucer’s Book of Fame 35, his italics). In particular, he observes that Dido’s linking Aeneas with other liars in an overarching critique of fame is an “excursus of [Chaucer’s] own devising” (Chaucer’s Book of Fame 36).
27 “I cite no other author.” Curiously, Geffrey insists he has “mette redely” (313) (“dreamed truly”) Dido’s “wordes” even as he disavows their independent authorship (312).
28 Recognizing the work on the brass table as in the first instance made up of mental rather than conventional written terms positions us to account for Geffrey’s description of the table’s contents as simultaneously “peynted” (211) and “graven” (212). We may say that Chaucer deploys this ambiguity to emphasize that the text is not perceptible via the senses, as a work in conventional language would be, but only via the mind apprehending ideas expressed by mental images which, as noted above, are described interchangeably in memory treatises as both portraits and inner writing.
appearance to his true nature: “Wenynge hyt had al be so / As he hir swor,” Geffrey relates, Dido “demed / That he was good, for he such semed. / Alas! what harm doth apparence, / Whan hit is fals in existence! / For he to hir a traytou was; / Wherfore she slow hirself” (262–8). This grim result of signs or semblances that belie reality moves Geffrey to decry male falsity more broadly. He says that “every woman” will “fynde” (279) that men “shewen outward the fayreste” but may be foul within (281); quotes Dido as saying “have ye men such godlyhede / In speche, and never a del of trouthe?” (330–1); catalogues “fals” men (393, 397, 405); and likens such persons to that which is not gold and yet “glareth” (272). Through the example of Aeneas’ deception of Dido, then, the Aeneid leads Geffrey to focus on signs that are not conducive to apprehension of truth.

It is apt that the Dido episode related by Geffrey centres on the truth, or rather falsity, of Aeneas’ words and deeds in the context of his love affair with Dido, for the subject of truth in love lies at the heart of Geffrey’s encounter with and interest in signs and their correspondence to reality in the shrine he takes to be “of Venus… / The temple” (130–1), as well as, on one axis, at the heart of Fame as a whole. Indeed, it is just possible that Fame, as a coterie poem, not only examines “the truth about love” but even hints at the truth about a particular love affair much discussed in Chaucer’s social sphere (Dickerson 172). But however immediately pertinent Dido’s reflections

29 “Believing it had all been so / As he swore to her,” Dido “deemed / That he was good, for such he seemed. / Alas! What harm apparence does, / When it is false in existence! / For he was a traitor to her; / Hence, she killed herself.”

30 “present outwardly the fairest front”; “have you men such righteousness / In speech, but not any truth?”; “glitters”

31 McGerr notes that Fame’s “ambiguous presentation of Aeneas… focuses on his use of words and the difficulty of discovering their true significance” (66). Similarly, Sklute comments that “the false appearance and false promise of Aeneas… is the only part of the [Aeneid] that [the narrator] chooses to exemplify” (38), while Stephen Kruger states that Geffrey’s version of the Aeneid is “about how ‘apparence’… may falsely mask the truth” (“Imagination” 122).

32 As Dickerson underlines, “Geffrey is a would-be love poet who cannot know about love from his own experience because he is not himself a lover” (172). Accordingly, the eagle who abducts the narrator in Book 2 (see Section 2.2) claims that Geffrey will receive “tydynges / Of Loves folk” (644–5) (“tidings / Of Love’s folk”) as “recompensacion / Of labour and devocion / That [he] hast had, loo causeles, / To Cupido” (665–8) (“recompense / For the labour and devotion / That he has had, without cause, / To Cupid”).

33 Claims to this effect abounded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, in 1928 Frederick Riedel suggested “that Chaucer was led to write the poem on account of an unfortunate incident in the career of John
regarding male falsity in love may have seemed to *Fame’s* early audience, we must not lose sight of the fact that, as has been said, the poem’s concern with truth extends beyond the specific topic of the truth about love to the relationship between truth and appearance or reality and signs more generally—and on that broader level, too, the text may have appealed to the social circle Chaucer initially addressed. For as David Jeffrey notes, “[w]e cannot… avoid the considerable probability that Chaucer was familiar with Wyclif’s ideas, or further, that a good deal of Chaucer’s thought,” as well as Wyclif’s, was “congenial to the group of court and literary friends with whom Chaucer most associated himself” (114). Notably, Paul Strohm has shown that Chaucer’s “core-audience” included those court figures generally called the “Lollard knights” (29), followers of Wyclif who “would certainly have been familiar with Wyclif’s writings” (Lynch, *Philosophical Visions* 24). And while it is impossible to determine to what extent, if any, the Lollard knights may have been familiar with Wyclif’s *philosophical* writings, any aware of the realist-nominalist conflict would have pricked up their ears at Chaucer’s imaginative exploration of the relationship between signs and significates and would have been predisposed to favour the realist viewpoint of their mentor.

With respect to the question of realism and nominalism, Chaucer’s treatment of the Dido story is of potential interest inasmuch as, if what has been said above about the table of brass is justified,
the table’s contents as well as the table itself stand opposed to the spirit—if not the letter—of the realist stance. To clarify, realists need not claim that all signs, or even all concepts, signify actual things. Even Wyclif, for whom each concept properly signifies a real thing, holds that some ideas represent unactualized possibles (and consequently admits that unactualized possibles are real). Accordingly, realists would gladly grant that signs do not always signify truths, if by “truths” we mean “actual things”; indeed, it is precisely the fact that all and only true sentences signify actual states of affairs that makes these sentences true. The brass table’s banal reminder that signs can lie, therefore, scarcely threatens the realist position. But I am not suggesting that Chaucer intends it to do so. What I am suggesting is that the table, by inciting contemplation of signs that conceal what is actually real, tends to underline what its impeding the external world already implies: the failure of signs, in Geffrey’s dream, clearly or straightforwardly to reveal what is in general real. However, this situation, at least insofar as it involves mental signs, runs afoul of the fundamental realist intuition that language straightforwardly correlates with and illuminates reality’s contents. Overall, Chaucer is readily regarded as illustrating a scenario at odds with the realist perspective.

A construal of the episode beginning in the glass temple as counter-realist gains momentum from Chaucer’s portrayal of “[t]he real world” outside of the shrine (Kiser 29). When Geffrey exits the church, “only more confused than before” by the table of brass (Baswell 226), he finds a desolate space, a “feld” (486) that, like “the desert of Lybye” (488), “nas but of sond” (486). This desert

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34 On Wyclif’s acceptance of unactualized possibles, and other non-categorical beings, see Chapter One, Section 2.3.
35 Medieval thinkers sometimes understood “truths” not as “actual things,” but simply as “real things.” For example, Alessandro Conti says that “Wyclif actually replaces ens with verum” and so implies that “[t]ruth is… the true name of being itself” (138, his italics). On the role of actual states of affairs as truth-makers, see Chapter One, footnote 66.
36 “field”; “the desert of Libya”; “was of nothing but sand.” Geffrey reaffirms his disorientation and perplexity—and also makes it clear that it is precisely this bewilderment that leads him to leave the shrine (or as St John says, that his “desire for knowledge encourages him to leave the temple” [78])—when he muses, “not wot I… / …where I am, ne in what contree, / But now wol I goo out and see” (474–6) (“I do not know… / …where I am, nor in what country, / But now I will go out and see”).
is strikingly empty, devoid of anything “formed be Nature” (490). Its vacuity conflicts sharply with the “richesse” characterizing the temple’s interior (474). Whereas that inner domain teems with treasures, this outside region exhibits an utter lack of clutter. Stripped bare of all beings but sand, the desert landscape Geffrey faces is a perfect symbol of ontological scarcity or parsimony, ideally geared to figure what Gyula Klima calls “the type of ‘desert landscape’ a nominalist likes to see in his ontology” (“Nominalist Semantics” 165). Klima’s metaphor serves to show that, if the glass temple stands for Geffrey’s mind, the desert can be aptly taken to stand—not merely for the extramental world—but more exactly for an ontologically thinned or frugal nominalist world.

The desert’s being exhaustively made up of sand enables us to elaborate the above interpretation. As the very stuff or substance of the desert, sand could naturally symbolize substance. Moreover, sand reappears in *Fame* in the form of “greynes… of sondes,” a locution that reduces the original image of (seemingly undifferentiated) desert sand to one of individual sand particles (691). The work may thus be hinting that substance, the stuff of reality, is ultimately reducible to particulars.

37 “formed by Nature.” The desert also excludes artifacts (any “toun” or “hous”) except for the temple of glass (484). Kruger describes it as “a stark landscape stripped of structures both natural and artificial” (“Imagination” 123).
38 “riches” or “abundance.” Rowland stresses that “the vast desert outside is the antithesis of th[e] rich and crowded ‘chirch’” (“Art of Memory” 167).
39 It is also, as is often observed, a symbol of sterility—perhaps even moral sterility or, in Koonce’s words, “spiritual death and aridity” (127). It is even possible that Chaucer associates lean nominalist ontologies with moral sterility or spiritual aridity—for, as we saw in Section 4 of Chapter One, some fourteenth-century realists deemed knowledge of real universals, which are of course jettisoned by nominalists, to be necessary for right moral action.
40 In Book 2, the eagle informs Geffrey that in Fame’s realm there are “moo berdys in two houres / Withoute rasour or scisour / Made then greynes be of sondes” (689–91) (“more deceptive utterances in two hours / Without razor or scissors / Made than there are grains of sand”). The Riverside Chaucer glosses “berdys” as “tricks, delusions,” but in this context I render it “deceptive utterances” since the eagle is speaking specifically of what Geffrey, upon reaching Fame’s abode, “shall here” (672) (“will hear”). Especially considering that the eagle is comparing (a certain class of) signs or statements with (a certain class of) things, i.e., grains of sand, it is tempting to regard his reference to a razor as an allusion to Ockham’s razor and, hence, the desire for ontological economy characteristic of (though not unique to) nominalist thought. This proposal, however, is probably untenable. For according to W. M. Thorburn’s early but still widely accepted claim in “The Myth of Occam’s Razor,” the phrase “Rasoir des Nominaux” first emerges in the eighteenth century and the phrase “Occam’s razor” does not appear until the nineteenth century (349–50, his italics).
Because the desert excludes all materials but one—which is unqualified in Geffrey’s description, being neither explicitly red nor yellow, torrid nor tolerable—as a figure for extramental reality it would provide no clue that English nominalists admitted diverse substances as well as qualities.\footnote{Cf. Chapter One, Section 2.2. As there stated (footnote 33), some Continental nominalists admitted quantities also.}

Without compromising the desert’s symbolic value, Chaucer might easily have figured a range of substances and hinted at the existence of qualities by, say, adding clay or rocks of various hues.\footnote{John Steadman stresses that “[i]t is the sandy nature of Chaucer’s desert which is its most significant feature. This characteristic differentiates it from most of its analogues, except the deserts of Lucan and Dante” (196).}

In brief, the desert may seem, although well suited to designate ontological parsimony, altogether too empty to depict a nominalist ontology fairly. I do not think, though, that Chaucer means to do justice to nominalism. Rather, if he engages with nominalism at all, I believe that he lampoons it, exaggerating its austerity to elicit a realist intuition—that nominalism’s impoverished ontology is inadequate to found or anchor thought. Sand would be instrumental in conveying this conviction.

By placing the crowded temple in a vacant field of sand, Chaucer, on the reading here developed, imaginatively presents an asymmetry between the mind and reality, the church’s contents and the desert’s. This lack of parallelism concurs with Geffrey’s failure in the temple to gaze forthrightly through to exterior things; indeed, because almost nothing exists beyond the shrine to be grasped, it can hardly surprise us that Geffrey’s awareness ends at signs. Simultaneously, though, Chaucer may be implying that the mental is founded on the extramental in a fragile or precarious way, for the temple rests on—and being glass, is made from—sand, the outer world’s single component.\footnote{McGerr points out that the desert’s “very fine sand provides the basic ingredient for creating the glass temple that sits upon it” (68).}

But glass is of course delicate, while sand offers a notoriously poor foundation for construction.\footnote{Critics have often called attention to the glass shrine’s tenuousness and fragility while linking its precariousness to its sandy base; for example, McGerr avers that the temple’s resting on sand attests to the shrine’s being “based on an unreliable foundation” (68), while Alastair Minnis insists that “the large amount of glass in the temple… is a symbol}
By surrounding the image-rich shrine with a landscape empty of materials sturdier or stabler than sand, then, Chaucer plausibly aligns asymmetry between concepts and entities with instability or fragility. On such a reading, he would seem to be suggesting that ontological paucity provides an inadequate foundation for knowledge, leaving concepts tenuous and insecurely anchored. Hence though Geffrey’s entering the desert indicates his (somehow) coming to enjoy a direct encounter with the extramental world, that world endows him with no solid understanding. Finding nothing to “rede or wisse” him reliably, he can little hope to escape the clutches of ungrounded thought.45

2.2 The Narrator’s Flight

Airy speculation, in the form of an airborne eagle, seizes Geffrey as Fame’s second book begins. Even at the end of Book 1, Chaucer hints that the fowl that will fly the narrator from the desert to “Fames Hous” is perhaps to be equated with thought (881), for Geffrey, relating his first glimpse of the bird, says only, “Me thoughte I sawgh an egle sore” (499, my italics).46 Beside the sun and at the very edge of his vision (“faste be the sonne, as hye / As kenne myghte I with myn yë”), the apparition causes Geffrey to question whether he indeed sees a creature, or merely thinks he does (497–8).47 And the eagle’s unnatural size and colour only strengthen the impression that the fowl is a projection of the narrator’s mind.48 In Book 2, however, Chaucer makes it clear that the eagle is reducible or equivalent to thought—that it is, as Michael St John affirms, “a representation of

of the very insubstantiality of the structure—which is *entirely* made of glass” and therefore “not a structure… to rely on” (192, his italics).

45 “advise or direct”

46 “I thought I saw an eagle soar.” According to James Winny, the eagle’s arrival is also anticipated by the “appeal to [the narrator’s] ‘Thought’” between Book 1 and Book 2 proper, that is, in the proem to Book 2 (87). Cf. Section 2.1.

47 “Right beside the sun, as high / As I might perceive with my eye”

48 Geffrey avows that the bird “semed moche more / Then [he] had any egle seyn” (500–1) (“it seemed much larger / Than any eagle he had seen”) and that “[h]yt was of gold, and shon so bryghte / That never sawe men such a syghte” (503–4) (“it was of gold, and shone so brightly / That people have never seen such a sight”). He adds in Book 2 that the eagle’s speed is also unnatural: “But never was ther dynt of thonder, / Ne that thyng that men call foudar, / … / That so swithe gan descend / As thus foul” (534–5, 538–9) (“But never was there blast of thunder, / Nor that thing that people call ‘thunderbolt,’ / … / That so swiftly began to descend / As this foul”).


‘Philosophy’ and of ‘Thought’” (84). Here, the bird’s connection with intellection emerges not only from its reference to “Aristotle and daun Platon” (759), nor solely from its mention and use of “termes of philosophie” (857), but also from the fact that Geffrey himself associates the eagle with “Boece, / That writ, ‘A thought may flee so hye / Wyth fetheres of Philosophye, / To passen everych element’” (972–5). In Chaucer’s translation of The Consolation of Philosophy (Book 4, Prose 1 and Metre 1), Lady Philosophy states that she possesses “swift feathers that surmounten the heighte of the hevene,” promises to “fycchen fetheris in your [Boethius’] thought,” and states that thought, “clothid” in “fetheris,” “despiseth the hateful erthes” (441). As Philosophy carries Boethius on a mental journey past the “erthes” by lending him her feathers, so the eagle of Fame avails Geffrey of its feathers, wafting him in “fantasye” from the realm of mundane beings (593).

But while the eagle’s flight, like Philosophy’s, denotes “the flight of Thought” (Boitani, Chaucer 191), the world from which the fowl carries the narrator is, on the present reading, an ontological wasteland largely denuded of beings. As suggested in Section 2.1, it constitutes an impoverished foundation for cognition, and so the reader may already suspect that the eagle which materializes in and departs from the desert stands not simply for thought—but more precisely for ill-grounded thought. Indeed, Chaucer may be gesturing toward a construal of this kind by depicting the bird

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49 A. C. Spearing likewise regards the eagle as “a personification of philosophical thought itself” (Dream-Poetry 76).
50 “Aristotle and master Plato”; “philosophical terms,” e.g., “demonstracion” (727), “ conclusyoun” (848), or “prove / Be reson” (707–8) (“prove / By reason”); “Boethius, / Who wrote: ‘A thought may fly high enough / With feathers of Philosophy, / To surpass every element’”
51 “swift feathers that surmount the height of heaven”; “fetch feathers to your thought”; “despises the hateful earth.” Cf. Boethius’ Latin (which, when referring to metrical as well as when referring to prose parts of the Consolation, I here and henceforth cite by page numbers rather than by line numbers): “Sunt etenim pennae volucres mihi / quae celsa conscendant poli”; “Pennas etiam tuae menti… adfigam”; “velox mens induit / terras perosa despicit” (101). Boethius goes on to say that swift thought, flying high, finally unites with or resembles the sun (“joyneth his weies with the sonne” [441] [“joins its ways with the sun”]); cf. Boethius’ Latin: “Phoebo… coniungat vias” (102). So too, Geffrey relates that “yf the heven had ywonne / Al newe of gold another sonne; / So shone the egles fethers bryghte” (505–7) (“if the heavens had obtained / Another golden sun completely new; / So shone the eagle’s bright feathers”).
52 Delany rightly states that, “[f]rom beginning to end, the Eagle’s speech relies on tautology, analogy, non sequitur, reductive simplicity, abuse of the syllogism, circular reasoning, and ‘proofs’ that prove nothing” (Chaucer’s House
as unswervingly directing its attention away from the earth and never touching the ground. Since eagles were known for their visual acuity—as Chaucer attests in *The Parliament of Fowls*, where he asserts that “the royal egle… / …with his sharpe lok perseth the sonne” (330–1)—the eagle of *Fame* might be expected to have a penetrating “bird’s eye view of the created universe” (Leyerle 256). Yet to the contrary, Geffrey, though “astonyed and asweved,” is more observant than the bird (549). Suzanne Akbari notes that the keen sight associated with eagles is “reserved for the narrator” in *Fame*, who is able to gaze “at the brilliant bird which seems itself ‘another sonne’” (204). Thus the bird asks Geffrey what the latter can see of the earth, instead of pointing out its details to Geffrey. For its own part, the fowl gazes fixedly upward as it proceeds “alway upper to sore” (961), telling Geffrey likewise to “turn upward… [his] face” (926) and “cast up [his] yë” (935). And although it *must* descend, of course, in order to seize its prey, it seems disinclined to make contact with the earth. It drifts only “somwhat dounward” (508), abducts the narrator “in a swap” from the air without alighting on or even touching the ground, and immediately turns back toward its ethereal home (543). Hence—perhaps because the earth or reality contains little for it to apprehend and lacks any perch with better purchase than sand—the eagle, or the intellection for which it stands, fails to ‘ground’ itself before conveying Geffrey ever farther from the world.

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53 “the royal eagle… / …with its sharp look pierces the sun.”
54 “bewildered and dazed”
55 Akbari cautions, however, that “even the narrator’s visual capacity is limited” (204).
56 The narrator says that he “adoun gan loken” (896) (“began to look down”) until “al the world… / No more semed than a prikke” (906–7) (“all the world… / Seemed to be no more than a dot”). His doing so moves the eagle, whose attention is given to how “high” they are (914), to ask, “Seest thou any toun / Or ought thou knowest yonder doun?” (911–2) (“Do you see any town / Or anything you know down there?”). The eagle proceeds to discuss, not the earth, but only the heavens and visionary journeys into “this large space, / This eyr” (926–7) (“this large space, / This air”).
57 “always upward to soar”; “cast up his eye”
58 The eagle claims to be “dwelling with the god of thonder, / Which that men callen Jupiter” (608–9).
As befits a symbol of ill-grounded cognition, the eagle does not transport Geffrey, as Philosophy does Boethius, from beings to the highest Being, God, the uncreated Word. To the contrary, the bird, advancing from so empty a world, offers only human words—“tydynges”—that prove to be similarly vacuous (675). It lifts Geffrey to the “propre mansyon” (754) of “every word… / That lowd or pryvee spoken ys” (809–10), where, it promises, he will hear “wonder thynges” (674). Inasmuch as “every word that spoken ys / Cometh into Fames Hous” (881–2), Fame’s domain is “a universe of discourse” (Hanning 141), a “world of words” deriving but distinct from the world of represented entities (Hanning 142). Indeed, Fame herself embodies speech. But if Fame’s

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59 In *Der Adler und die Nachtovle*, Carlos Steel examines the use, in the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, not only of the bat or the night owl as a symbol of cognitive limitation, but also of the eagle as a symbol of intellectual acuity. He observes that, in the longstanding debate regarding whether and how humans can grasp “reinen unstofflichen und unbewegten Substanzen” like “Gott, die Intelligenzen und die Seelen” in the present life (7), the eagle serves as “das Gegenbild des Nachtvogels,” i.e., the night owl, because, “[w]ährend dieser das Licht der Sonne nicht ertragen kann, ist der Adler in der Lage, geradewegs zur Sonne zu fliegen und ihr Licht direkt anzuschauen” (14). More fully, Steel shows that many philosophers, including Averroes and Albert the Great, held that although a given person’s intellect initially resembles the night owl and so cannot apprehend transcendent realities, “da kann er sich durch unablässiges Studium und Abstraktion zu einem Adler entwickeln. Durch Übung können wir also Adler werden und so zur Sonne fliegen—weit entfernt von aller Sinnlichkeit” (23). By contrast, Aquinas—whose position, however, “war sicherlich zu seiner Zeit keine ‘commnis opinio,’” being “heftig bekämpft… nicht nur von den Philosophen der Aresfakultät, sondern auch von Kollegen in der theologischen Fakultät” (19, Steel’s italics)—denied such a possibility, claiming, instead, that “[e]in mittelbarer Zugang zu den tranzendenten Wesen ist nicht möglich, denn… erstreckt… sich unser Geist unmittelbar nur auf sinnliche Vorstellungen” in this life (18). Regardless of whether Chaucer was aware of this debate (which was extraneous to the conflict between realists and nominalists), Steel’s text confirms the importance of the eagle as a symbol of intellectual ascent or transcendence in the context of medieval philosophy, underscoring that a mind that has become like an eagle through the exercise of philosophy, if indeed there are such minds, can and should rise from perceptible beings to God. Accordingly, it is particularly striking that Chaucer’s “eagle, the feathers of Philosophy,” fails to lift “his mind beyond the clouds of mortality to a clear understanding of truth” (Tisdale 260).

60 “tidings.” The fact that the eagle conduces to conventional language explains not only its extreme loquaciousness, but also why critics such as Katherine Zieman have considered it a “representation of [conventional] language” (83).

61 “proper dwelling”; “every word… / That is spoken aloud or secretly”; “wonderful things”

62 Grennen points out that Fame’s realm, which the eagle says stands “in myddes of the weye / Betwixen hevene and erthe and see” (714–5) (“in the middle of the way / Between heaven and earth and sea”), is “a manifest impossibility if those three regions are to be conceived as concentric spheres” (“Science” 45). The impossibility of this domain of words seems to exclude it from objective reality and thus to accentuate the division between language and the world.

63 As Britton Harwood remarks, “Lady Fame, who gets her name from fari, ‘to speak,’ is predication itself” (346, his italics). Again, Boitani asserts: “Fame gives things their ‘duraucioun’ and above all their ‘name’; and if ‘name’ means ‘reputation,’ there is no doubt that it also means what we all understand by ‘name’—nomen…. Chaucer’s ‘Goddesse of Renoun’ is a Fame-Language. ‘Fama a fando, id est, a loquendo’” (Chaucer 215, his italics). The etymology of “fame” both critics cite reflects Isidore of Seville’s well-known, and correct, derivation of “fama” from “fari,” which Martin Irvine also sees as “an important gloss on Chaucer’s ‘Lady Fame’” (861). McGerr notes that “the ‘fame/name’ rhyme,” which “appears once in Book I but eighteen times in Book III,” emphasizes Fame’s “linguistic nature” (75).
domain is that of speech, and more broadly of conventional language, it is also a place of “fals and soth compounded” (1029), a realm of “sothe sawes and lesinges” intermingled and confused (676). Having floated away from reality, language has here become incoherent, its expressions a “swogh” (1031) as empty as the “betynge of the see… / …ayen the roches holowe” (1034–5).

That the eagle rises to meaningless conventional language may itself be a function of the fact that the bird sets out from a ‘deserted’ world. For as observed in the first chapter of the current study, medieval philosophers held that the mental language of thought is prior to conventional language (first speech and then writing), so that conventional statements signify or have meaning by virtue of their correlation with concepts. Accordingly, it appears only fitting that thought inadequately grounded in the extramental world and hence bereft of due significance—the type of thought the fowl betokens—would give rise to conventional statements which are also insufficiently founded and likewise lack meaning. And in fact, in Book 3 Geffrey explicitly affirms that Fame’s “castel” (1161), the culmination and epitome of her linguistic land, rests on “a feble fundament” (1132).

Corresponding to the tenuously founded glass temple from which the narrator begins his flight in

64 The eagle hints that Fame’s subjects include written as well as spoken expressions, for, as Carruthers observes, the fact that the words or statements in Fame’s land “are clothed in red or black, according to the ink in which the letters forming these words were written” appears to imply that Fame’s domain contains not just “all the voices, the parole, of human beings,” but also all words or statements expressed “in language’s graphic form, its manuscript painture” (Book of Memory 225, her italics). Baswell and Karla Taylor make the same point. Baswell remarks that the “figures clad in red or black” are “letters come to life” (238); Taylor, that “the red or black in which [words or statements] may be clothed suggests black-letter manuscripts with red capitals and rubrics” (34). That written as well as spoken signs subsist in Fame’s realm is confirmed in Book 3 when Geffrey finds writers qua writers (“hem that writen olde gestes” [1515]) (“those that had written old histories”) represented in a “halle” (1514) of Fame’s castle (1429–1512).

65 “false and true compounded”; “true sayings and lies”
66 “great sound of wind”; “beating of the sea… / …against the hollow rocks”
67 See Chapter One, Section 1 (including footnote 2). In Calvin Normore’s words, “Spoken and written terms signify things in the world, but they do so in subordination to mental terms” (“Ockham” 56). That is, “The signification of a spoken [or written] term is a function of that of the corresponding mental term,” so that “the significations of spoken [or written] terms and the truth-values of spoken [or written] sentences are completely fixed by the corresponding mental terms” (Normore, “Ockham” 55). And more generally, the “relation of natural sign to the object that it ‘signifies’ is the nexus of knowing and meaning (significatio)” (Tachau, Vision 18, her italics). The meaning or signification of spoken and written signs, then, is a function of spoken or written signs’ correlation with mental signs, which, in turn, have meaning by virtue of being related to objects as natural signs of those objects.
68 “feeble foundation.” We will revisit the foundation of Fame’s castle in Section 2.3.
the talons of thought, this palace of conventional language at that journey’s end is at least equally ill-grounded. It would seem that, if the former structure stands for the mind or sphere of concepts while the latter (or the realm its occupant rules) denotes the domain of conventional expressions, then the mind’s fragile foundation in extramental reality leads, via the eagle of thought, to poorly grounded conventional language—i.e., to speech and writing wanting in significance or meaning. Hence though on one level the precariousness of Fame’s home of course reminds us of the truism that fame, in the sense of “renown,” is fickle (a lesson more fully illustrated in lines 1520–1867), it also, on the more philosophical level pertaining to fame insofar as “fame finds its essence… in the primary medium of communication, language” (Amtower 275), coheres with and contributes to the glass temple’s situation to bolster the impression that signs lack solid foundations in Fame.

The glass temple and Fame’s castle resemble each other not only insofar as both are precariously founded, but also inasmuch as both are translucent. The palace is not fashioned of glass, but does have “walles of berile,” a pellucid gem (188). Much as Geoffrey seems unable to see forthrightly through the walls of the shrine, however, but must pass “out at the dores” to perceive the exterior world, so too he cannot look straightforwardly through the castle’s walls (480). Rather, he relates that the palace’s beryl walls “shoone ful lyghter than a glas / And made wel more than hit was / To semen every thing” (1289–91). They do not reveal (or, perhaps, do not reflect: the narrator’s comparison of their light to that of “a glas,” and not simply to that of “glas,” implies that he may be thinking of a mirror), but instead distort, “every thing” beyond them. Taking the temple and the palace together, one can understand Chaucer as suggesting that language—whether mental or

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69 “walls of beryl.” McGerr describes “Fame’s palace” as “a more complex version of the temple of glass” and notes that its “walls… call to mind the temple walls in Book I” (74).
70 “shone far more brightly than a glass / And made everything seem / To be much more than it was”
71 The MED cites this use of “glas” in Fame as an instance of the word in its sense of “a glass mirror, looking glass”; cf. “glas, n.2(c).”
conventional—does not reveal or reflect reality, but rather alters or refracts it. In other words, he may be painting a picture on which language, by magnifying or multiplying what the world truly contains, engenders a semblance of plentitude that overwrites reality’s actual ontological paucity.

An asymmetry between language (or at least conventional language) and the world emerges from the eagle’s characterization of Fame’s subjects even before Geffrey reaches her domain. The bird explains: “Whan any speche ycomen ys / Up to the paleys, anon-ryght / Hyt wexeth lyk the same wight / Which that the word in erthe spak, / By hyt clothed red or blak; / And hath so verray hys lyknesse / That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse / That it the same body be, / Man or woman, he or she” (1074–83). Words, then—and in fact not only words, but “any speche” (766), “what so ever… / Is spoken” (716–7)—take on visible form in Fame’s dwelling (721–2). Geffrey will encounter not real, full-blooded beings at his flight’s end, but representations of beings, signs or images that reproduce things “in erthe” in their complete and concrete detail. In keeping with the status of Fame’s land as a site of language, he will see only “texts… not the reality they claim to be representing” (Kiser 37). And crucially, all of these representations reproduce individuals. Regardless of whether a given sign is a singular term or a common term, one word or a sentence, it represents an individual (or, when multiple people say the same thing simultaneously, multiple individuals). Thus all the signs in Fame’s linguistic realm represent or signify particular things.

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72 “When any speech has come / Up to the palace, promptly / It becomes like the same person / Who spoke the word on earth, / Be it clothed in red or black; / And has so truly the likeness of the one / That spoke the word, that you will guess / That it is the same body, / Man or woman, he or she.”
73 So too Irvine: “In the House of Fame there are only texts, personified by the images of the auctores” (875, his italics).
74 Winny calls attention to the “individual nature” and “sharp particularity” of these representations (93).
75 E.g., when in Book 3 a “huge companye” (1607) of Fame’s suppliants “crie, ‘Lady, graunte us now good fame,’” it seems that a single utterance (“Lady, graunte us now good fame”) represents all members of that company (1609).
The eagle’s claim that spoken—and by extension, written—expressions represent the individuals producing them resonates, like the description of “how sound is transmitted” that the fowl offers shortly before describing Fame’s subjects, with the “perspectivist theory of the multiplication of species” (Akbari 179). According to the perspectivists, all material objects generate ‘sensible species’ of themselves, which then multiply through the air (or other media) into the senses and the mind. A sensible species is a “likeness or image caused by an object” (Tachau 11), namely

76 The eagle offers the analogy of waves multiplying outward from a stone that has been cast into the water: “yf that thow / Throwe on water now a stoon / Wel wost thou hyt wol manke anoon / A litel roundell as a sercle, / Paraunter brod as a covercle; / And ryght anoon thow shalt see wel / That whel wol cause another whel, / And that the thriddle, and so forth, brother, / Every sercle causynge other / Wydder than hysmelve was; / And thus fro roundel to compas, / Ech aboute other goynge / Causeth of othres sterynge / And multipyinge ever moo, / Til that hyt be so fer ygoyo / That hyt at bothe brynkes bee” (788–803) (“If you / Now throw a stone into water, / You know well that it will promptly make / A little circular ring, / Perhaps as broad as a pot lid; / And straightway, you will well see / That that wheel will cause another wheel, / And that a third, and so on, brother, / Every circle causing another / Wider than it was itself; / And thus from small circle to full circumference, / Each going about another / Causes the stirring of others / And, ever more, their multiplying / Until it has gone so far / That it is at both banks”).

77 The definitive study of perspectivism in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England remains Katherine Tachau’s Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham (1988). Tachau demonstrates that—although scholars even by the end of this period continued to debate such questions as “whether, for existential certitude, not only a sensitive but also an intellectual intuition was required, or whether representative images [i.e., species] could be sufficiently distinguished from the objects they represented to avoid existential error” (312)—they overwhelmingly concurred in accepting at least the broad outline of “the doctrine of the ‘multiplication of species’” developed largely by Roger Bacon (4), particularly as refined by Scotus, whose “integration… of the theory of the multiplication of species within a new account of knowledge… appeared to clarify and tighten up the most obvious loose ends” of that theory (54). For Bacon, the multiplication of species is a physical process the ramifications of which extend into “psychology, epistemology, and semantics” (Tachau, Vision 6). He claims that “a visible object generates, or ‘multiplies’ species of light and colour in the adjacent, transparent medium. These species, which Bacon also calls ‘virtues’ or powers, ‘forms,’ ‘images,’ ‘similitudes,’ ‘phantasms,’ and ‘intentions,’ generate further species in the medium contiguous to them, which results in a continuous multiplication of species along rays proceeding in all unobstructed directions from all points on the object’s surface. These visible species convey the object’s accidents through the intervening medium, which serves as their substance, to the eye of the viewer, upon which they are, loosely speaking, ‘impressed’” (Tachau, Vision 8). Moreover, “the processes of the other external senses… can, mutatis mutandis, be understood in the same way” (Tachau, Vision 8, her italics). And once impressed upon the external senses, “each species continues to be multiplied,” according to Bacon, “into the cavities of the brain housing the internal senses” until it reaches “the intellectual powers” (Tachau, Vision 11). But at this point, “it became usual” for perspectivists writing after Bacon “to hypothesize the abstraction of an intelligible species” produced by “an intellectual faculty” (Tachau, Vision 11); cf. footnote 108. Scotus, for example, admits that a process of “abstractive intellecction” (Tachau, Vision 60) or “abstractive cognition” through species occurs (Tachau, Vision 68). However, he influentially insists not only that “the intelligible species” are “mental terms” (Tachau, Vision 62) or “concepts” (Tachau, Vision 65), each “functioning as a sign to its object” (Tachau, Vision 62), but also that perceivers, or at least human perceivers, enjoy “intuitive cognition” as well as abstractive cognition (Tachau, Vision 69). Through the process of intuitive cognition, which is “concurrent” with the process of abstractive cognition, one enjoys “immediate, direct contact with objects” (Tachau, Vision 69). Intuitive cognition is a sort of intellecction which is not, like abstractive cognition, “indifferent to existence,” but which is instead “precisely of existence” (Tachau, Vision 71, her italics).
the “generating object” (Tachau, Vision 18). And as an image of the object causing it, a sensible species constitutes a “natural sign” of that thing (Tachau, Vision 18) and “represent[s] reality” to an extent (Tachau, Vision 16–17, her italics). As a likeness of its producer, a sensible species can clearly enough be assimilated to the sort of “lyknesse” that the eagle affirms—particularly since, as Katherine Tachau stresses, the perspectivists held that “[l]ike every other entity, the uttered (or written) word is capable of generating species that, in turn, multiply through the sense of hearing (or sight) into the inner senses” (Vision 19). But while Ockham himself rejected perspectivism, other nominalists as well as realists in England continued to endorse it. Perspectivism lies, then, outside the bounds of the realist-nominalist debate. If it informs the eagle’s description, its doing so does not by itself offer any indication of either realism’s or nominalism’s underpinning Fame.

No less than other medieval thinkers, however, the perspectivists insisted that spoken and written expressions signify conventionally as well as naturally, i.e., insofar as they are humanly imposed

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78 Sensible species should not be confused with species either in the sense of specific signs (for instance, the concept of humanity) or in the sense of specific entities (for example—if real universals like this exist—common humanity).

79 Of course, Chaucer takes poetic liberties with the theory of perspectivism. For example, a sensible species would not actually, contrary to what the eagle asserts of the likenesses that reach the realm of Fame, amount to a complete likeness of its generating object on a perspectivist view. Instead of representing all of its cause’s properties, that is, a species would constitute a likeness of just one of that object’s accidents (e.g., its colour). Furthermore, a species of a written word would indeed constitute a visible likeness of that word as written on the page, but would not constitute an image of the writer of that word—except, maybe, in the indirect sense that the word on the page is itself an effect generated or transmitted to that page by the writer and thus could be considered an image of her or his act of writing. Further, Akbari notes that the eagle “tells the narrator that the ‘tydynges’ they hear are not uniform and indivisible, as species must be, but are instead,” at least in some cases, “composite, ‘of fals and soth compound’d’” (208).

80 “Ockham did not establish a school of Ockhamists,” Tachau reports, “and he did not even succeed in displacing visible species… even in Sentences commentaries. On the contrary, most scholars defended such mediators precisely because they thought the perspectivist account of vision [and the other senses], and of the psychological processes originating in vision, more adequately accounted for the observed phenomena than did the alternative that Ockham posed” (Vision xv, her italics). She finds it “unlikely that [Ockham] gained many” adherents “to his views on cognition” by Wyclif’s time and declares that “there is no reason to suppose that Ockham’s views gained greater conviction for later readers,” either (Vision 310). “In fact,” Tachau adds, “there are indications that his positions did not” (Vision 310). Among nominalists writing after Ockham, for example, both Holcot (Tachau, Vision 244–55) and Wodeham retain sensible species (Tachau, Vision 278–310).
to designate beings as well as insofar as they are, by nature, sounds or sights caused by objects. Further, spoken and written expressions come under the dispute between realists and nominalists not at the level of natural signification, but rather at the level of conventional signification. For it is only through their conventional subordination to concepts that spoken and written signs might be taken to signify not just singular entities but also, say, real universals or real states of affairs. The eagle, though, never so much as alludes to conventional signification. And one upshot of this glaring omission is that, inasmuch as the fowl does refer to representation, it creates an unalloyed impression of semantic-ontological asymmetry. It paints a picture of how conventional signs (the signs in Fame’s domain) stand to significates that bypasses even the possibility that conventional signs parallel reality as they, or more exactly as the mental signs to which they are subordinated, do for realists. Thus while the perspectivism informing the eagle’s words implies that individuals alone answer on one level (i.e., that of natural signification) to conventional signs, the impression that only individuals answer on any level to conventional signs—a situation opposed to the spirit of realism—arises chiefly from the bird’s attendant failure to mention conventional signification.

The omission of conventional signification from the eagle’s discussion stands out most plainly in its attempt to elucidate the nature of speech. In a lecture indebted, as Martin Irvine has shown, to the “medieval ars grammatica” (850, his italics), the bird avers that speech “[i]n hys substaunce

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81 Bacon, for instance, “includ[es] species among natural signs” (Tachau, Vision 18, her italics), but also recognizes that a given spoken or written word is not a natural sign or image of the thing “the word was imposed to designate” or signify since “[i]f words were such images, then words would be exactly alike in all languages” (Tachau, Vision 18). Similarly, Scotus distinguishes “between artificial and natural likenesses,” explaining that spoken and written words (unlike concepts) “are artificial likenesses” of the things they are imposed to signify “inasmuch as words are conventional,” although they are also natural likenesses of the objects that generate them (Tachau, Vision 66).

82 Because real universals would be abstract entities while real state of affairs would not even be categorical entities, they clearly could not of themselves generate sensible species. Conversely, sensible species, including those caused by speaking or writing, could not be natural signs of real universals or real states of affairs. So, if a spoken or written word is to signify a real universal or a real state of affairs, it could do so only as imposed to represent that being.
ys but air” and that sound (768), such as the sound of speech, “ys noght but eyr ybroken” (756). Irvine traces both claims to Priscian’s Institutiones grammaticae, one of the grammatical works “with which readers like Chaucer would have been familiar from postelementary grammar and private reading” (852). Additionally, he maintains that the eagle “proceeds like a lecturer on the first topic of ars grammatica” (861, his italics), namely “vox, the vocal utterance as… vehicle of discourse” (854, his italics). But notably, the fowl does not continue to the “second topic” of ars grammatica, “the relation between signifier and signified” (Irvine 856). As Boitani points out, its oration “on physiological linguistics” ignores the crucial fact that “a word is not only sound,” but also has “meaning, significatio” (Chaucer 212, his italics). In effect, the bird’s account of speech eradicates the role of (conventional) signification—even though medieval grammarians, for their part, foregrounded the subject of signification to such an extent that vox came to seem accidental to their discipline. Moreover, Geffrey himself has signification in mind, for he questions “what thing” his abduction “may… sygnifye” (587) and whether he will be transformed into a heavenly sign (586). Yet the eagle dismisses such matters. And since it leaves no room for signification,

83 “in its substance is but air”; “is nothing but broken air”
84 More exactly, Irvine associates the assertion that “[s]poken utterances have a corporeal substance—air” (855) and the definition of sound as “struck or beaten air” (856) with the Institutiones grammaticae as glossed by Peter Helias: “The Eagle indicates the genus of ‘spech’—‘soun’—in a way closely parallel to Peter Helias’ definition… and then proceeds to the topic of substance,” offering “statements which translate comments like those in [Peter’s] Tractatus super Priscianum” (864, his italics).
85 Irvine mentions “Priscian’s Institutiones grammaticae and its body of commentary, Isidore of Seville’s Etymologiae sive origines, Vincent of Beauvais’s Speculum doctrinale, and the Catholicon by John Balbus” as texts that Chaucer would likely have encountered (853, his italics).
86 Thomas of Erfurt, e.g., explains that “expression, in so far as it is expression, is not considered by the grammarian, but in so far as it is a sign, it is, since grammar deals with the signs of things, and because the expression is the most suitable sign among other signs, therefore expression, in so far as it is a sign, is considered by the grammarian before other signs of things. But because being a sign is a property of the expression, therefore the grammarian, in considering expression, does so accidentally” (Bursill-Hall 149) (“vox, inquantum vox, non consideratur a grammatico, sed inquantum signum, quia grammatica est de signis rerum; et quia vox est habillissimum signum inter alia signa, ideo vox inquantum signum pries consideratur a grammatico, quam alia signa rerum. Sed quia esse signum accidit voci, ideo grammaticus considere vocem, considerat eam per accidentis” [148]).
87 Geffrey relates: “I / Gan for to wondren in my mynde…. / Wher Joves wol me stellyfye” (583, 586) (“I / Began to wonder in my mind…. / Whether Jove would turn me into a star”). In “Stellification and Poetic Ascent in the House of Fame,” Dean Swinford calls “stellification” “a signifying practice in that the end result of stellification serves as a sign of the character thus transformed” (2). He argues that “stellification, like signification, refers to meaning, to the
the bird blurs speech and empty sound together as indiscriminate “speche or soun” (824). Irvine accordingly comments that the fowl “reduces significative utterances… to their natural substance and genus—air and sound—and disrupts the relation between signifier and signified” (857), and, in the same vein, Edwards remarks that “language loses its power of representation” for the eagle and “seems hardly capable of saying anything at all” (109). The background of grammatical texts against which the bird’s talk proceeds does not only, however, make the absence of conventional signification from its account extremely conspicuous. It also throws light on the fowl’s oversight.

Irvine finds that the “widely circulating glosses that accompanied Priscian’s works” (853), many of which were written by the “speculative grammarians” (856), “are especially relevant” to Fame (853). Not only the “intricacies of modistic speculative grammar,” though, but the fundamental relationship between a thing and a word image”; affirms “the term’s significance as a kind of writing”; and links the topic of stellification as it appears in Fame to “the essentially written” and spoken nature “of the world of fame” (4). He also discusses the theme of “homosexual domination” implicit in Geffrey’s allusion to “Ganymede” (at line 589), noting that this reference adds an element of willful imposition, motivated by desire or pleasure, to the “act by which the gods write humans into the skies” (15). Adapting Swinford’s reading, I would suggest that Geffrey’s Ganymede reference points to the willfully imposed, ad placitum character of stellification in Chaucer’s poem—a character also evident, of course, in the eagle’s act of forcibly abducting the narrator. But the willful or ad placitum imposition of a sign renders that sign, not natural, but conventional. So when Geffrey wonders what his being abducted signifies and what his being stellified would signify, he seems to be considering these events as conventional or non-natural signs. 88 “Thow demest of thyself amys,” cries the bird, “For Joves ys not therabout— / I dar wel putte the out of doute— / To make of the as yet a sterre” (596–9) (“You judge amiss about yourself! / For Jove has no intention— / I dare well put you out of doubt— / To make a star of you just yet”). The fowl goes on to tell the narrator that it serves “Jupiter” and carries Geffrey to Fame at that god’s behest, but it never bothers to address the significance of its mission (609).

89 It cannot be an accident that—although the eagle is associated with language from the instant that Geffrey reports, early in Book 2, that it “spak” to him “[i]n mannes vois, and seyde, ‘Awak! / And be not agast so, for shame!’ / And called [him] tho by [his] name” (555–8) (“spoke”; “in a human voice, and said, ‘Awake! / And be not so aghast, for shame!’ / And called [him] tho by [his] name”)—its shrill “Awak!,” which recurs at line 560, is as much a birdcall as a meaningful human word. Throughout its flight, this brute beast endowed with human “vois” hovers (pun intended) between significant and insignificant utterance. Especially given that a bird “can make a noise but cannot utter voces articulatae” for Priscian and his commentators (“since no irrational animal utters a vox from the discerning power of the mind so that the utterance may have the intention of signifying”), Irvine regards the eagle as “a grammatical joke which calls attention to the nature of speech and the rational faculty of signifying” (860, his italics).

88 Irvine mentions “the commentary known as the Glossule super Priscianum majorem, Peter Helias’s Summa super Priscianum, the gloss known as Promisimus, and the… Tractatus super Priscianum majorem attributed to Robert Kilwardby… which subsumes earlier commentary” (853, his italics). He also notes, not as regards any particular text but with respect to the broader intellectual climate in which Chaucer wrote, that “[f]ourteenth-century Oxford was a lively center of grammatical studies” (852). As observed in footnote 5 of our Introduction, it is possible that Chaucer attended Oxford University. If at Oxford University (or elsewhere) Chaucer’s “studies extended to natural science or
viewpoint and assumptions of the speculative grammarians were essentially realist (Irving 852). Karen Fredborg insists that, as early as “the first half of the twelfth century, grammatically well-formed sentences… are those which would satisfy logicians of a ‘realist’ tendency as regards the doctrine of universals” (186). Grammarians of this realist disposition—whose writings, although contested in the fourteenth century by “nominalist grammarians,” remained uneclipsed (Bursill-Hall, “Introduction” 18)—were called “speculative” not only in Aristotle’s sense of “theoretical” (Covington 21), but also “in the sense that language mirrors the ‘reality’ which… underlies the phenomena of the physical world” (Bursill-Hall, Speculative Grammars 31).91 Furthermore, the term “speculative grammar” had come to be “used exclusively by and for modistic grammar” by the “late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries” (Fredborg 177). G. L. Bursill-Hall underscores that the Modistae, even more staunchly than earlier speculative grammarians, were “not nominalists” (Speculative Grammars 39), but scholastic “realists” who granted “the existence of the universal in the individuals” (Speculative Grammars 40).92 Both “grammarians and logicians” (Covington 22), they held that, in order for a sign to have objective significance or “to function realistically” (Bursill-Hall, “Introduction” 38), there must exist a close “correspondence between language and

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91 As Jan Pinborg remarks, “nominalists… renounced the theoretical framework of modistic grammar” (“Speculative Grammar” 269). But though “the fourteenth century appears to have been the scene of constant controversy between the Nominalists and the Modistae,” the “nominalist grammarians” themselves failed to provide an equally satisfying “philosophical grammar” and hence did not undercut the influence of the Modistae (Bursill-Hall, “Introduction” 18).

92 For instance, the so-called “the high point of Modistic theory” (Bursill-Hall, “Introduction” 28), Thomas of Erfurt, tells us that “in things we find certain common properties or common modes of being” (Bursill-Hall 153) (“in rebus invenimus quasdam proprietates communissimas, sive modos essendi communissimos” [152]). Affirmations of real universals dot the works of the speculative grammarians, even those prior to the Modistae; for instance, Peter Helias (c. 1150) proclaims that “names that signify substances signify some and denominate others, for this name ‘human’ denominates singular humans but signifies a certain universal” (“nomina que significant substantias aliud significant et aliud nominant, quoniam hoc nomen ‘homo’ singulos homines nominat sed universale quiddam significat” [192]).
reality” (Lombardi 99), an “isomorphism between word, concept, and object” (Pinborg, “English Contribution” 30). Accordingly, Chaucer may have adapted the eagle’s discussion of the nature of speech from works including grammatical texts which were stamped with a decidedly “realist orientation” and presumed that mind-independent signification presupposes semantic-ontological parallelism (Kelly 176). And in that case, since realists such as the Modistae regard meaning as dependent on semantic-ontological symmetry, the bird’s neglect of signification can be read as a symptom of nominalist ontological reduction and resulting asymmetry between signs and beings.

The absence or disturbance of meaning that the eagle’s remarks imply, and that awaits Geffrey at his flight’s end, has led some critics to see nominalism in *Fame*. Medieval nominalists, though, would no more agree that nominalism ‘disrupts the relation between signifier and signified’ than

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93 Bursill-Hall also remarks that “Modistic grammatical theory results from a complete interdependence between the structure of reality and the operations of the mind” (“Introduction” 24), while Elena Lombardi insists that “reality is mirrored in language” for the Modistae (97). So for instance Thomas of Erfurt, whose “view of language as a mirror is fundamental to [his] whole grammatical theory,” contends that each expression must straightforwardly reflect one being in order to be meaningful (Bursill-Hall, “Introduction” 43). Or as Thomas puts this, “since… active modes of signifying are not fictions, it follows necessarily that every active mode of signifying must originate basically from some property of the thing” (Bursill-Hall 137, 139) (“cum… modi significandi activi non sint figmenta, oportet omnem modum significandi activum ab aliqua rei proprietate radicaliter oriri” [136, 138]). On Thomas’ account, the isomorphism between an active mode of signifying—i.e., a “mode or property of the expression vouchsafed by the intellect to itself by means of which the expression signifies the property of the thing” (Bursill-Hall 135, his italics) (“modus, sive proprietas vocis, ab intellectu sibi concessa, mediante qua, vox proprietatem rei significat” [134, 136])—and its significate is so complete that entities stand in one-to-one correlation to active modes of signifying and may, accordingly, be considered modes of signifying themselves, namely passive modes: “The passive mode of signifying is the mode or property of the thing as signified by the expression” (Bursill-Hall, 135, 137) (“Modus significandi passivus est modus, sive proprietas rei, prout est per vocem significata” [136]). If such an isomorphism did not exist, active modes of signification would be mere “figmenta,” failing to signify objectively. The Modistae thus make the realist belief that objectivity presupposes language-reality parallelism a central principle of grammar.

94 The possibility that realism underwrites the eagle’s discussion can only gain momentum from Grennen’s argument that the bird’s terminology “suggests the strong likelihood that [Chaucer] is here indebted to Burley” (“Science” 44). For although Grennen maintains more specifically that Chaucer follows Burley’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics* instead of Burley’s more metaphysical or logical treatises, Chaucer’s being acquainted with *any* of Burley’s writings would seem to bolster the probability of his being familiar with others and thus of his encountering Burley’s realism.

95 For example, Sarah Powrie proceeds from examining the narrator’s flight in *Fame* (and how it “rewrites the flight sequence from Alan’s [Alan of Lille’s] *Anticlaudianus*”) to aligning Chaucer with “nominalist philosophers” (255, her italics). More precisely, she proceeds from recognizing that “words lose their signifying power” or “are emptied of their content” in *Fame’s* land (256) to suggesting that this loss or disruption of meaning accords with nominalism inasmuch as, she believes, *Fame* and nominalists alike affirm the “instability of linguistic signifiers” (252), i.e., how “words gather or lose meanings in the flux of their use” (255–6).
they would take their position to cut thought adrift, like the eagle, from its extramental moorings. To the contrary, the concern that language would misrepresent reality if only individuals existed to answer to signs—as only individuals answer to the sundry signs in Fame’s domain—sits better with the intuitions of fourteenth-century realists. For as stressed in Chapter One, realists believed that nominalism compromised the ability of concepts (and derivatively, of conventional terms) to signify real entities and permit objective knowledge. Similarly, the picture Chaucer develops of a gulf between words and the world so profound that language comes to distort reality can scarcely be considered a charitable portrayal of the refractive relation between signs and their significates that nominalists grant, but can be understood as a comical exaggeration of that relation such as a realist might offer. It therefore appears more reasonable to hold that a realist view of nominalism underpins the scene of the narrator’s flight than to construe the episode as presupposing a frankly nominalist stance. But if realism does inform Fame, the wish “to lernen” (1088) or for “science” and illumination (“lyght”) that Geffrey retains upon reaching Fame’s realm seems doomed since, as we also saw in Chapter One, realists maintained that all real science is of real universals—and it is clear that no real universals will be found where only signs of singular beings abide (1091).\footnote{Real science (scientia realis) is discussed in Section 2.3 of Chapter One.}

In the absence of real universals, a thinker might struggle indefinitely through semantic corridors without ever arriving at knowledge of the extramental world incorrectly represented by language.

### 2.3 The Labyrinth

If Fame’s first book illustrates the relation between the mind and the world (the glass temple and the desert) and its second book follows ill-grounded thought or mental language (the eagle) from the world to conventional language, its third book focusses on conventional language. Especially
in the initial scene of Book 3, Chaucer depicts speech and writing as essential to cultural memory and transmission, but also as transitory, liable to abuse and inconsistency, and highly arbitrary. However, his imaginative analysis of conventional language also distinguishes “two ‘houses’” in Fame’s “linguistic realm” (Howard, “Flying” 6): the palace proper to the region’s ruler and, “in a valeye, / Under the castle, faste by, / An hous” (1918–20) so “queyntelych ywought” (1923) that it resembles “that Domus Dedaly, / That Laboryntus cleped ys” (1918–21). The present section examines the labyrinth scene rather than the palace scene because conventional language appears in the castle as actually spoken or written—whereas, in the maze, conventional language appears as elaborated by “thought” in relation to external reality (1924). At least on one level, therefore, the labyrinth episode revisits and may comment on the relationship between concepts and beings.

Situated at the very foot of the palace, the maze occupies a fundamental place in Fame’s domain. Indeed, “Fame’s establishment is utterly dependent” on the labyrinth (Minnis 213) insofar as the

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97 The fact that “the pillars supporting [Fame’s castle’s] roof are the premier poets (mainly historical) of the Western literary tradition” (Karla Taylor 32)—whose work collectively “constitutes the sum of secular historical knowledge” (Sklute 43)—leads Miller to associate Fame’s land with “the collective human memory” (490). Along similar lines, Irvine describes the “[l]iterary discourse” effectively set on pedestals in Fame’s palace as “a form of memory which perpetuates what Fame institutes” (862). But at the same time, Geffrey calls attention to the transience of the signs in Fame’s realm when, finding the foundation of Fame’s castle to be engraved with “names” (1137) some of which are partly “molte away” (1145) (“melted away”), he remarks, “But men seyn, ‘What may ever laste?’” (1147). He later discerns conventional language’s potential for abuse and inconsistency when he perceives “a little envy” (1476) (“a little envy”) among the poets supporting the roof and states that “[o]n seyde that Omer made lyes, / Feynynge in his poetries, / And was to Grekes favorable” (1477–9) (“one said that Homer made lies, / Feigning in his poetry, / And was favourable to Greeks”). Finally, though perhaps most importantly, conventional language’s arbitrariness appears throughout the scene in which Fame judges her petitioners, deciding capriciously and without “any comprehensible sense of fairness” (Kiser 37) whether or not particular figures who “have no names” will receive them in this or that given instance (Zieman 84). Fame’s arbitrarily wielded power to bestow names certainly refers in part to her power to determine reputations by distributing or suppressing reports, yet her assignment of names “could not mean simply that Fame is assigning the tiding as a reputation, since the tiding is exactly a reputation… awaiting assignment” (Harwood 349). That Fame arbitrarily imposes names may more fundamentally point toward the fact that, according to medieval thinkers, spoken or written terms were originally arbitrarily imposed to name or designate entities. But Geffrey shows little interest in Fame’s arbitrariness as such (or in arbitrary, conventional language as such), for he asserts that “the arbitrary working of Fame is not what he came to see” and forthwith leaves the palace (Winny 101). 98 “in a valley, / Under the castle, nearby, / A house”; “elaborately crafted”; “that House of Daedalus / That is called ‘Labyrinth.’” As regards the lower house of Fame’s realm, the labyrinth, Kinch notes that critics “influenced by the source of this section of the poem in Ovid’s description of Fama in Metamorphosis… have consistently misread this space; most refer to it as the House of Rumour” even though this name at no point appears in Fame (307, his italics).
latter functions as a “workshop where… raw materials are received and prepared” for the former (Hanning 147). More precisely, the maze receives sensations—e.g., sights and sounds, including utterances—and from these forges new statements which, once expressed, subsist in the castle.99 That is, it shapes the conventional expressions over which Fame presides and, in so doing, serves her and belongs to her empire. Moreover, the labyrinth’s proximity to, and thus association with, the “roche of yse” upon which the palace sits confirms that the maze supports the castle in a way that involves language (1130), for the rock is covered with words and may recall a manuscript.100 Yet the labyrinth is a linguistic space not just inasmuch as it yields conventional expressions, but also in its own right; as Penelope Doob observes, “it is woven of multicoloured twigs” and so “is literally textus” (328, her italics).101 Since the maze is productive of linguistic expressions as well as intrinsically textual or linguistic, Doob calls it a “nest of language” and a “labyrinth of words” (330), while Eugene Vance, citing similar considerations, labels it “a labyrinth of language” (31).

That the maze converts sensations into expressions suggests that the labyrinth betokens the mind. Such a construal is confirmed by Geffrey’s statement that the maze “ever mo” revolves “as swyft as thought” (1924), for this simile, as Ashby Kinch points out, reveals “an underlying premise of this space: the workings of the mind are here exteriorized in physical form” (307). Moreover, the

99 The eagle tells Geffrey to expect “syghtes and tydynges” in the labyrinth (2010). Geffrey later asserts that “[e]very tydnge” travels “streght to Fame” (2111) (“straight to Fame”), who immediately proceeds to assign “ech hys name” (2112) (“each its name”).
100 Cf. footnote 97. Kathy Cawsey proposes that a phrase in Fame describing the icy foundation of Fame’s palace—a phrase which The Riverside Chaucer, following a suggestion advanced in 1902, renders “alum de glass” (1124)—be amended to “alymed glas” (Cawsey 976). She shows that “alymed glas” is not only consistent with some manuscript and early print editions of the poem (unlike “alum de glass,” which occurs in none of “the manuscript and early print authorities”), but also that, because “the context for most of the early uses” of the verb “limnen” (or “to illuminate”) “is explicitly manuscript” and refers to “letters limned” (976, her italics), one is “left with an image of the names on the ice mountain lined with or coloured by light, like the golden illumination on a beautiful manuscript” (977).
101 Geffrey declares that the maze is “mad of twigges, falwe, rede, / And grene eke, and somme… white, / Swiche as men… / …make of these panyers, / Or elles hottes or dossers” (1936–40) (“made of twigs, yellow, red, / And also green, and some… white, / Such as men… / …make into wicker bread baskets, / Or else into wicker baskets carried on the back or wicker baskets carried on the backs of horses”).
fact that Geffrey can access the labyrinth only with the help of the eagle aligns the maze with the mind provided that the fowl stands for thought.\footnote{The bird’s sudden reappearance in the poem coincides with a flash of thought, for Geffrey reports that he noticed the eagle perched nearby only at the instant he began to muse upon the maze (1988–91). The eagle itself then claims that Geffrey cannot enter the labyrinth without its assistance because Geffrey lacks the understanding needed: “oon thynge I the telle, / That but I bringe the therinne, / Ne shalt thou never kunne gynne / To come into hyt” (2002–5) (“I tell you one thing: / That, unless I bring you therein, / You will never know the trick / Of coming into it”).} But perhaps most importantly, the labyrinth is, of course, “a labor-intus (and ‘Laboryntus’ is Chaucer’s spelling)—the suffering and labour that accompanies intellectual and artistic work” (Boitani, \textit{Chaucer} 211, his italics). In a text to which Geffrey has previously alluded, \textit{The Consolation of Philosophy}, Boethius refers to the arguments of Philosophy as a labyrinth, remarking, in Chaucer’s translation, that his mentor has “woven” an intellectual “hous of Didalus” (Book 3, Prose 12, p. 439).\footnote{Although Boethius’ original sentence—“Are you playing with me,” I asked, ‘weaving an inextricable labyrinth with arguments, which indeed you at one time enter where you would exit, but at another time exit where you would enter…?’ (“Ludisne, inquam, me inextricabilem labyrinthum rationibus texen, quae nunc quidem qua egrediaris introeas, nunc vero quo introieris egrediare…?” [94–5])—does not directly refer to Daedalus, the “inextricabilem labyrinthum rationibus” certainly denotes a mental maze, i.e., the convoluted reasoning to which Philosophy appears to subject her auditor. Similarly, the madly spinning labyrinth Geffrey encounters in \textit{Fame} seems in the first instance to involve a wild and bewildering web of ideas, while the added mention of Daedalus, the artist \textit{par excellence}, may point toward the expression of thoughts by means of human art or custom, i.e., in the form of conventional language.} The labyrinth Geffrey finds in \textit{Fame} and compares to the “Domus Dedaly” also appears to be a mental maze or “hous of Didalus.” As Doob comments, this labyrinth is “an intellectual or epistemological maze, a perfectly imagined transformation of the traditional physical labyrinth into a mental one” (329–30). But as a locus of “interior or mentalistic” effort, Geffrey’s maze seems to figure the mind (Howard, “Idea” 45).\footnote{Kinch, for whom the labyrinth illustrates “the dizzying abundance of the mind,” submits that the ‘comparison to the ‘Domus Dedaly’ figures for Chaucer the complexity of mental labour, and associates this space with… mental processing capabilities” (306).} We may even more specifically maintain that, insofar as we find it engaged in the production of expressions, the labyrinth in \textit{Fame} stands for the mind labouring to formulate conventional signs.

As a symbol of the mind, the maze in a way brings the text full circle back to the temple of glass.

But whereas concepts (or the “ymages” that convey them) are presented in the temple episode as
statically enshrined in the mind—immured from the outside world, like relics, within their glass confines—ideas are depicted in the labyrinth scene as participating in a dynamic transaction with external reality. Geffrey’s repetition that “never rest is in that place” emphasizes that the maze is a site of active process (1956), and the rhyming of “ywrought” (1923) with “thought” with which the episode opens intimates that the formative process occurring here is a conceptual one (1924). More exactly, the labyrinth reworks, or reconceives, information from extramental reality before, like an “engyn” or catapult (1934) casting a “ston,” it flings the fruits of its inner effort to Fame’s castle (1933). As James Winny notices (107), this instance of “engyn” looks back to the proem to Book 2, just after the glass-temple scene, where Geffrey invokes the aid of Thought’s “engyn” to turn his dream into writing (528). There as in Book 3, Chaucer takes up the topic of transforming concepts into conventional signs. Only in the labyrinth episode, though, does he portray the prior step in the process that ultimately yields speech or writing: the translation of things into thoughts.

Inside the maze, the sensible data received—particularly the tidings gathered and reprocessed for expression—multiply like the sensible species of the perspectivists and the thoughts which these species occasion. Geffrey says that “every tydyng” (2076) is propagated through the labyrinth by being repeated “evermo with mo encres / Than yt was erst” (2074–5). Here, as Vance remarks, “the principle that prevails… is rampant inflation” (32). And in fact, the whole process in which the tidings in the maze participate can be understood in terms of perspectivism. More precisely, we may say that tidings and other sensible species, having been transmitted through the air to the labyrinth, are then sensed or apprehended without impediment, continuing in through “entrees / As fele as of leves ben in trees / In somer” (1945–7), all of which “dores” (1952), as well as over

105 “evermore with more increase / Than it was before”
a “thousand holes” in the roof (1949), stand “opened wide” (1952) both “be day” (1951) and “be nyght” (1953).\textsuperscript{106} Geffrey insists that nothing hinders species’ access to the maze: “Ne porter ther is noon to lette / No maner tydynges in to pace” (1954–5).\textsuperscript{107} But once received into the labyrinth or mind, sensible species become mental contents—first mental images and then concepts.\textsuperscript{108} As a mental image, a species signifies a given “thing’s form as it is perceived in a concrete situation. Thus, a person looking at a tree receives some entity representing the tree exactly in the way it is given in that situation: as an object with a certain colour, a certain shape, etc.” (Perler, “Things” 232). But by contrast, a concept does not represent a form as concretely sensed; it “represents the pure form of the thing. Thus, after receiving a sensible species of a concrete tree, the… intellect abstracts” from the species a concept of the tree’s form as “stripped of all individual qualities and all perceptual circumstances” (Perler, “Things” 232). The maze can be understood to contain not only sensible species or their mental images, but also concepts elicited from these mental images.

Geffrey proclaims that the labyrinth is “ful of” individuals, e.g., “shipmen and pilgrimes” (2122), “pardoners” (2127), and “messagers” (2128). However, “what he contemplates here is not reality as such,” but reality as “transformed into its… sign” (Boitani, \textit{Chaucer} 210). Moreover, the signs he sees in the maze—the images in the mind—“are concrete” representations (Boitani, \textit{Chaucer} 211). On a perspectivist construal, they will stand for mental images. Yet as John Finlayson says,

\textsuperscript{106}“entrances / As many as there are leaves on trees / In summer”; “doors”; “by day”; “by night”
\textsuperscript{107}“There is no porter to hinder / Tidings of any kind from proceeding.” It is notable that, because species’ access is so straightforward, problems of knowledge raised by the labyrinth scene do not seem to stem chiefly from sensation.
\textsuperscript{108}Insofar as they are mental images, i.e., contents of the imagination, such species are “phantasms” (Tweedale 36). As Martin Tweedale explains, phantasms are “species of sensed objects” that “exist in the imagination… and in fact are produced there by the species in the sense organs” (36). The “sensory species and the phantasm are ‘impressed’ from outside the faculties” (Tweedale 37), but, whereas “the species in the sense organs… produce acts of sensory apprehension whenever and as long as they are present, those in the imagination only produce a readiness on the part of the imagination to engage in its apprehensive act” and can be “stored for use whenever needed” (Tweedale 36). By contrast, concepts or “intelligible species” (Tweedale 38) are not impressed from outside of the mind, but instead are produced from phantasms by “the agent or active intellect” (Tweedale 37).
the “scene presented is, in fact, very much more aural than visual” (“Seeing” 53). As it spins, the
labyrinth evokes exclusively audible “rounynges” from its concrete, visible individuals (1960).

It elicits talk

Of werres, of pes, of mariages,
Of reste, of labour, of viages,
Of abood, of deeth, of lyf,
Of love, of hate, acord, of stryf,
Of loos, of lore, and of wynnynges,
Of hele, of seknesse, of bildynges,
Of faire wyndes, and of tempestes,
Of qwalm of folk, and eke of bestes;
Of dyvers transmutacions
Of estats, and eke of regions;
Of trust, of drede, of jelousye,
Of wit, of wynnynge, of folye;
Of plente, and of gret famyne;
Of chepe, of derthe, and of ruyne;
Of good or mys governement,
Of fyr, and of dyvers accident. (1961–76)

Such whispers flow forth from the visible figures in the maze as the labyrinth turns those images
about, moving them to converse. Much as the intellect acts upon mental images to draw out their
abstract forms, then, the maze acts on the visible representations to extract their invisible content.

These reflections suggest taking the whispered “jangles,” or gossip, of the figures in the labyrinth
as concepts, mental words abstracted from their concrete and therefore singular trappings (1960).

But inasmuch as Chaucer presents both mental images (the images or visible figures in the maze)
and concepts (the words murmured by the images) in Book 3 of Fame, the book of conventional
language, and hence finally with an eye to the reception and expression of speech and writing, he
indiscriminately calls all of the elements in the progression from species to expressions “tidings.”

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109 “whisperings”
110 “Of wars, of peace, of marriages, / Of rest, of labour, of journeys, / Of abiding, of death, of life, / Of love, of hate, accord, and strife, / Of reputation, of learning, and of winnings, / Of health, of sickness, of comforts, / Of fair winds, and of tempests, / Of human plague, and also of animal plague; / Of diverse transmutations / Of estates, and also of regions; / Of trust, of dread, of jealousy, / Of wit, of profit, of folly; / Of abundance, and of great famine, / Of good supply, of high costs, and of ruin; / Of good or bad government, / Of fire, and of diverse accident”
As presented to the reader (and as quoted above), the tidings in the labyrinth do not initially take
the form of complete sentences, but only of isolated terms and phrases—as if the building-blocks
of sentences must be attained or abstracted before full sentences can be assembled. At least some
of these building-blocks, furthermore—e.g., “drede” and “jelousye”—seem to be common terms,
ignorable of multiple entities.111 Britton Harwood notes that many of the “whispers” in the
maze are “only predicates, time-bound actions and states” that “could… serve to characterize one
grammatical subject or another” though “none is identified” (Harwood 345). Thus “jelousye,” for
example, could be, but does not yet appear to be, predicated of any number of persons. It follows
that, if we view the tidings whispered in the labyrinth as concepts, the maze scene accommodates
common concepts. However, as the labyrinth continues to act on the images within it, it seems to
progress past abstracting terms from images. It begins to bring together images, and the words it
elicits from them, to construct simple declarative sentences: “‘Thus hath he sayd,’ and ‘Thus he
doeth,’ / ‘Thus shall be hite,’ ‘Thus herde y seye,’ / ‘That shall be founde,’ ‘That dar I leye’” (2052–4).
112 Only at this stage does a whisper obtain a truth-value, becoming “soth or fals” (272). And
finally, some simple sentences converge into more complex ones with truth-values of their own.
In at least one notable case, “fals and soth compouned / Togeder fle for oo tydynge” (2108–9).113

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111 As discussed in Section 2.1 of Chapter One, nominalists no less than realists granted concepts that are common or
universal in this sense. Realists and nominalists would agree that the common concept of jealousy, say, is predicab
of multiple things; all jealous individuals answer to this concept. Yet whereas for realists these individuals answer to
the common concept of jealousy by virtue of their sharing in a common property, universal jealousy, for nominalists
they answer to it just by virtue of singular properties (namely, their singular jealousies). Nominalists did not, though,
not admit that concepts can ever be common in a metaphysical sense. Regarded as an act of thought, a common concept
remains a singular entity on a nominalist account. More exactly, it is a particular quality of a particular soul or mind.
112 “‘So he has said,’ and ‘So he does,’ / ‘So it will be,’ ‘So I heard said,’ / ‘That will be found,’ ‘That I dare wager’”
113 “falsehood and truth compounded / Together fly as one tiding”
That concepts are first abstracted from mental images and then assembled into mental sentences, which may in turn be joined into more complex mental sentences, concurs with perspectivism.\footnote{Scotus, e.g., distinguishes simple ideas, which the intellect immediately abstracts from mental images and which constitute the intellect’s most fundamental “building blocks,” from the more complex concepts which are composed from simpler concepts and ultimately from the basic “building blocks” (Tachau, Vision 62). He considers the former first intentions and the latter second intentions; mental sentences are among the latter. Cf. Tachau, Vision pp. 55–81.}

We need not further develop a ‘perspectivist’ interpretation of the maze episode, though. For our purposes, it suffices that such an account can help to reveal that at least some of the tidings in the labyrinth—i.e., those whispered by the visible figures in the maze—plausibly stand for concepts, including common concepts and mental sentences.\footnote{Perceiving that the labyrinth figures the mind, Kinch maintains that the movement the maze imparts to the tidings within it stands for “the movement of ideas” and that any given tiding stands for “an isolable unit of thought” (309). Yet Kinch also uses “idea” in a self-consciously broad, contemporary sense. For instance, he speaks of “the way an idea, as an electrochemical signal, moves through the brain and synchronizes with other neurons” (309). At the same time, he recognizes that Chaucer’s “culture’s means for describing this process was the ‘species,’” which translated a sensory stimulus into a mental object of representation” (309). Such comments make it clear that Kinch means more than “abstract concept” by “idea”: “idea” also encompasses sensible species, or at least their mental images (309). If one takes “idea” in this broad sense, then I agree that all tidings in the maze stand for ideas. I do not agree, however, if one takes “idea” in the narrower sense of “abstract concept.” In that case, I see only some of these tidings as ideas.}

At any rate, Geffrey does hear sentences in the labyrinth. So provided that the maze stands for the mind, there does seem to be some sense in which this scene involves mental sentences. Accordingly, although Book 3 of *Fame* is ultimately directed to conventional language, the labyrinth episode also appears to explore mental language. We might even say that, rather as medieval thinkers consider the presence of concepts in the soul “a pivot on which naming and knowing turn,” in *Fame* concepts constitute the axis on which the maze spins things into conventional signs—and maybe into knowledge as well (Maloney 130).\footnote{Thomas Maloney speaks specifically of concepts on Bacon’s perspectivist account, but medieval philosophers in general deemed concepts, as the natural signs presumed by conventional terms, pivotal for language and knowledge.}

It is with respect to the theme of knowledge, I believe, that the whispers become most important. Both the narrator’s avowal that he “dide al [his] entente” (2132) in the labyrinth “to lere” and his talk of the truth-values of the sentences he hears underscore that he still hopes, at this point in the
text, for access to truth and understanding (2133). Yet if in the maze scene Geffrey is finally to gain knowledge—the “science,” mentioned at the end of Section 2.2, of which he speaks in Book 3’s proem—it seems he must perceive what the tidings in the labyrinth, especially those standing for common concepts or mental sentences, represent. For as discussed in Chapter One, medieval philosophers agreed that knowledge proceeds by means of common concepts (insofar as science is in some sense of universals) and mental sentences (as objects, whether or not ultimate objects, of knowledge). Elements of the poem including, but not limited to, the conspicuous absence of conventional signification from the eagle’s account of the nature of speech and the very fact that Geffrey has been overtly immersed in signs since his arrival Fame’s land have already primed us to assume that “[e]verything here signifies” (Van Dyke, Chaucer’s Agents 50). Further, the fowl has called Geffrey’s (and readers’) attention to natural signification, i.e., the natural signification of sensible species. But concepts too are natural signs. Thus, we may anticipate that Geffrey will in due course discern not only what sensible species and their images represent, but also what the concepts derived from mental images represent. And if the labyrinth is a symbol of the mind, i.e., the site of intellectual apprehension of reality via concepts, the maze is just the place for Geffrey to discover the significates of concepts. Here if anywhere, knowledge should be within his grasp.

At this point, the realist-nominalist conflict may again come into play. As shown in Chapter One, realists maintained that common concepts and mental sentences must signify real universals and real states of affairs, respectively, in order that idealism be evaded. By contrast, nominalists were confident that singular things are adequate to secure objective knowledge. In Fame, the labyrinth episode seems to impart that mental images, for their part, represent individuals only, individuals

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117 “gave his full attention”; “to learn”

118 See Chapter One, particularly Sections 2.1 and 2.3.
perceived as crowding the maze to such an extent that Geffrey states, “wel unnethe in that place / Hadde y a fote-brede of space” (2041–2).\footnote{“very scarcely, in that place, / Had I a foot’s breadth of space”} If concepts represent anything over and above these individuals, however, their significates elude Geffrey. Even though the dreamer’s bodily eyes are closed and his mind’s eye is open—even though his mental journey has brought him to the cradle of concepts, the source of intellectual abstraction—still he apprehends nothing but individuals.\footnote{I stress that, though only concrete things can be perceived with the bodily eyes, it does not follow that everything Geffrey sees in his dream must therefore be concrete.}

In fact, it is not clear that the whispers in the labyrinth even represent individuals. Consider again the sentences spoken here, e.g., “Thus hath he sayd.” As Harwood remarks, all such “gossip… is grammatical only because it is full of pronouns” (345). Apart from any context that would fix the reference of a pronoun such as “he,” our sample sentence does not appear to mean anything. And for the same reason, the other sentences that Geffrey relates prove equally devoid of significance. Moreover, a curious imbalance obtains between speakers outside of the maze and speakers inside it. The words of the former take visible shape as their particular speakers, thus representing them, but those of the latter do not. In the labyrinth, gossip circulates from figure to figure but remains merely audible. We might have expected that, if a given whisper itself represents something, that whisper would, like its speaker, come in some way to replicate or resemble what it signifies. But nothing in Geffrey’s claim that “[w]hen oon [figure] had herd a thing, ywis, / He com forth ryght to another wight, / And gan him tellen anon-ryght / The same that to him was told” indicates that the second speaker’s words reproduce the first speaker or, for that matter, any entity (2060–3).\footnote{“When one had heard a thing, indeed, / He came forth right to another person, / And right away began to tell him / The same thing that was told to him.” Though tidings certainly do multiply and run rampant through the labyrinth, each figure communicating its message or content to the next (in a manner reminiscent of the perspectivists’ species, each communicating the form to the next), their doing so does not seem to entail their resembling their predecessors.}
Of course, it is not obvious just how a whisper could resemble, say, a real universal or a real state of affairs. Similarly, it is not obvious how concepts represent and resemble entities for medieval thinkers, yet the scholastics do appear to be committed to the claim that ideas somehow represent and resemble the beings they signify.\textsuperscript{122} And Chaucer is a poet: surely he, in this most fanciful of poems, could have found a creative way to suggest that (some) concepts represent real universals or real states of affairs, had he desired to do so. Or at least he could have presented concepts, i.e., gossip in the maze, as representing entities not among the familiar, singular beings of perceptible reality. For instance, had he, like Langland, included personification figures with common names or with sentences as names, one might be led to speculate that such figures signify real universals and real states of affairs.\textsuperscript{123} But Chaucer does nothing as the kind. Instead, he makes the maze so

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} “The Christian Aristotelianism of the High Middle Ages” led thinkers by this period to agree that a given “mental representation signifies the represented item,” as Peter King explains, though some philosophers identified concepts with mental representations directly whereas others, like Scotus, drew a “distinction between mental act (or concept) and its content,” claiming “that a mental representation represents in virtue of having the same formal content as the external object, so that when Socrates thinks of a sheep he does so in virtue of having a concept whose content is the form of the sheep” (“Rethinking Representation” 86). Regardless, signification and representation in effect converge in the context of concepts, for philosophers concurred that “a mental representation represents an object whenever it signifies that object, i.e.\textemdash to the extent that it functions as the (mental) ‘word’ for the object” (King, “Rethinking Representation” 95, his italics). Yet exactly “how intellectual cognition can in any way be viewed as analogous to the sensory”—that is, in just what sense it can be true that a concept in the intellect, no less than in a sense organ or a phantasm in the imagination, represents its signifyate—remained “something of a question,” as Tweedale observes, especially because “all the scholastics agreed that the intellect has no material organ” (37). Still, since “the Aristotelian program insisted on just such an analogy,” medieval philosophers “insisted that intellectual acts,” i.e., concepts, are in some sense “likenesses of what they apprehend”—including real universals, if any exist (Tweedale 45). Even Ockham held that concepts represent and in some sense resemble their signifyates. According to King, Ockham’s use of “the traditional terminology” of representation and likeness “is an empty formula” (“Rethinking Representation” 98). However, Normore believes that, if “similarity does figure prominently in Ockham’s account of why concepts signify as they do,” it does so because “a sufficient degree of natural similarity between the mental term and what it signifies is a necessary condition for signification on Ockham’s view” (“Ockham” 57).
\item \textsuperscript{123} As argued in Section 3 of Chapter 3, personification figures need not represent real universals or other beings that realists granted and nominalists denied. Nonetheless, the traditional association between personification allegory and realism attests to the fact that readers have often taken personification figures to signify real universals, and some of the temptation to do so presumably stems from the fact that personification characters seem in many cases to signify abstract entities, e.g., indolence or charity. It does not follow from the fact that a given being is abstract that it is also universal (even realists admit singular properties such as the singular indolence of this person or the singular charity of that one). Still, the alignment of abstract beings with real universals is understandable since, while not all abstract things are real universals, all real universals, if any exist, are themselves abstract things. In \textit{The Parliament of Fowls}, Chaucer presents a quick catalogue of personification figures. In that poem, the dreamer-narrator declares: “Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-ryght, / And of Aray, and Lust, and Curteysie” (218–9) (“Then I was aware straight away of Pleasure, / And of Attire, and Lust, and Courtesy”). He goes on to state that “Craft” (220), “Delyt” and “Gentlesse”
utterly concrete and thoroughly particularized that “the stress upon the individual perspective and
knowledge derived from the senses” seems in this scene to be “at its most extreme” (St John 94).

Inasmuch as individuals alone are represented in the labyrinth episode, Chaucer may be implying
that only particular entities are signified by mental contents—that singular things alone answer to
whatever common concepts or mental sentences, say, might be in the mind. Hence, Chaucer may
be depicting a scenario at odds with the realist vision of parallelism between thoughts and things.
And perhaps to intensify the scene’s sense of mental-extramental asymmetry, Chaucer highlights
the contrast between the profusion inside the maze, as previously inside the glass temple, and the
relative paucity beyond it. Geffrey avows that “in the world nys left / So many formed be Nature,
/ Ne ded so many a creature” as there are tidings in the labyrinth: the world neither includes nor
has included a wealth of beings equivalent to that of the maze (2038–40). Donald Howard thus
finds that the labyrinth’s “[t]idings don’t bear a one-to-one relation to the events they report”—or
as we might add, to beings of any sort (“Idea” 46). Chaucer scarcely seems to be going out of his
way to portray an isomorphic, realist relation between the mind and the world, ideas and entities.

(224) (“Delight and Nobility”), “Beute” (225) (“Beauty”), “Youthe” (226), “Foolhardynesse, Flaterye, and Desyr, / Messagerye, and Meede, and other three” (“Foolhardiness, Flattery, and Desire, / Message-Sending, and Meed, and three others”) whom he will not name are also present (227–8). None of these characters are very particularized, and
the names of many suggest that they represent abstract entities. Accordingly, Carolynn Van Dyke assumes that these
and other “allegorical agents” in that text (Chaucer’s Agents 42) are extramental “universals” (Chaucer’s Agents 43)
albeit “static” [Chaucer’s Agents 55] and “ontologically dislocated” ones inasmuch as “they consort with particular
men and women, whom they ought to subsume” (Chaucer’s Agents 56). She thus takes The Parliament of Fowls to
presuppose realism. However, no personification figures appear in Fame’s labyrinth scene, and hence, as Van Dyke
admits, this “setting has been regarded as a welcome release into particularity” (Chaucer’s Agents 48). She does tell
us that “the anonymous, innumerable tidings are unparticularized” (Chaucer’s Agents 49). Because they are tidings,
though—and so in some sense linguistic, whether as sensible species of conventional expressions, mental images of
these, or concepts (mental language) pending expression—it is easier to construe them as common concepts or signs
than as common beings.

124 “in the world there is not left / So many a creature formed by Nature, / Nor so many dead”
We must not overhastily conclude, however, that nominalism underwrites the episode. Of course no nominalist would grant that concepts lack significates altogether, if Chaucer is so hinting. But even if we read him as indicating that ideas represent individuals alone—a claim nominalists would endorse—still nominalists would not accept that a world in which only individuals answer to concepts would leave thought poorly grounded. Yet according to Geffrey, who again calls our attention to the topic of unstable foundations, the maze “is founded to endure / While that hit lyst to Aventure” (1981–2). It is so precariously grounded that it could topple any moment! And the fact that the wicker “tymber” of the labyrinth is “of no strength,” as delicate a material as the glass of the temple in Book 1, additionally emphasizes the weakness of the situation thought is in (1980). It would seem that, if concepts represent only individuals at most, intellectual efforts and the conventional expressions they yield rest on a feeble footing—contrary to the nominalist view.

Yet if nominalism does not itself inform the labyrinth scene, a realist picture of nominalism may. Because realists regarded nominalism as depriving concepts of due grounding in reality, it makes good sense on this hypothesis that Chaucer would pair mental-extramental, semantic-ontological asymmetry with an image of inadequately founded cognition. Furthermore, the supposition that a realist construal of nominalism underpins the maze episode can help explain why this scene—the last of the poem—ends without Geffrey’s escaping the labyrinth and returning to the outer world.

The episode’s conclusion finds the narrator rushing to “a corner” (2142) in the hopes of learning something from a figure “who semed for to be / A man of gret auctorite…” (2157–8). Perhaps this authority will furnish certain knowledge, science, insight into reality? But Geffrey enjoys no

125 “is founded to endure / So long as is pleasing to Chance”
126 Sklute points to the volatility intrinsic to the labyrinth’s “ceaseless turning” on “its axis with no foundation” (42).
127 “who seemed to be / A man of great authority”
such revelation; he remains cornered in the labyrinth, unable to understand or access anything of
the extramental world. As Russell correctly comments, the text breaks off mid-sentence “with an
ellipsis within the dream,” leaving Geffrey “incarcerated in his own nightmare world” insofar as
“the poem does not allow him to awaken” and by extension “making this poem quite literally the
dream vision from which we do not awaken” (193). The narrator even seems to anticipate such
imprisonment, or at least to recognize the maze’s capacity to entrap, for he likens its materials to
those used to fashion “cages” (1938) and insists that it “was shapen lyk a cage” (1985). Russell is
wrong, though, to claim that Geffrey’s ensnarement in the labyrinth of the mind renders Fame “a
nominalist poem” (113). The maze does offer an “image of inescapable self-enclosure” (Hanning
157), so taking “a drastic leap into subjectivity” consistent with idealism (Terrell, “Reallocating”
288). Yet since nominalists rejected idealism, the note of idealism on which the texts closes does

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128 Not all scholars believe, of course, that Fame is deliberately fragmentary. For example, in 1960 George Kittredge
expressed the then-standard opinion that “[p]robably Chaucer finished the piece, and our manuscripts are defective”
(103). However—especially because “the inconclusive nature of the ending reflects the questions about the authority
of all human voices and words” and the relation between words and the world “that this poem repeatedly raises”—a
“growing number of readers consider this poem intentionally inconclusive rather than unfinished” (McGerr 61). For
instance, Donald Fry views Fame as “breaking off as a deliberate fragment” that aptly underscores “the unreliability
of… knowledge” (28), while Hanning similarly holds that, since Chaucer has undercut any adequate foundations for
objective knowledge by the time Fame ceases, he “render[s] inevitable the poem’s breaking off at this point” (142).
Again, Doob tells us that Fame “breaks off abruptly with that ironic word ‘auctorite,’ and probably Chaucer meant it
to end so” insofar as “the… labyrinths he describes are endless when one cannot escape them, as Geoffrey cannot”
(331, her italics). And Finlayson states that the “incompleteness of this poem is of a piece with the inconclusiveness
of Book III,” adding: “Even the ‘man of gret auctorite’ might not provide a meaning, since, as the dreamer notes, he
cannot name the man and he does not assert him to be a man of great authority but will only say ‘he seemed for to
be.’ Clearly this dream could not have a resolution. The lack of conclusion is the meaning” (55, his italics). In brief,
recent scholars, including but not limited to literary nominalists like Russell, tend to find that “Chaucer intended—or
at least, should have intended—to end the poem at this inconclusive point” (Van Dyke, Chaucer’s Agents 51), with
the “man of gret auctorite,” since it seems clear that this man, whoever he is, “can have little to add to the situation”
(Terrell, “Reallocation” 288): “In a poem in which the highest attainable truth is only what people say” rather than
objective facts, “he could say nothing to restore verifiable truth to his authority” (Karla Taylor 38). I substantially
agree with the view of these and other critics, but the question of whether Fame’s inconclusive ending is deliberate
will probably never be definitely resolved. For more on the fragmentary ending of Fame, see John Burrow’s “Poems
Without Endings”; on the related topic of the identity of the “man of gret auctorite,” see Pat Overbeck’s “The ‘Man
of Gret Auctorite’ in Chaucer’s House of Fame.” Before offering his own hypothesis—namely, that the man of great
authority is “Amor, the god of Love” (158)—Overbeck summarizes that “proposals have run the gamut from topical
(a court herald announces the betrothal of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia) to functional (a storyteller begins a
round of tales) to philosophical (Boethius propounds the universal bond of love)” to “sublime”: that the man of great
authority is Christ (157). Literary figures have also been suggested; for example, R. C. Goffin proposes Boccaccio in
“Quiting by Tidings in The Hous of Fame.”
not imply that *Fame* presupposes nominalism. To the contrary, if the work’s ending engages with the realist-nominalist dispute at all, it more plausibly presumes the realist belief that nominalism entails idealism, accordingly caricaturing nominalism as providing an insufficient foundation for objective knowledge. And the shadow of idealism does not darken the poem’s last section alone. Rather, like a shade that appears when the sun declines from its apex, the fear ultimately realized in the labyrinth scene—that we lack objective knowledge—first enters Geffrey’s dream when the narrator stands in the bare desert and the golden eagle of thought descends from heaven’s vertex.

3. Idealism

The wasteland that Geffrey encounters outside the temple of glass so unnerves him that he prays, “‘O Christ… that art in blysse, / Fro fantome and illusion / Me save!’” (492–4). One might have expected him, faced with a desert, to dread dehydration and death more than deception and error. Yet something about the vacuity confronting him, or the contrast between this emptiness and the abundance of the church from which he has emerged, moves him to doubt his grasp of reality. In this context, moreover, the “choice of the word ‘fantome’ seems most significant” (St John 111).

For as Sheila Delany makes clear, “phantom denotes a mental process, or the product of a mental process, which is deceptive in that it does not accurately mirror the… world” (“Phantom” 70, her italics). Accordingly, Geffrey fears that his thoughts or mental contents do not correctly reflect reality—but distort and misrepresent it. Or in Karla Taylor’s words, his “association of ‘fantome’

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129 Delany explains that authors including St Augustine and Isidore of Seville distinguished, as “Stoic psychologists” had before them, between a phantasy and a phantom (“Phantom” 69). “Phantasy was defined as a mental impression which reproduces reality and which functions as the basis of thought,” she notes, while “[p]hantom… occurs only in dreams or waking illusions. Having no mimetic relation to reality, it conveys erroneous information to the intellect” (“Phantom” 69). Both phantasies and phantoms are mental images—“phantasms” in the sense given in footnote 108. And simultaneously, “fantome” is Chaucer’s rendering in the proem to Book 1 of *Fame* of a misleading, nightmarish type of dream according to Macrobius (11). In light of these considerations, Geffrey’s prayer in the desert appears to convey the concern that the thoughts comprising his dream are straying from reality and may amount to a nightmare.
with ‘illusion’ intimates his fear that the images in the Temple are nothing but delusions,” fictive notions “drawn from nothing outside the mind and bearing no relation to external reality” (30–1).

Delany argues that Geffrey’s prayer constitutes a fideistic call to Christ to dissolve the “impasse” the narrator has reached in the temple of glass (Chaucer’s House of Fame 59), i.e., his skeptical “perception that tradition,” in this case conflicting construals in the literary tradition of the Dido-Aeneas story, “offers no certain truth” (Chaucer’s House of Fame 67). More broadly, she regards Geffrey’s doubt about tradition’s ability to furnish certain knowledge as one of many expressions in Fame of a fideistic skepticism underpinned by nominalism.130 But while she observes that “the desert scene creates a sense of impending crisis” (Chaucer’s House of Fame 58), Delany fails to notice that the desert is itself a principal cause of the anxiety that imbues Geffrey precisely when he perceives this desolate place and discovers that the “ordered collection of images in the closed space of the temple” is “a private island of meaning and sense in a great desert” (Miller 486).131

As intimated in Section 2.1, the danger that Geffrey anticipates does involve signs and language, as Delany maintains, but not merely the words which comprise tradition’s authoritative writings; rather, it concerns the way in which signs—and in the first instance mental signs, the contents of the temple—stand to extramental things, the contents of the desert. More exactly, Geffrey seems, upon realizing that the sandy space before him lacks the richness of the shrine, to be worried that he must, unless perhaps God intervenes, fall into illusion and error as regards extramental reality.

As McGerr remarks, it is “appropriate that the dreamer react to the sight of the field of sand with a prayer that Christ—the True Word—save him from false visions or the apparence” he “earlier

130 See footnote 1.
131 Peter Brown perceives the causal connection between Geffrey’s glimpsing the desert and his feeling fear. Calling attention to the “sharp contrast between the… enclosed interior of the temple and the wide-open space of the desert” with its “featureless terrain” (171), Brown remarks, “After the cornucopia of images seen in the temple this [desert] is a terrifying place” (170).
described as harmful” (68, her italics) because his vision of the desert reveals that “language has lost its true objectivity or correspondence to the world” (72). Language may still have subjective meaning; it may correctly represent Geffrey’s own ideas or their expressions. But since reality is so divested, signs have little external to signify and seem unlikely to represent reality correctly.\(^{132}\)

On the foregoing interpretation, Geffrey’s invocation of Christ asks His protection or restoration of the objectivity of language—and insofar as knowledge depends on language, the objectivity of knowledge as well. In brief, the narrator requests deliverance from idealism. To the extent that he doubts the possibility of objective knowledge in the world in which he finds himself, the narrator (and the poem as a whole) may justly be considered skeptical. Contra Delany, though, Geffrey’s skepticism is not rooted in nominalism. If his anxiety about idealism follows from his seeing that language does not reflect reality, that there is not a close correlation or parallelism between signs (especially concepts) and things, the unease that prompts his orison seems to flow rather from the realist conviction that objective truth and knowledge presuppose semantic-ontological symmetry.

In keeping with the supposition that at the heart of the skepticism in Fame lies Geffrey’s fear that objective knowledge may be impossible in an ontologically denuded or deserted world, Delany’s examples of skepticism in the poem can be understood in terms of idealism. The uncertainty that the narrator displays in the proem to Book 1, for instance, regarding the relationship between his dream and reality—his “vision… is not said to be the result of any event in real life… nor is any claim made that this vision can in turn illuminate real life”—may attest to his concern that ideas, including the conceptual tapestry of his dream, might not mirror what is real (Delany, Chaucer’s

\(^{132}\) As Laurel Amtower observes, a “kind of idealism” obtains in Fame such that language and literature “say nothing about ‘truth’ in a fixed sense,” though the text “recoups the possibility that the reader, at least, may determine values specifically beneficial to him or herself” as an individual (276).
Again, his aforementioned skepticism about authoritative writings’ ability to offer truth can more specifically be described as doubt about their ability to yield objective truth. Nothing in *Fame* implies that canonical works cannot illuminate Geffrey’s own mental contents; indeed, they seem to do just that throughout the poem as Geffrey explores his mind and thoughts against the backdrop of famous texts. And if the narrator reacts skeptically, as Delany alleges, to the eagle’s assumption “that the real cause of things can in fact be discovered by observation and reason, that the universe is really accessible to the operations of sense and intellect,” his doing so illustrates that he doubts whether extramental reality is knowable (*Chaucer’s House of Fame* 76).

By contrast, Geffrey never appears to question the possibility of knowing oneself or one’s mind. At one point, he even seems to affirm robust self-knowledge. At the end of the scene in the castle of Fame, immediately before he visits the labyrinth, Geffrey is approached by a figure who asks what his name is and whether he has come to the palace for fame (1871–2). The narrator replies, “‘Sufficeth me, as I were ded, / That no wight have my name in honde. / I wot myself best how y stonde; / For what I drye, or what I thynke, / I wil myselven al hyt drynke’” (1876–80).

Steven Kruger states that this response, with both “its insistent use of the first person pronoun and of the emphatic ‘myself’ / ‘myselven’” and “its self-conscious movement back into personal, subjective experience,” points “us to the concerns of the dreamer as an individual” and underlines the “self-reflective movement of the *House of Fame*” (“Imagination” 128, his italics). Delany herself goes further, esteeming Geffrey’s answer “a reassertion of subjective judgment” insofar as he “claims to know best what his merit is” (*Chaucer’s House of Fame* 103). And according to St John, here “the narrator himself seems to be circumscribing the self as the limits of what he can truly know”

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133 “‘It would suffice for me, if I were dead, / That no one have my name in hand. / I myself know best how I stand; / For what I feel, or what I think— / I will keep it all within myself.’”
Geffrey’s skepticism, then, does not extend to *all* knowledge, but only to knowledge which purports to reach beyond oneself or one’s subjective experience—that is, to objective knowledge.

The preceding reflections suggest that Geffrey’s doubt, and hence that of the poem he ostensibly writes, may not be a basic feature of the narrator’s character, but may stem from the disquiet that invades him when he glimpses the desert: the fear that objective knowledge may be unattainable, that idealism may hold. Unfortunately for Geffrey, the rest of his dream vindicates this suspicion. The bird that appears as if in answer to his prayer “sets in motion expectations that the next stage of the poem will see the narrator’s deliverance from illusion and transportation to a higher sphere of knowledge” (Hanning 153). Yet as we have seen, the eagle conveys him not to the Word, “the source of all meaning” and ground of all being, but to meaningless, ungrounded words (Hanning 153). And while Fame’s realm is that of conventional signs, it is also a place to which Geffrey is conducted by thought. Though only one of its houses, i.e., the maze, seems to stand for the mind, there is a sense in which all “the world he flies to is his mind” or contained in his mind (Howard, “Idea” 47). After all, the narrator meets conventional signs not as they mind-independently exist, but in a sort of “self-analysis” (St John 65). However, his flight turns out to be a one-way trip. As the labyrinth closes around him like a cage, the extramental world vanishes forever from his ken.

In a way, then, Geffrey—after his brief and unsettling sight of the world’s vacuity—immediately returns to and never again escapes from his mind. Indeed, by the poem’s end the narrator appears to be imprisoned in his mind on at least three levels or in at least three ways. He never leaves the labyrinth, symbol of the mind; the maze is part of the mental realm to which thought carries him; finally, he never wakes from his dream, so far as Chaucer shows us. By the time the “man of gret
auctorite” arrives, it is evident that this figure could not have disclosed objective truth even if the text had not broken off before his words could be reported; a “total breakdown into subjectivity” has occurred (Terrell, “Reallocation” 288). Furthermore, “[i]ndividuals are not only cut off from [objective] truth but also from one another in real terms” by the dream’s final scene (St John 95), for, like all other beings, “the individual is incommunicable,” unknowable to others (St John 65).

Of course, it seems that the dream must have an end since, when the work begins, Geffrey claims to be transcribing his dream after the fact. Yet like the desert, the extramental or waking frame of the dream in Fame is profoundly depleted; the sole detail the dream-frame offers about Geffrey’s waking life is that he fell asleep and dreamed on December tenth (63, 111). Thus as Lisa Kiser says, Fame “is very much a poem in which ‘kynde’ (or reality) practically disappears as a useful concept” (34). That this is so may tempt us to think that, in Chaucer’s text, reality is inaccessible or unknowable outside of Geffrey’s dream—i.e., in his waking life—as well as within his dream. The very fact that the poem’s frame offers the reader no “encounter with… unvarnished reality,” though, whereas Geffrey may enjoy such an encounter within his dream when he sees the desert, deprives us of any way of inferring from idealism’s holding in the dream to its holding beyond it (Grennen, “Chaucer” 250). In other words, although on the present reading reality (the desert) is ontologically depleted and the loss of objective knowledge (the subsequent course of the dream) follows, we cannot conclude that extramental reality in the poem actually is as it appears to be in

134 Inasmuch as the dreams presented in dream-vision poems are typically set in May and asserted to be veridical, the December date of Geffrey’s dream could be taken to hint that his dream is not veridical. John Leyerle offers, though, that Chaucer picks December because “in December as the sun moves through its annual path… it approaches close to Aquila, the constellation of the eagle,” and that furthermore on the tenth of December the sun is in Sagittarius, the “house of dreams, tidings, and travels” (249, his italics). Possibly Chaucer chooses this date to suggest that the eagle of thought, the tidings to which it brings Geffrey, and Geffrey’s dream itself may well be non-veridical, i.e., illusory.
Geffrey’s dream. The most that we can say, if even so much, is that, if his extramental or waking world is as ontologically denuded as it is within his vision, then idealism holds in his waking life.

In undermining objective knowledge in Geffrey’s dream and preserving the possibility (although not revealing with certainty) that such knowledge is unavailable even in his waking world, Fame contrasts with dream-vision texts like Macrobius’ work on the dream of “Daun Scipio” (916), the nuptial poem of “Marcian” (986), and Alan of Lille’s “Anteclaudian” (986). Such poems, as well as Boethius’ *Consolation* and the *Divine Comedy* of “Daunte” (451), belong to the genre dubbed “the philosophical-theological epic” by Ernst Curtius (120). According to Curtius, works of this genre seek to depict intellectual transcendence or ascent “to the vision of the divine Ideas” (119). In Boitani’s words, they stage journeys “to the center of things, where man discovers the order of the universe” (*Chaucer* 196). Thus in the *Anticlaudianus*, Prudence rises “to a privileged vantage point where she sees the cosmic blueprint: the ideas in the divine mind” (Powrie 257–8). Yet if such ascents “signify a philosophical or religious journey to the truth” (Karla Taylor 36)—indeed to the divine and immutable truth—Chaucer’s portrayal of Geffrey’s flight “appears calculated to distance” it “from the philosophical quest for truth” (Powrie 247). As the narrator’s (involuntary) “attempt to soar… becomes a bellyflop” (Hanning 155), *Fame* “becomes a serious parody, if not a perversion, of its predecessors” (Doob 311). In Joseph Grennen’s words, the text “seems like a deliberate mimicry—even parody, if one prefers that term—not of a specific poem… but [of] the philosophical epic, the mystical ascent, the celestial vision” (“Chaucer” 262). Certainly Geffrey’s flight falls pitifully short of “the higher realms visited by Dante” (McGavin 73). And crucially, if “the poem’s upward, revelatory movement keeps being weighed down, pulled back from abstract causes and ideas,” this failure of transcendence begins in earnest when the eagle abducts Geffrey
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(Kruger, “Imagination” 128). The bird of thought, which should help the narrator to intellectually ascend, instead “forestalls him” whenever he “edges too close to Dante’s flight to the Empyrean” (Karla Taylor 36). “Rather than leading Geffrey to Boethian truth, the eagle clouds it,” endlessly offering and discussing meaningless speech (Baswell 240). In fact, the fowl bears him away even from objective truth and serves only “as a guide to the inward,” where “truth is personal” (Karla Taylor 37). Finally, “all flights above the maze are aborted” and the narrator is left “no access to transcendence” (Doob 313), no “escape from subjective confusion to a privileged overview of clarity and symmetry” (Doob 331–2). Chaucer creates, not a vision of intellectual ascent, but an “antivision” of descent into idealist absurdity (Kiser 26). And in so doing, he may be poking fun at nominalism by implying that it pulls the rug out from under the philosophical-theological epic.

4. A Realist Reductio ad Absurdum

Rodney Delasanta describes Fame as “especially fertile ground for nominalist theories of poetry” (“Nominalism” 138). Yet as Akbari notes, scholars who suppose nominalism to be “an important formative principle in Chaucer’s theory of language” and “try to read Chaucer’s work in this way define nominalism only very loosely, as a rough synonym for skepticism” (179). Thus Delasanta, for example, speaks blithely of Chaucer’s “nominalist skepticism” (“Chaucer” 160). Ann Astell points out that “[t]he closest connection Chaucer himself draws between fiction and philosophy,

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135 As observed in Sections 2.2 and 2.3, Chaucer does present truth (and falsity) in the labyrinth and in Fame’s realm as a whole insofar as he explicitly posits that true (and false) sentences subsist there. However, he gives us no reason to think that such sentences are true (or false) by virtue of their correspondence (or lack of correspondence) to truth-makers in the extramental world, and the slippery, haphazard way in which truths and falsities converge in the maze, without any apparent foundation beyond the labyrinth for their doing so, can even be taken to suggest that, in accord with idealism, the maze or mind itself founds truth (and falsity) in the narrator’s dream. Moreover, and perhaps more tellingly, in the temple of glass, the poem’s first image of the mind, Geffrey insists that he has truly dreamed Dido’s statements while simultaneously stating that he himself is their sole “auctour” (cf. footnote 27). Here, his truth-claim seems to lack extramental foundation—and hence to depend on his own dreaming mind. As regards truth-makers, cf. footnotes 1, 54, 61, 66, and 74 of Chapter One.
however, is explicitly Boethian and Platonic” (22). Grennen argues that “Plato’s Timaeus, in the translation with commentary by Chalcidius,” is “a major source” for Fame (“Chaucer” 237), and the Timaeus is “the profoundest influence” (Dronke 155) on the great philosophical-theological epics of the twelfth century, Bernardus Silvestris’ Cosmographia and Alan of Lille’s De planctu Naturae and Anticlaudianus, all of which “Chaucer had read” (Dronke 154). It is difficult to see how, beginning from Platonic-realist sources such as these, Chaucer might have come in Fame to endorse “an Ockhamist universe of splendidly unnegotiable singulars” (Delasanta, “Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 155).

But as observed in Section 3 of Chapter One, the late medieval realist-nominalist controversy did not focus on Plato’s Forms or ante rem universals. The twelfth-century philosophical-theological epics would have emphasized for Chaucer that divine Ideas constitute the goal of the intellectual ascent; however, more directly relevant to our present purposes is the belief, implied by Boethius and overtly reaffirmed by fourteenth-century realists like Wyclif, that common properties or in re universals are indispensible steps on the ladder of wisdom that leads at last to God and His Ideas.

Even Delasanta concedes that Boethius countenances common properties (although, erroneously, Delasanta names these real or in re universals “Aristotelian post rem” universals) (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 156). In Book 5, Prose 4 of the Consolation, Philosophy asserts, in Chaucer’s translation:

the wit comprehendith withoute-forth the figure of the body of the body of the man that is establesschid in the materere subgett; but the ymaginacioun comprehendith oonly the figure withoute the matere; resoun surmountith ymaginacioun and comprehendith by an universel lokynge the comune spece that is in the singuler peces. But the eighe of intelligence is heyere, for it surmountith the envyrounynge of the universite, and loketh over that bi pure subtalte of thought thilke same symple forme of man that is perdurably
in the devyn thought. In whiche this oughte gretly to ben considered, that the heyeste strengthe to comprehenden thinges enbraseth and contienith the lowere strengthe; but the lower strengthe ne ariseth nat in no manere to the heyere strengthe. For wit ne mai no thing comprehende out of matere ne the ymaginacioun ne loketh nat the universel spieces, ne resoun ne taketh nat the sypsel forme so as intelligence takith it; but intelligence, that lookith [as] aboven, whanne it hath comprehended the forme, it knowith and demeyth alle the thinges that ben undir that foorme; but sche knoweth hem in thilke manere in the whiche it comprehendid thilke same sypsel forme that ne may nevere ben knowen to noon of that othere (that is to seyn, to none of the thre forseyde strengthis of the soule). For it knoweth the universite of resoun, and the figure of ymaginacioun, and the sensible material conceived by wit; ne it ne useth nat nor of resoun ne of ymaginacioun ne of wit withoute-forth; but it byholdeth alle thingis, so as I schal seie, by [o] strook of thought formely (withoute discours or collacioun). Certes resoun, whan it lokith any thing universel, it ne useth nat of ymaginacioun, nor of wit; and algatis yit it comprehendid the thingis ymaginable and sensible. (463–4, italics and brackets The Riverside Chaucer’s) 

Here Philosophy not only affirms the existence of the real universal (“the comune spece that is in the singuler peces”), but also establishes a hierarchical progression of mental powers (“strengthis of the soule”) such that each power has its own proper object and higher powers supervene upon lower powers. Furthermore, Delasanta correctly comments that the clause “that is perdurably in

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136 “the senses externally comprehend the form of the body of the man that is established in the material subject; but the imagination comprehends the form alone, without the matter; reason surmounts imagination and comprehends in its universal gaze the common species that inheres in particular things. But the vision of intelligence is higher, for it surmounts the boundaries of the universe and sees beyond them, by pure subtlety of thought, that same simple Form of man that subsists eternally in the divine thought. Here this ought chiefly to be considered—that the highest power to comprehend things embraces and contains the lower power, but the lower power in no way ascends to the higher power. For the senses cannot comprehend anything out of matter, nor can the imagination see the universal species, nor can reason grasp the simple Form as intelligence grasps it; but intelligence, which gazes as if from above, when it has comprehended the Form, knows and appraises all the things which are under that Form. And it knows them in the very way in which it comprehends that same simple Form that cannot ever be known to any of the others (i.e., to any of those three aforesaid powers of the soul). For it knows the universals of reason, and the form of imagination, and the sensible material conceived by the senses; however, it uses neither reason, nor imagination, nor the external senses, but beholds all things, as I will so say, by one stroke of thought formally (without discourse or comparison). Certainly reason, when it perceives anything universal, uses nothing of imagination or of the senses, and nonetheless it comprehends imaginable and sensible things.” Cf. Boethius’ Latin: “Sensus… figuram in subiecta materia constitutam, imaginatio vero solam sine materia iudicat figuram; ratio vero hanc quoque transcendit speciemque ipsam, quae singularibus inest, universalis consideratione perpendit. Intellegentiae vero celsior oculus existit; supergressa namque universitatis ambitum, ipsam iliam simplicem formam pura mentis acie contuetur. In quo illud maxime considerandum est: nam superior comprehendendi vis amplectitur inferiorem, inferior vero ad superiorem nullo modo consurgit. Neque enim sensus aliquid extra materiam valet vel universales species imaginatio contuetur vel ratio capit simplicem formam; sed intellecti in qua desuper spectans concepta forma quae subsum etiam cuncta diuidicat, sed eo modo quo formam ipsam, quae nulli aliis nota esse poterat, comprehendit. Nam et rationis universum et imaginationis figuram et materiale sensibile cognoscit nec ratione utens nec imaginacione nec sensibus, sed illo uno icu mentis formaliter, ut ita dicam, cuncta prospiciens. Ratio quoque, cum quid universale respicit, nec imaginacione nec sensibus utens imaginabilia vel sensibilia comprehendit.”
the devyn thought” is “probably original with Chaucer, appearing nowhere in the Boethian text” (“Chaucer and the Problem of the Universal” 156). With this clause, Chaucer reveals that he sees the “symple forme” perceived by the highest or most deiform mental power, intellect, as a divine Idea. He says that intellectual ascent to God’s Ideas approaches its consummation by three steps. The senses grasp particular forms as established in matter; the imagination grasps forms removed from their matter; finally, reason grasps the universal forms—real universals—in singular things.

Boethius next proceeds, in Book 5, Metre 4, to subsume into his picture of an “ascending scale of knowledge” (Reichl 146) the claim that “thought” is “imoevid and excited” when “voys or soun hurteleth to the eres and commoeveth hem to herkne” (464, Chaucer’s translation).137 But Fame, as we have seen, centrally depicts “voys or soun” that “hurteleth to the eres” and excites thought. According to Karl Reichl, moreover, Chaucer probably drew upon “the Boethius commentary by Nicholas Trivet… for his translation of the Consolatio” (142, his italics). Reichl explains that the poet would have found this section of Boethius’ work glossed in perspectivist terms.138 Chaucer, then, appears to have taken as a starting point for Fame Boethius’ reference to speech and sound, which had already been associated with perspectivism by Trivet and which Boethius provides in the immediate context of his vision of intellectual ascent through in re universals to divine Ideas.

Philosophy’s discussion of intellectual ascent is motivated by her promise to Boethius in Book 4, Prose 1—the same section in which she mentions the “fetheris” of thought—to direct him toward

137 “moved and excited”; “voice or sound hurtles to the ears and influences them to listen.” Cf. Boethius’ Latin: “mentis vigor excitus”; “cum… / …vox auribus instrepit” (152).
138 For Trivet, “[k]nowledge (intellectio) consists in abstraction, more precisely in ‘seeing’ the intelligible form (intelligible species)” in phantasms (Reichl 143, his italics). As noted in footnotes 77 and 108, talk of intelligible species, as well as talk of sensible species, is characteristic of perspectivist theories of knowledge.
the “forme” of “verray blisfulnesse” (441, Chaucer’s translation). With this promise, she holds out the hope that, if Boethius can reorient his thought from sensed to imagined singulars and then to real universals, he may at last participate in the supreme joy common to the righteous in *Pearl*. But despite Finlayson’s claim that Geffrey ultimately “has a direct revelation, like the narrator’s final vision of Pearl in the company of Christ and the virgins” (“Seeing” 52), and also despite the sense that Chaucer expresses “yearnings for truth and transcendence” in his poem even “through his humor” (Baswell 248), Geffrey’s voyage is surely “not… a journey towards Heaven, towards Love, towards God, towards the beatific vision” (Boitani, “What Dante Meant” 120). For rather than approaching beatitude, Geffrey reaches “a false paradise of speech” and signs (Vance 31).  

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140 Robert Hanning points out that Chaucer refers to the four beasts of the Apocalypse in lines 1383–5 and “presents the Muses gathered around the throne singing Fame’s praises like the elders of the Apocalypse” in lines 1395–1406 (151). He adds that these “touches, together with Fame’s role as a judge (foreign to Chaucer’s classical antecedents) suggest a parallel between her and Christ”—a deeply “unsettling” parallel (151). Kiser explores the parodic parallel between Fame and Christ, Fame’s realm and heaven more fully. Noting that “the events in the palace of Fame are to narratives what the Last Judgment is to souls,” she proceeds to stress that “Chaucer’s ‘heavenly Jerusalem,’ though carefully constructed with other medieval and early Christian sources in mind, is a city with distinct idiosyncrasies” (33). For instance, Fame’s palace “seems to be a secularized version of a Gothic cathedral, that is, an earthly image of the Celestial City. But as a castle rather than a church, Fame’s dwelling exists at a level at least two… analogical steps away from the real Heavenly Jerusalem that St. John saw in his vision, being merely an image of an image of the Heavenly Jerusalem” (Kiser 34). Additionally, “as if to reproduce the angelic hierarchy believed to be present in the Celestial City, whereby each order of angels imitates and learns from the orders above them who are closer to the reality of God, the lesser harpers [in the niches in the exterior of Fame’s castle] sit under the great harpers” while “[t]he lowest group of artists… occupy positions behind this tableau, completing a scene that imitates the ordered celestial hierarchy” (Kiser 34). Because Fame’s “trumpets, Cler Laude and Sklaundre, clearly suggest salvation and damnation,” too, Fame is aligned with God or Christ (37). To Hanning’s and Kiser’s observations, we may add that the narrator ends his overview of the images in the niches of Fame’s palace by referring to “domes day” (1284). In brief, Chaucer seems to be contrasting the false appearances of Fame’s realm, i.e., the conventional signs that distort and misrepresent reality, with the perfect truth supposed to abide in heaven, where there can be no distance between signs and their significates. Moreover, the eagle of thought figures into Chaucer’s parodic rewriting of the heavenly vision, the revelation of God and heaven. St John notes that Dante’s “Beatrice, who looks upon the sun as an eagle can, is replaced by an eagle itself in Chaucer’s version of this ascent” (74). Chaucer also bases his bird on two eagles present in Dante’s *Comedy*, that of *Purgatorio* 9 and that of *Paradiso* 18. In the case of the latter, Dante’s “narrator sees res and verbum together, the ‘m’ in ‘monarchia’ emblematized by eagle,” thus beholding a “closure of the gap between signified and signifier” (Akbari 203, her italics). Geffrey experiences no such transcendence from signs to significates. In accordance with the fact that the eagle shows interest only in signs deprived of their (conventional) significiation, Chaucer turns “Dante’s journey through the otherworldly realms into a subjective exploration of [the narrator’s] own mind” (Karla Taylor 39). Hence “Geoffrey is denied the ‘trasumanar,’ the passing beyond humanity that Dante undergoes” at the end of the *Paradiso* (Boitani, “What Dante Meant” 120). As Doob asserts, his quest for objective truth and knowledge in *Fame*’s “labyrinthine world is fruitless as it was not for Dante and Boethius” (333).
As a colleague of Wyclif’s in John of Gaunt’s service and a friend of Wyclif’s friend and fellow realist philosopher Ralph Strode, Chaucer may have been acquainted with Wyclif’s outspoken opinion that the position of “Ockham and… other doctors of signs,” who, “through the weakness of their understanding, give up real universals,” thwarts intellectual ascent to God (Kenny 16). But more fundamentally, Chaucer, as I have tried to suggest, would have been aware as a student of Boethius that the denial of real universals constitutes a rejection of transcendence. Hence if, in *Fame*, Chaucer “arrests the transcendent trajectory” (Powrie 256) which in “the traditional dream vision” is “the one out of the many” according to the literary nominalist Kathryn Lynch—instead “return[ing] again and again to the many” (*Philosophical Visions* 64) and offering “an even more bewildering immersion in particulars” at the poem’s end than at its beginning—it scarcely seems likely that his doing so amounts to a loud endorsement of nominalism (Grennen, “Chaucer” 262). It appears more probable that, if *Fame* engages with the realist-nominalist debate at all, it does so by presenting a nightmare that reduces nominalism to idealist absurdity in vindication of realism, a nightmare of inescapable division, through language, from reality—and finally even from God.

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141 See our Introduction.
142 More fully, Wyclif explains that a feeble grasp of the fact that universals are common in God’s thought primarily, before they are common in creatures, “fecit Ockham et… alios doctores signorum ex infirmitate intellectus declinare ab universali reali” (*Tractatus de universalibus* c. 2 p. 65).
CONCLUSION

Envisioning Unity Beyond Fourteenth-Century England

After decades of literary-critical efforts to align the poets of late fourteenth-century England with the nominalism believed to have set the intellectual tone of the time in the wake of an Ockhamist revolution, it has become possible for scholars to assert without argument that “the philosophical tenets of scholastic nominalism underwrite Chaucer’s poetry” (Marelji 206). As well as Chaucer, the *Pearl* poet and Langland have been targeted by literary-nominalist critics. Yet as observed in our Introduction, contemporary historians of philosophy have found that philosophers working in England in the second half of the fourteenth century decidedly rejected nominalism. In fact, these thinkers, as Chapter One explains, defended realist views more extreme than those of their recent predecessors both in the sense that they insisted on especially thoroughgoing parallelism between language and reality and in the sense that they granted actual, not only potential, existence to real universals. Attempts to harmonize late fourteenth-century English authors with contemporaneous thought by affiliating their work with nominalism have therefore had the opposite effect. In order to restore the *Pearl* poet, Langland, and Chaucer to their intellectual milieu, or at least to militate against the assumption that they affirm nominalism, the present study has approached their texts, i.e., the dream-vision poems *Pearl, Piers Plowman,* and *The House of Fame,* from a realist angle.

Chapter One of this study opened paths for literary-realist inquiry by clarifying what was at stake between realists and nominalists in late fourteenth-century England. Examining what topics were in dispute between the two camps, and how each side’s stances on these topics cohere, helps give
shape to the kinds of questions that elucidation of a given poem in terms of realism invites. In the first place, this chapter explained, realists but not nominalists granted symmetry or unity between language (especially that of concepts) and reality. Fundamentally, only realists countenanced real universals, items of ten real categories, and real states of affairs. Moreover, a key reason for their acceptance of isomorphism between signs and significates is that they took its denial to undercut objective knowledge. And secondarily, in keeping with their affirmation of semantic-ontological symmetry, realists but not nominalists admitted metaphysical unity among individuals by means of real universals. Realists considered real universals necessary not only for objective knowledge or as the objects of science, but also, as is made explicit in the writings of late fourteenth-century realists such as Wyclif, for higher or transcendent understanding. On this account, universals are indispensable epistemic steps toward God and heaven. Nor is the access to the divine they enable merely epistemic, for real universals are also necessary for right volition and action as well as for the avoidance of sin. In this way, they contribute to the acquisition of salvation and heavenly joy.

These considerations indicate two general lines of literary-realist interrogation. First, one can ask whether language and reality mirror one another—or to the contrary, whether they conspicuously diverge—in a given poem. And second, one can ask whether individuals in a given text converge in real universals. The two questions are related inasmuch as an affirmative answer to the second implies an affirmative reply to the first (if the poem suggests that there are real universals, then it ipso facto assumes a level of semantic-ontological symmetry at odds with nominalism). Chapters Two through Four accordingly asked these questions of Pearl, Piers, and Fame respectively and offered an overarching reply unavailable to literary nominalists. More precisely, they took these texts to presume that realism furthers, whereas nominalism hinders, transcendence and salvation.

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1 But even realists as early as Boethius deemed real universals crucial for transcendence; cf. Chapter Four, Section 4.
Chapter Two in effect replied “yes” to the questions, Does language mirror reality in Pearl? and Do individuals in Pearl merge in real universals? As regards the second, this chapter argued that the Pearl maiden’s paradoxes can be naturally and straightforwardly resolved by taking heavenly delight as a real universal in which the maiden, her fellow elect, and Christ metaphysically unite. According to this chapter, moreover, the narrator enjoys a revelation of the blessed and Christ as joined in universal joy when, in the text’s culminating scene, he beholds them in New Jerusalem. And as regards the first question, the structure of the poem’s interlinked cantos stands revealed in the same scene as a reflection of the reality there glimpsed: the saints’ interconnection in delight. Construing Pearl as informed by realism thus yielded a clear and cohesive way of explaining not only the maiden’s paradoxes, but also the work’s written form, precluded by nominalist readings.

Having reached these conclusions, Chapter Two proceeded to apply them to Pearl’s engagement with a major topos of the medieval dream-vision genre, namely the visionary flight or journey to God and heaven. Since the narrator initially supposes the maiden to be a wholly singular treasure stolen from him by God, he loves her only as an individual possession and resists the divine will. However, the maiden intervenes on his behalf, on Chapter Two’s analysis directing his mind and heart, and hence also his volition, toward God by striving to help him to recognize real universals and to prioritize them over particulars. By attempting to show him that she is bound to Christ not qua singular or as His private treasure, but rather qua universal or as united with Him in common delight, the maiden holds out the hope that the narrator also can fuse with her in heavenly bliss—uniting with her and even perpetually perceiving his unity with her without wrestling her from the Lamb. And though the narrator’s intellectual and moral progress remains imperfect at the work’s
end, his amicable view of Christ and his talk of communion in *Pearl*’s last lines intimates that he has to an extent advanced toward apprehension of and participation in heaven’s universal delight.

Chapter Three then asked the same questions of *Piers* and likewise returned affirmative answers. According to this chapter, in Langland’s poem humans merge in common humanity, and this real universal, shining out unclouded by sin in Christ and Piers, both accounts for Piers’ identification with Christ and helps unlock Faith’s ‘proof’ of the Trinity and the C-Text grammatical metaphor. More fully, on this interpretation Faith’s ‘proof’ not only tends to imply that the text presupposes a realist view of original sin but also suggests that knowledge of real universals (such as common humanity) can help to reorient the fallen mind and will toward the divine. Meanwhile, the C-Text grammatical metaphor indicates that salvation amounts to participation in Christ’s mystical body, or in other words, as also explained in this chapter, in universal humanity in its state of fidelity to God—and it is in this true or salvific state that universal humanity appears to the narrator in Piers and Christ. Lastly, Chapter Three proposed that the grammatical metaphor and Langland’s use of personification both point toward symmetry between language and reality. One can thus take Doowell, for example, to stand for what its name most naturally seems to denote: not a rightly acting individual, say, but right action itself (or perhaps a state of affairs, i.e., God’s ordering humans to act rightly). Since nominalists denied the real category of action (as well as real states of affairs), however, readings of this sort are foreclosed by the supposition that nominalism underpins *Piers*.

Like Chapter Two, Chapter Three at this juncture brought its findings to bear on the theme of the narrator’s journey toward the divine. Because he exemplifies volition out of step with reason and God as a result of original (and subsequent) sin, Will must undertake an epistemic pilgrimage—a
quest to approach and heed divine Truth—if he would be saved, human nature in him redeemed. Further, since Will attends solely to sensed and singular things at the beginning of *Piers* (like the *Pearl* narrator in the first canto of that work), his approaching truth centrally involves his coming to grasp imperceptible natures—chiefly including common natures, the relation of which to their participants, as Faith’s ‘proof’ shows, helps illuminate the divine nature in relation to its Persons. More broadly, Will’s quest for knowledge and salvation depends partly upon his recognizing and attending to the wealth of beings for which the personification figures in his dream stand, e.g., on Chapter Three’s construal, real states and other non-categorical entities as well as real universals. For by learning to see beyond appearances and the impression of thoroughgoing particularity that they support to the ontological abundance acknowledged by realists—to a world isomorphic with language if not itself linguistic, a metaphysical text expressing the Word—Will can come to read reality aright, rising through objective knowledge of creatures toward understanding of God. And inasmuch as he attunes his mind to divine truth, he becomes more rational, subordinating his will to reason and accordingly, like Piers and Christ, exhibiting true human nature undarkened by sin. His salvation remains uncertain as *Piers* concludes; nonetheless, Will’s entrance into Unity Holy Church hints at his uniting with Christ in true universal humanity and so attaining heavenly bliss.

Whereas those of *Pearl* and *Piers* appear to advance toward the Word, *Fame*’s narrator flies only to human words, i.e., ideas and conventional terms. Yet it does not follow that, as has often been held, *Fame* affirms nominalism. To the contrary, Chapter Four found fundamental philosophical concord between Chaucer’s poem and those discussed in previous chapters, for it argued that it is more probable that realism underwrites *Fame* than that nominalism does (if the text engages with the realist-nominalist conflict at all). More exactly, this chapter proposed that the poem plausibly
presupposes a realist picture of nominalism as undermining objective knowledge—and therefore, in the context of the dream-visionary ascent to the divine, hindering transcendence and salvation. Put otherwise, it in effect answered “no” to the questions, Does language reflect reality in *Fame*? and Do individuals in *Fame* merge in real universals? Conspicuously, the garrulous eagle serving as visionary guide in Chaucer’s poem does not appear to unite, as do the *Pearl* maiden and Piers, with Christ in any common property revealed to the mind’s eye of the dreamer. For these reasons it might indeed be suspected, initially, that a nominalist outlook informs *Fame*. If the text depicts asymmetry between words and the world, though, it also comically illustrates the failure of signs, in this situation, to represent extramental reality adequately and to yield objective knowledge. On Chapter Four’s analysis, the poem’s termination leaves the narrator in a mental maze, a labyrinth of signs conveying little about the exterior world. This idealist scenario, in the light of the realist-nominalist controversy, bespeaks not nominalist thought itself but realist fears about nominalism. Accordingly, in *Fame* Chaucer might well be warning, in his whimsical manner, that nominalism subverts ascent to God and heaven—but he assuredly does not seem to be *endorsing* nominalism.

If even *Fame*, that favourite text of literary nominalists, can be fruitfully read in terms of realism, then one would expect that Chaucer’s other dream visions would also prove amenable to literary-realist explication. Indeed, in future studies I hope to show that realist analysis of *The Parliament of Fowls, The Book of the Duchess*, and the Preface to *The Legend of Good Women* can yield key insights into these works. This is not the place to elaborate original construals, of course. Yet if I may be allowed to anticipate, I would offer that it appears promising to approach the *Parliament* much as this dissertation has *Fame*, but to approach the *Duchess* and *Good Women* more as it has *Pearl* and *Piers*. More exactly, I would understand the *Parliament*, which was written around the
same time as *Fame*, as agreeing with *Fame* in lightheartedly affirming nominalism’s folly from a realist viewpoint, whereas I would read White (in the *Duchess*) and Alceste (in *Good Women*) as exemplifying real universals recognition of which steers these texts’ narrators toward the divine.\(^2\)

And of course, the literary-critical questions which Chapter One invites need not be asked just of dream-vision poems. Especially given the staunchly realist intellectual climate of late fourteenth-century England, it seems likely that interpretations along the lines of those proposed in Chapters Two through Four may also illuminate other works, particularly those engaging with the motif of the journey to God, e.g., Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, or at least its final episode, and perhaps even his *Canterbury Tales*.\(^3\) But furthermore, Chapters Two and Three have elucidated *Pearl* and *Piers* as imaginative visions of unity rooted in realism, and it may be asked whether such texts as

\(^2\) Although its overt and extended engagement with the Neoplatonic commentary of “Macrobye” (111) on “the Drem of Scipioun” (31)—according to which anyone who in life “lovede commune profyt” (47) above her or his particular good will “into a blysful place wende / There as joye is that last withouten ende” (48–9) (“pass into a blissful place / Where there is joy that lasts without end”)—invokes a realist paradigm of ascent to God and heaven, a paradigm that is only reinforced by Chaucer’s allusion to Alan of Lille’s realist poem “the Pleynt of Kynde” (316), the *Parliament*, like *Fame*, ends in an incoherent babble of words that are both uttered by birds and as bereft of significance as those to which the eagle bears Geffrey in *Fame*. This consideration—together with the fact that the *Parliament*’s narrator, like Geffrey, gains no “bliss and joye” (669) in his dream beyond that of the “shoutyng” fowls (693) (despite having entered by a gate the inscription on which offers hope of admittance “into that blysful place / Of hertes hele” (127–8) (“into that blissful place / Of heart’s salubrity”), the “welle of grace” (129) (“font of grace”) and the further fact that he first passes through “a temple of bras” (231) the walls of which, like those of the temple of glass in *Fame*, are covered with words (“peynted overal” (234) with “many a story” (235)) but do not reveal external reality—hints that in the *Parliament*, as in *Fame* on Chapter Four’s reading, ascent to the divine may be hindered by the failure of signs to lead straightforwardly to signified entities, i.e., by nominalism. By contrast, at the end of the *Duchess* that poem’s narrator seems not only (like the *Pearl* narrator) to glimpse the New Jerusalem of John’s Apocalypse (“A long castel with walles white, / Be Seynt Johan, on a ryche hil” (1318–19) (“A long castle with white walls, / By Saint John, on a rich hill”)), but also to enjoy this vision by coming more to comprehend and value “goode fair White” (948) as the “man in blak” (445) does, i.e., I think, as an especially clear instance of universal truth, that “Trouthe” which (1003), though abiding in many individuals, “chose hys maner principal / In hir that was his resting place” (1004–5) (“made his principal residence / In her, who was his resting place”). And comparable considerations can be applied to *Good Women*, for one may say that, if in the *Duchess* common truth appears in White and sets paradise before the narrator, in the Preface to *Good Women* another real universal, i.e., common goodness or fidelity “in lovyng” (F 438), shines out in “the quene Alceste, / That turned was into a dayesye” (F 511–2) (“the queen Alceste, / Who was turned into a daisy”)—which real universal, duly affirmed and esteemed in the many women of *Good Women*, guides the narrator toward the divine. All Chaucer quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, and all translations into modern English are mine (taking *The Riverside Chaucer*’s translations, where available, into account).

\(^3\) Karl Reichl gestures toward the possibility of explicating *Troilus and Criseyde* in terms of realism when he tells us that the Boethian hierarchy of knowledge—at the apex of which reason “permits us to see the form of things, not the
John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, which similarly places a premium on unity, should likewise be regarded as underpinned by realism and promulgating “a moral view of universals” (Laird 225).  

It is also tempting to turn the lens of literary realism upon works written on the Continent or after 1400. In France, in particular, the nominalism of the first part of the fourteenth century provoked such a backlash of anti-nominalist and anti-Ockhamist sentiment that the University of Paris laid down statutes in 1339 and 1340 barring the teaching of Ockham’s doctrine—and at last, in 1474, King Louis XI himself intervened to forbid nominalism throughout the realm.  

form that characterizes an individual object (the particular red of this particular flower), but the general form… i.e., the universal red as such” (140)—figures in this poem, adding that that Troilus does not rise to rational apprehension of real universals in his affection for Criseyde, for he loves her at no level above that of imagination and “individual forms only” (141). Building on Reichl’s suggestion, one may further speculate that Troilus’ seeming unawareness of real universals ultimately interferes with his apprehending the true, Trinitarian nature of God (“the one, and two, and three, eternally alive, / That forever reigns in three, and two, and one”) and attaining “the pleyn felicite / That is in hevene above” (5.1818–9) (“the perfect felicity / That is in heaven above”)—so that we read only that, after his death, he proceeds “[t]her as Mercurye sorted hym to dwelle” (5.1827) (“to the place Mercury allotted him to dwell in”). Regarding *The Canterbury Tales*, it has been admitted at least since D. W. Robertson’s 1962 *Preface to Chaucer* that the pilgrimage around which the poem is organized is at least on one level “a figure for the pilgrimage of the Christian soul through the world’s wilderness towards the celestial Jerusalem” (373). However, literary-nominalist as well as literary-nominalist criticism of the Tales has focussed on Chaucer’s depictions of the pilgrims in the General Prologue or on this or that particular tale rather than on the possible role of universals in relation to the theme of pilgrimage to God and heaven.  

Interestingly, the literary nominalist Russell Peck observes that, for Gower, “[t]he more men ignore common profit to seek singular ends, the more they hate each other and turn against each other”—simultaneously becoming “furth further divided from God” (xviii). Peck adds that the *Confessio*’s narrator, Amans, is out of step with God and Nature at the work’s beginning precisely because he (much like the *Pearl* narrator) prioritizes “his singular concern” for a beloved individual above the common good (xiii). For as Amans declares, “Sonne… / Is moder of divisioun” (Prol. 1029–30) (“Sin… / Is mother of division”) whereas virtue or righteousness is a matter of maintaining unity by valuing “comun common profit” over private or singular goods (Prol. 377). This understanding of morality sits quite nicely with—although of course it does not, of itself, entail—a moral view of universals such as that emphasized by contemporaneous realists.  

The statute “signed, sealed, and promulgated on September 25, 1339 by the four nations comprising [the Faculty of Arts] and by the rector of the University” (Courtenay, *Ockham* 161) completely prohibits listening to, lecturing on, disputing, or citing Ockham’s teachings and threatens offenders with suspension: “[S]ince in these times some have presumed to dogmatize the doctrine of William of Ockham… we, mindful of our well-being […] decree that henceforth no one shall presume to dogmatize the said doctrine by listening to it or lecturing on it publicly or in private, or by holding small meetings for disputing said doctrine, or by citing it in lecture or in disputations. If anyone should presume, however, to act against the above or any part thereof, him we suspend for a year, during which time he may not obtain any office or degree among us, no exercise in any way any office or degree already held. Moreover, if anyone should obstinately fail to observe the above statute, we will forever place him under the aforesaid penalty” (Courtenay, *Ockham* 159) (“Cum… istis temporibus nonnulli doctrinam Guillermi dicti Okam… dogmatizare presumpserint… statuimus quod nullus decetero predictam doctrinam dogmatizare
realist or anti-nominalist attitudes inform French poems of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries? And to return to England: How, if at all, did institutional hostility to Wyclif and Lollard opinions traced to Wyclif—some of which, such as the antipathy to mere signs or appearances as such that seems to have fueled the fifteenth-century controversy about religious images, make appearances in Wyclif’s works on universals— influence the philosophical (realist or nominalist) perspectives

presumat audiendo vel legendo publice vel occulte, necnon conventicula super dicta doctrina disputanda faciendo vel ipsum in lectura vel disputationibus allegando. Si quis tamen contra premissa vel aliquod premissorum attemptare presumperit, ipsum per annum privamus, et quod per dictum annum obtinere honorem seu graduem inter nos non valeat nec obtenti actus aliquiliter exercere. Si qui autem contra predicta inventi pertinacies fuerint, in predictis penis volumus perpetue subjacere” [Chartularium 485]). As J. M. M. H. Thijssen notes, this ordinance—“the first document that testifies to the impact of Ockham’s teachings on the Continent” (139)—“invokes concern over ‘our salvation’ (nostre salutis) as a reason for prohibiting the dogmatizing of Ockham” (141, his italics), which consideration reveals that, if “the statute reveals a high level of concern over Ockham’s doctrine,” the anxiety flows, at least in part, from the perception that Ockhamism imperils salvation (Thijssen 141). The statute of December 29, 1340, which was also ordained by the Faculty of Arts, then constituted “an additional measure to the measures already taken in 1339 against ‘those who have presumed to dogmatize the doctrine of Ockham’” (Thijssen 145, his italics). This edict reasserts “what we [the Arts Faculty] have decreed elsewhere [i.e., in the statute of 1339] as to the doctrine of William called Ockham” (Courtenay, Ockham 169) (“que de doctrina Guillermi dicti Ockam alias statuimus ” [Chartularium 507]). Further, it “bears a rubric that states that the said statute is directed against certain errors of the Ockhamists (Statutum facultatis de reprobatone quorumdam errorum Ockhanicorum)” (Thijssen 142, his italics) and goes on to list some of the offensive opinions “believed to have been inspired by Ockham’s writings” (Thijssen 143). For instance, the fifth article of the statute of 1340 declares, “let no one say that there is no scientific knowledge… of things which are not signs, that is, which are not terms or expressions” (Courtenay, Ockham 168) (“nullus dicat scientiam nullam esse de rebus que non sunt signa” [Chartularium 506]), insisting to the contrary that “we [humans] have scientific knowledge of things, albeit by means of terms or expressions” (Courtenay, Ockham 168) (“scientiam habemus de rebus, licet mediantibus terminis vel orationibus” [Chartularium 507]). This article of the 1340 statute thus attests to the realist conviction that nominalism undermines objective knowledge insofar as nominalists (including Ockham, Holcot, and Wodehams, although in different ways: see Chapter One, Section 2.3) denied that sentences properly signify extramental entities—and it seeks to secure objective knowledge, including knowledge of articles of faith requisite for salvation, by institutionalizing realism. (Cf. Section 4 of Chapter One, including footnote 162.) Finally, on March 1, 1474, following a protracted “quarrel between the nominalists and the realists… between 1466 and 1474,” Louis XI himself intervened and, “by a royal ordinance, prescribed the teaching of realist doctors” (Gabriel 446). In Louis’ ordinance we read: “And moreover we establish and proclaim that the aforesaid doctrine of Aristotle and his Commentator Averroës, Albertus Magnus, St Thomas of Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus, Bonaventure, and the other Realist Doctors—whose doctrine, as has been said, has been found safe and secure in retrospect—should henceforth be read, taught, dogmatized, learned, and imitated in the Faculties of both sacred Theology and the Arts in the aforesaid University of Paris in the accustomed manner; however, we expressly decree that the other doctrine, of the aforesaid Nominalists (both those mentioned and any others like them in the same university or elsewhere in our Realm), is henceforth by no means openly, secretly, or in whatever manner to be read, taught and dogmatized, or to some extent upheld” (“Et vterius statuimus et edicimus quod predicta Aristotelis doctrina eiusque Commentatoris Auerrois, Alberti Magni, Sancti Thome de Aquino, Egidii de Roma, Alexandri de Halis, Scoti, Bonauenture, aliorumque Realium Doctorum, quorum doctrina, vt dictum est, rectroactis temporibus sana securaeque comperta est, tam in sacre Theologie quam in Artium Facultatibus in predicta Parisiensi Vniuersitate deinceps more solito legatur, doceatur, dogmatizetur, discatur et imitetur; alteram autem predictorum Nominalium tam expressatorum, quam aliorum quorumcumque sibi similitum in eadem universitate nec alibi quoquo versum in Regno nostro deinceps, palam nec occulte, aut quouismodo nullatenus esse legendam, docendam et dogmatizandam aut aliquatenus sustinendam, expresse decernimus” (Ehrle 314). In the same year, a group of French nominalists responded with a manifesto in their defence; cf. Ehrle, 321–2.
Indeed, precisely what bearing, if any, did the extreme realism which prevailed in England by the close the fourteenth century have on the image controversy—or what bearing was it believed to have—and further, how did the prohibition of some of Wyclif’s books and the repression of his views affect the form or articulation of realism in the fifteenth century? Such questions, representing some of the avenues for future research invited by the current study, beg to be answered if literary-realist readings of texts beyond its parameters would be developed.

Yet while we should be sensitive to differences in the shape and reception of realist thought from place to place and over time, we should also be mindful of realism’s enduring potential to appeal, sometimes for reasons akin to those adduced in fourteenth-century England, to poets as well as to philosophers. It is decidedly not the case that “we are all nominalists nowadays,” and one of my

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6 As Richard Green points out, the Lollards’ “mistrust of the popular veneration of images” (286), like their rejection of transubstantiation, appears to have been fueled by Wyclif’s insistence that one must not, by “failing to distinguish between the signifier and the signified,” unduly focus on signs to the exclusion of realities (284)—a criticism Wyclif also directs, in his *Tractatus de universalibus*, at the nominalists or “doctors of signs” (cf. Chapter Three, Section 4).

7 In “Censorship and Cultural Change,” Nicholas Watson discusses the consequences of “the increasingly systematic campaign of opposition to the Lollards,” particularly the Constitutions issued by Archbishop Arundel in 1409 (825). He points out that poems like “Pearl… and Piers Plowman” (829, his italics) could not “have been written after the publication of the Constitutions without contravening several of the articles therein” since the Constitutions would not have permitted “their use of biblical quotation and their extensive treatment of an array of theological subjects” (829–30). Of course, the Constitutions did not forbid realism—even in the form adapted from Wyclif by the Oxford Realists—and so would not have prevented the writing of a poem just on the basis of that work’s affirming a realist perspective. However, the Constitutions did “address… the universities, and Oxford in particular, with inhibitions on the conduct of theological instruction” and prohibited the use of “the works of Wyclif as textbooks except what was approved by a board of censors responsible to the archbishop” (Catto 244)—and the fact that a certain Thomas Claxton, who was himself on the board of censors (Catto 255), sought “to challenge… the idea of real universals” as “the philosophical basis of many of the condemned doctrines” reveals that realism was not beyond suspicion in this context (Catto 256). Philosophers defending, and presumably poets presupposing, realism after 1409 would have had to do so cautiously. To date, most studies of the influence of Wyclif’s realism outside of England have focussed on its impact in Prague, where it enjoyed a vibrant second life via the work of Mikuláš Biceps, Stanislav of Znojmo, and Jerome of Prague (e.g.). One particularly good recent examination of the impact of Wyclif’s realism in Prague is Ota Pavlíček’s “Wyclif’s Early Reception in Bohemia and His Influence on the Thought of Jerome of Prague.”

8 For instance, in “Nominalism and Idealism” (2011) the contemporary realist Herbert Hochberg contends (as did his fourteenth-century counterparts) that nominalism implies idealism, while in his famous paper “Nominalism” (1964), the twentieth-century Thomist Peter Geach gives a new form to the abiding realist conviction that nominalism poses problems for Christians by leading that nominalism leads “to false and heretical conclusions… in relation to the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation” (6). Marilyn Adams (in “Relations, Inherence and Subsistence: or, Was Ockham a Nestorian in Christology?”) and Alfred Freddoso (in “Logic, Ontology and Ockham’s Christology”) deny
hopes for the present study is that it may help to kindle new interest in literary-realist explication of modern as well as pre-modern literature (Knight 37). However, a major obstacle to the fruition of my hope is that, as has been noted intermittently in the above chapters, literary critics continue to align nominalism with modern, and especially with postmodern, perspectives. For instance, in 2001 James Paxson detected a “general inhospitalableness toward postmodern theory” in the act of “preferring a realist Langland” to a nominalist one (“Response” 47), and in 2010 Angus Fletcher spoke of “this inherently nominalist world we now inhabit” (31). In order, then, to accommodate literary-realist readings not just of texts sometimes said to anticipate modern ideas or approaches, e.g., *The Canterbury Tales*, but even of genuinely modern or postmodern works, I shall conclude this dissertation with a look at the recurrent affiliation of nominalism with (post)modernity—and more basically, at the view of realism and nominalism on which this association rests. Fletcher’s rather unfortunately titled “Allegory without Ideas” serves to illustrate a common line of thought.

Fletcher, who is among those for whom allegory assumes “something like philosophical realism” (20), centrally argues that “the platonic theory of ideas modulated into that system we know as the ‘realism’ of medieval philosophers and theologians—‘realism,’ of course, because the ideas were the only ultimately unchanging reality” (16). The language of this claim effectively reduces realism of all sorts to Platonic realism, and accordingly Fletcher adds that for realists “universals, those abstract entities that we identify with various modes of platonic form” (17), overshadow or “preside… over” concrete particulars (15). Hence realism is anti-individualistic: “Contingency, Geach’s arguments regarding the Trinity and the Incarnation, though Freddoso, who calls Ockham’s “account of the hypostatic union… seriously deficient,” concurs that Ockhamist nominalism creates difficulties for Christians (293). Cf. Section 1 of Chapter Two, including footnote 3, and especially Section 1 of Chapter Four, including footnote 2. This opinion is discussed in Section 3 of Chapter Three. The Platonic-realist sentiment that Fletcher finds to be prototypically realist was perhaps put best by Ralph Waldo Emerson in “Prudence”: “The world of the senses is a world of shows; it does not exist for itself, but has a symbolic character” (215). Fletcher’s depiction of realism also agrees with Emerson’s in the latter’s “Nominalist and Realist,”
individuality, concreteness of the given thing disappear into the perfection of the idea” (17). And further, since the Forms are the essences of concrete individuals, a “deep essentialism animates” realism (15)—and realism, in turn, encourages essentialist or “absolutist thinking” (17). Fletcher ultimately suggests that, if “allegory is the authoritarian mode of literature and art and discourse” (20) and “is always involved in symbolisms of power,” allegory’s authoritarian character rests on realist essentialism (26). He goes on to connect allegory with “a Machiavellian theory of power” (29) instrumental to political absolutism and “institutionalized religions” (27), and even warns of “a neorealist allegory pandemically spreading everywhere through… corporate advertising” (29).

However, Fletcher also holds that nominalism subverts the “symbolic terrorism” of allegory (27), deflating “iconologies of power” (10) by rejecting “a platonic heaven of unchanging forms” (17). Instead of discounting concrete individuals in favour of abstract universals, nominalism advances an ideologically liberating “real-world imperative” that enfranchises the contingent, singular, and concrete (31). Nominalism, then, is profoundly individualistic. And according to Fletcher, it also “seems to envisage a world of endless qualification in speech and thought, so that no ‘classes’ of things are even believed to be anything ultimately serious” (19). At last nominalism, like modern and (preeminently) postmodern thought, replaces firm Ideas with “relativistic procedures” (19).12

where we read that, “[i]n the famous disputes with the Nominalists, the Realists had a good deal of reason. General ideas are essences. They are our gods: they round and ennoble the most partial and sordid way of living” (393). But for a fourteenth-century realist, at least, the essences of concrete individuals are certainly not numinous, godly Ideas. 12 Both Fletcher’s depiction of realism as essentialist and authoritarian and his portrayal of nominalism as relativistic if not democratic are anticipated by many authors, perhaps most notably by authors active in the wake of World War II. For instance, Richard Weaver’s 1948 Ideas Have Consequences traces modernity’s “feeling of alienation from all fixed truth” (4) to “the fateful doctrine of nominalism” (3) on the grounds that a key “result of nominalist philosophy is to banish the reality which is perceived by the intellect” (3) and to substitute “relativism” for “objective truth” (4). Weaver laments the relativism allegedly arising from nominalism, but John Lewis’ review of Weaver’s book replies that—although nominalism indeed “rejects all general ideas, all underlying principles, and therefore all standards of judgment”—the realism Weaver prefers “is not merely aristocratic and authoritarian but in many respects… fascist” (69). Similarly but far more influentially, Karl Popper’s 1950 The Open Society and Its Enemies aligns realism with authoritarianism. Like Fletcher, Popper reduces all realism to Platonic realism, seeing Aristotle’s account as merely a “systematization of Platonism” (202), and understands realism as a form of “essentialism” to which “nominalism”
It must be replied, though, that nominalism is no more relativistic than it is skeptical or idealist—and that, if realism is to be branded “essentialist” because it countenances extramental natures or essences, nominalism equally warrants this label. Medieval realists and nominalists alike granted natures; the latter just denied common natures. And whatever may be said about Platonic realism, scholastic realism cannot justly even be called anti-individualistic. To see how entirely amenable realism of the kind articulated in fourteenth-century England is to respect and even reverence for individuals and individuality, one need look no further than the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins.

According to Maria Lichtmann, “unity” is “perhaps the first word of Hopkins’ poetic creed,” and a “fundamental need for unity” appears throughout his poetry (8). Lichtmann links this “need for unity” with the poet’s “belief in philosophical realism” (Wimsatt, Hopkins’s Poetics 97), alleging that “Hopkins is… no nominalist” (Lichtmann 11) and connecting his “parallelisms of structure” (Lichtmann 43) with the symmetry he finds “between art and life,” signs and entities (Lichtmann 55). In fact, it makes good sense to speak of “Hopkins’ poetry of realism” (Lichtmann 145)—for as his prose writings attest, “Hopkins was a philosophical realist” as well as a poet (Ward 214).
However, Hopkins deemed Platonic realism too abstract, too dismissive of concrete particulars.\(^{14}\) He himself paid “patient attention to the particulars in nature” (Lichtmann 18), celebrating them in his poetry—one thinks, for instance, of his “dapple-dáwn-drawn Falcon, in his riding / Of the rolling level undernéath him steady áir, and striding / High there [as] he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing / In his ecstasy” (“The Windhover” 2–5)—and like his poetry, his prose reveals a hardly-to-be-surpassed preoccupation with “the unique particularity of things” (Lichtmann 17).\(^{15}\)

Hence if Hopkins sought to express a realist vision of unity or “vision of… oneness” in his work, he simultaneously foregrounded the “variety and individuality” of tangible reality (Lichtmann 9). The poet found a philosophical foundation for his vision of unity with particularity in the realism of Scotus—and accordingly calls Scotus, not just “the rarest-veined unraveller” of reality (“Duns Scotus’ Oxford” 12), but he who “most sways my spirits to peace” (“Duns Scotus’s Oxford” 11).

For Hopkins as for Scotus, individuals essentially contain immediately singular, incommunicable individual differences as well as common natures. Hopkins often terms an individual difference a “pitch,” and he places the pitch at the centre of an individual’s “inscape”—a neologism by which he seems to mean the full field or inner “landscape” of an individual’s metaphysical components, including its common properties.\(^{16}\) Because of the applicability of Scotus’s idea of the individual

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\(^{14}\) As Litchmann relates, Hopkins maintains in his unpublished Oxford notes that “the defect of the Platonic as of all transcendental theories is that it confines itself to the upper world without caring at all about the sensible as if the abstraction were truer than the thing it was meant to explain” (103).

\(^{15}\) Hopkins often ponders particularity and individual distinctness. For example, he describes his own “individuality” as “something most determined and distinctive” (Sermons 122) and says, “this is much more true when we consider the mind; when I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of I and me above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf or camphor, and is incommunicable by any means to another man (as when I was a child I used to ask myself: What must it be to be someone else?). Nothing else in nature comes near to this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctness, and selving, this selfbeing of my own” (Sermons 123, his italics). As noted below, “pitch” is a name Hopkins applies to Scotus’ individual difference.

\(^{16}\) “So also pitch is simple positiveness, that by which [a] being differs,” Hopkins writes, going on to ask: “Is not this pitch or whatever we call it then the same as Scotus’s [ha]eceitas?” (Sermons 151, his italics). The use of “pitch” to designate the haecceity or individual difference seems to belong to a larger analogy between metaphysics and music. Being a poet, and not a professional philosopher, Hopkins tends to describe the metaphysical make-up of individuals
difference to his own notion of inscape, Hopkins records that, upon his first contact with Scotus’ philosophy, he found himself moved to think of Scotus whenever he apprehended inscapes.  

He describes himself as “flush with enthusiasm” on that occasion (Sermons 221). And well he might have been, for Scotus’ account (like those of other fourteenth-century realists, e.g., Wyclif or the other Oxford Realists, whose systems he never mentions having studied) furnished Hopkins with what Platonic realism did not: the philosophical resources to set the universal in its particulars, to see a ground of metaphysical identity among individuals within individuals themselves. Thus, far from bidding Hopkins withdraw attention or affection from sensible singulars, Scotus’ scholastic realism inspired him to turn toward individuals—not just for their differences, but for their unity.

Like the Pearl poet, Langland, and Chaucer according to the present study, Hopkins believes that apprehending the universal in its particulars or finding “in the many the One” facilitates ascent to the divine: “Man may rise from an experience of particular things, of ‘inscapes’, to God” through the universals in inscapes (Pick 49). He also holds that “man may read the message of the Word” in “the world,” and indeed Hopkins, like a late fourteenth-century realist, takes very seriously (in harmony with his realist insistence on semantic-ontological symmetry) the view that the world is importantly linguistic (Pick 49). “God’s utterance of himself in himself is God the Word, outside himself is this world,” he explains (Sermons 129). “This world then is word, expression, news of God” (Sermons 129). Likewise, Hopkins writes in “As kingfishers catch fire” that “[e]ach mortal thing… / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; / Selves—goes its self; / Myself it speaks

figuratively; for instance, though he does not on this occasion call it a “pitch,” Hopkins once describes the individual difference as the centre of a field (of properties), or in other words an inscape, belonging to an individual: “A self… will consist of a centre and a surrounding area or circumference, a point of reference and a belonging field, the latter set out, as surveyors… say, from the former; of two elements, which we may call the inset and the outsetting of the display” (Sermon 127, his italics). In this metaphor, the centre or “inset” is the individual difference which, together with the properties “outsetting” the centre to produce a “surrounding area or circumference,” constitutes the inscape.

17 “At this time I had first begun to get hold of the copy of Scotus on the Sentences in the Baddely [sic] Library,” he relates, adding that “just then I took in any inscape… and thought of Scotus” (Sermons 221).
and spells, / Crying what I do is me: for that I came” (5–8, his italics). Each thing declares itself, as Wyclif also asserts. Each, as it expresses or “deals out” its inner being, participates in God’s self-expression. Thus if one would hear and heed God’s news, and so draw nearer to heaven, one must attend to creatures. Here one will discern particularity, to be sure—the “throng and stack of being, so rich, so distinctive”—in each individual’s inscape (Sermons 122). But here too one will perceive real universals, recognize the oneness of created things, and ascend toward their creator.

I have lingered on the work of an author whom some deem “the first modernist” because, beyond attesting to the lasting attraction of scholastic (and in fact fourteenth-century English) realism for poets, it belies the stubborn supposition that realism is pre-modern and anti-individualistic, if not authoritarian (Sobolev 8). The “poet of inscape and haecceitas,” who praises concrete particulars both in themselves and as divine utterances expressing the individual as well as universal aspects of their being, can hardly be accused of dismissing or suppressing individuality (Lichtmann 163). Indeed, to Hopkins’ mind and through his poetry, Scotus’ realist vision brings peace precisely by providing for particularity without, however, annulling metaphysical unity—without denying, in other words, that insofar as we merge in real universals we are really one despite our differences. And surely the definitively realist opinion that we are not metaphysical islands would seem more amenable to peace than to authoritarian aggression, for who, inasmuch as she recognizes another as to some extent really identical with herself, reviles or represses that other? Perhaps more of us, in our era of divisive nationalism and isolationism, should take the realist vision of unity to heart.

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18 Cf. Section 2.3 of Chapter One.


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