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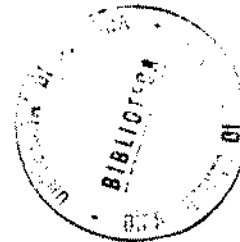
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## 9 The Tradition of Mediaeval Nominalism

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Contemporary nominalism has several faces. One of these is displayed in the first sentence of Hartry Field's book *Science without Numbers*, where Field writes that "Nominalism is the doctrine that there are no abstract objects."<sup>1</sup> Another is displayed in Nelson Goodman's claim that "Nominalism . . . consists of the refusal to countenance any entities other than individuals. Its opposite, platonism, recognizes at least some non-individuals."<sup>2</sup>

It is far from clear what these positions have to do with one another—in part because the connection between being concrete (the contrary of being abstract) and being particular or individual is itself obscure. Some philosophers write as if it were obvious that all and only concrete objects are individual, but it is hard to see what is non-individual about either the cardinal numbers or Plato's Forms. Part of the problem here is just that we lack good theories of the abstract/concrete and individual/nonindividual distinctions, but part also seems to be that any plausible story which would make the collapse seem plausible involves strong additional assumptions which I doubt foes of either abstract objects or nonindividuals have any reason to accept.

Suppose, for example, that an object is abstract if one could imagine it emerging as the result of a process of abstraction which leaves out some features of some other object. A concrete object then would be one from which no feature was left out. Such an object would be an

I am heavily indebted to Christopher J. Martin for many references to texts of the *Nominales* and for much discussion of them, to Sten Ebbesen for the reference to Jacques de Vitry, and to Peter King for comments. Other versions of this material were presented at the Boston Area Medieval Philosophy Colloquium and at the University of California, Irvine. I would also like to thank the members of those audiences for their helpful discussion.

1. Hartry Field, *Science without Numbers: A Defense of Nominalism* (Princeton, 1980), p. 1.

2. Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1951), pp. 33-34.

individual in Leibniz's sense and an actual object (as contrasted with a mere possible) in Peirce's.<sup>3</sup> Against such a background the two faces of nominalism merge. But such a merger requires the identity of indiscernibles. It is because a Leibnizian individual is completely specified by a maximal collection of properties that every Leibnizian individual is, in this sense, concrete.

Nominalists are not, I think, in a position to accept the identity of indiscernibles. Why should indiscernible objects be identical? To suppose they are is to suppose that distinctness is either produced by or results in a difference of properties. But properties are neither individual nor concrete. Hence no matter which face is the true face of nominalism, nominalists will have to deny that properties exist. But then properties cannot account for the distinctness of things. This still leaves the possibility that each two things are as a matter of fact discernible, but it leaves that possibility unmotivated. So the collapse of the two claims about what nominalism is would, on this story, require an assumption which the adherents of neither need accept.

If the most plausible stories supporting the merger of the two all require assumptions which neither party need accept, we have reason to wonder whether either captures what the term "nominalism" was originally coined to express. Perhaps by investigating the history of the term we will learn something about how and why it came to be used so variously.

"Nominalist" is a mediaeval term. Perhaps the best way to find out what it means is to take that fact seriously and to try to trace the history of its mediaeval use. It is plausible to suppose that even today people use the term as they imagine their teachers did in a chain that stretches back into the Middle Ages. So perhaps the history of the use of the word "nominalist" can inform its current use.

There is considerable unease within the contemporary scholarly community about what is to be understood by "nominalism" in the Middle Ages. For example, Paul Vignaux suggests that the nominalism of the twelfth century is unrelated to that of the later Middle Ages, while William Courtenay goes so far as to suggest that there is not enough resemblance among the thinkers and views usually called "nominalist" to warrant the continued use of the term.<sup>4</sup> Yet even such

3. Because his adherence to the identity of indiscernibles is very strict, Leibniz admits possible as well as actual individuals (cf. for example his *Correspondence With Arnauld*, trans. H. T. Mason [Manchester, 1967], pp. 15-16).

4. For Vignaux's view cf. his *Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1959), p. 52. For Courtenay's view cf. his "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," in C. Trinkhaus and H. Oberman, eds., *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Leiden, 1974), pp. 26ff.

sophisticated critics as these have, I suggest, queered the pitch for their investigations by assuming that we know what nominalism was, at least originally, and by assuming in particular that its roots lie somehow in the debate about universals. Thus two of the four sections into which Vignaux divides his article "Nominalisme" in the *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* have "Universel" in their title, and even Courtenay is prepared to suggest that "'Nominalist' was a twelfth-century term that described a particular position on the problem of universals."<sup>5</sup>

It is precisely the assumption that mediaeval nominalism was, fundamentally, a position about universals which I wish to question here. I claim that mediaeval nominalism was only incidentally connected with the problem of universals and that, once that is seen, both the philosophical terrain of the Middle Ages and some of our contemporary metaphysical vocabulary look somewhat different.

When does nominalism begin? Most of our earliest sources are completely silent about this question, but there are two sentences by the twelfth-century historian Otto von Freising which just might suggest an answer. It is thought that Otto studied in Paris from about 1127 to 1133, so his testimony has some authority. In book I of his *Gesta Frederici Imperatoris*, Otto writes of Peter Abaelard that "he had for his teacher first one Roscelin, who first taught in our time the *sententia vocum*."<sup>6</sup> This gnomic remark could perhaps be glossed with the help of Otto's claim just a bit later in the passage that Abaelard, "holding in the faculty of natural studies the *sententia vocum seu nominum*, incautiously introduced it into theology."<sup>7</sup>

If the *sententia nominum* is nominalism, and if this *sententia vocum seu nominum* can be identified, as Otto suggests it can, with Roscelin's *sententia vocum*, then we have some evidence that whatever nominalism is, it was Roscelin who popularized it in the early twelfth century. But it is not easy to see how Roscelin's doctrine of *voces* could be Abaelard's doctrine of *nomina*. If the *sententia vocum* is what John of Salisbury calls in his *Metalogicon* the "opinion that *voces* themselves are species and genera," then on John's own telling, we should conclude that that opinion "has vanished readily with its author," at a time when Abaelard's views in dialectics were treated with respect. But if the *sententia vocum* to which Otto refers is not the view that genera and species are *voces*, then what is it?

5. Courtenay, op. cit., p. 52.

6. Otto von Freising, *Gesta Frederici Imperatoris*, Lib. I, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, vol. 20, ed. G. H. Pertz, p. 377.

7. Ibid.

Otto suggests that Abaelard incautiously brought the *sententia vocum seu nominum* into theology. The problem of universals is not, as such, a central problem in theology, but the question of the nature of the Trinity is. The only position which we can solidly attribute to Roscelin, other than his view about universals, is the view that the distinctions among the persons of the Trinity are not distinctions among different things but distinctions among names. For this he was accused of Sabellianism.<sup>8</sup> As luck would have it, Abaelard was also accused of Sabellianism, and much of his effort in his *Theologia Christiana* goes to buttress his opinion against the charge. This suggests the possibility that the *sententia vocum seu nominum* includes a thesis that the various names of persons of the Trinity pick out just one thing.

Whatever we make of this suggestion about what the *sententia nominum* is, Peter Abaelard is clearly the one to whom Otto of Freising attributes it. And Walter Mappe in his *Trifles of the Courtiers* calls Abaelard the *Princeps Nominalium*.<sup>9</sup> Mappe's testimony is from the next generation, but still early, and it links Abaelard explicitly with the *Nominales*. If Abaelard is the author of the *sententia nominum* and the "Prince" of the *Nominales*, then we have a suspect. Does he have an alibi?

If we look at the references to the *Nominales* in twelfth-century texts, we find a curious collection of doctrines attributed to them. First, there is the view, called the *Error Nominalium*, that a syllogistic inference does not require a topical locus—this suggests that the syllogism is an inference form requiring no further justification.<sup>10</sup> Second, there is the view attributed to the *Nominales* in Munich CLM 2950 that a negative sentence does not follow from an affirmative nor vice versa.<sup>11</sup> Third, the *Compendium Logicae*—a text which recognizes Gilbert de la Poirée as master—attributes to some *Nominales* the view that a whole is nothing other than its parts.<sup>12</sup> Fourth, the *Obligationes Parisiensis* edited by De Rijk attributes to the *Nominales* views which imply that not everything follows from an impossibility.<sup>13</sup> And fifth,

8. Cf. Anselm of Canterbury, *Epistolae de Incarnatione Verbi*, in F. S. Schmitt, ed., *Opera Omnia* (Rome, 1938–60), vol. 1, p. 287 (*Priora Rescensio*), and 2, p. 15 (*Secunda Rescensio*).

9. Walter Mappe, *De Nugis Curialium*, d. I, c. 24, ed. and trans. M. R. James (Oxford, 1983), p. 79.

10. Cf. the treatise "Haec Est" (Paris, Arsenal 910 ff. 58ra–88vb), ed. N.-J. Green-Pederson in *Studia Medievalistica* 18 (1977), pp. 125–63, p. 142, n. 88.

11. Cf. the edition of Munich CLM 2950/2 by Yukio Iwakuma in *Cahiers de L'Institut du Moyen-Âge Grec et Latin* (CIMAGL) 44 (1983), p. 82.

12. *Compendium Logicae*, ed. Sten Ebbesen in CIMAGL 46 (1983), p. 39.

13. Cf. L. M. de Rijk, "Some Thirteenth Century Tracts in the Game of Obligation,"

Jacques de Vitry attributes to some *Nominales* the thesis that "nihil crescit."<sup>14</sup>

These theses seem quite disparate, but they have one thing in common: they are all characteristic and controversial views of Peter Abaelard. First, the view that the syllogism does not require a topical justification lies at the heart of Abaelard's theory of inference. In his *Dialectica*, Abaelard divides inferences into those which are perfect and require no rule to justify them and those which are imperfect and do require such a rule. The syllogism is his paradigm of perfect inference.<sup>15</sup> Second, in his discussion of the *locus ab oppositis*, Abaelard expressly denies that a negative sentence follows from an affirmative or vice versa.<sup>16</sup> Third, Abaelard seems to have denied that an integral whole like a house is a thing distinct from its integral parts.<sup>17</sup>

The fourth thesis, that not everything follows from an impossibility, is clearly Abaelard's but not so clearly a common doctrine of the *Nominales*. Abaelard not only held this view, but engaged in a bitter controversy about it with Alberic of Rheims, a controversy which seems to have been a watershed in the history of logic.<sup>18</sup> Abaelard resolutely denied that everything follows from an impossibility and devised two arguments which he believed decisively supported his view. In response, Alberic proved that the very arguments Abaelard used could be extended to show that the thesis Abaelard defended was inconsistent with the principles used in its defence. We do not know how Abaelard responded in turn to Alberic's proof, but in at least one text he is reported to have accepted it. This is of interest because there is confusion about the position of the *Nominales* on this point. This confusion is just what one would expect if the *Nominales* followed Abaelard into Alberic's trap and then had to find their own way out.

It is perhaps worth adding that the Alberic who bested Abaelard on this question is the same man who appears in the only mention of the *Nominales* in John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon*. John does not mention

*Vivarium* 13 (1975), pp. 22–53. Cf. also Vat. Lat. 7678, ed. in H. A. G. Braakhuis, *De 13de Eeuwse Tractaten over Syncategorematische Termen* (Krips Repro Mappel, Holland, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 63.

14. Thus the *Dialectica Monacensis*, ed. L. M. de Rijk in *Logica Modernorum*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Assen, 1967), p. 558, ll. 6ff., and Jacques de Vitry in his *Exempla*, Exemplum 102, in *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters*, vol. 5, ed. P. Lehmann (Münich, 1914), p. 147.

15. *Dialectica* III, p. 256, ll. 30–35, in Petrus Abaelardus, *Dialectica*, ed. with an intro. by L. M. de Rijk, 2d rev. ed. (Assen, 1970).

16. Op. cit., III, p. 395, ll. 7ff.

17. Cf. for example op. cit., V, p. 555, ll. 10ff.

18. For Abaelard's view and the controversy surrounding it cf. Christopher J. Martin, "William's Wonderful Machine," forthcoming in the *Journal of Philosophy*, 1986.

the *Nominales* at all in his discussion of universals but in recounting his own studies tells how, after Abaelard left Paris, he, John, went to study with Alberic, "a very fierce opponent of the sect of the *Nominales*."<sup>19</sup>

There seems little doubt then that the *Nominales* were followers of Abaelard. But why were they called *Nominales* and what is the *sententia nominum*?

Curiously the first explicit claim about why *Nominales* are so called appears not in the twelfth century but in the thirteenth, and not among logicians but among theologians. It is found in St. Bonaventure's commentary on the *Sentences*. The problem is the unlikely one of just what the articles of faith are. A little reflection shows that the difference between heresy and orthodoxy can be marked by as little as a difference of tense—by, for example, the difference between believing that the Messiah has come and believing that the Messiah will come. Hence, it seems reasonable to say that faith requires the acceptance of particular sentences (*complexa*) at particular times. Bonaventure continues:

And if you object to them about the change of faith [that would result] on account of change in these statements [*enuntiabiles*], they respond according to the *Nominales* that the statements are not changed, because that you are going to run, that you do run, and that you have run, spoken at different times signify the same thing. There is just one statement, because there is just one thing which they signify and one time for which they are put forward. Therefore, they are one in reality and truth although they seem vocally to be diverse. (*Sent. III*, d. 24, art. 1, q. 3, c.)<sup>20</sup>

Bonaventure also discusses the view of these *Nominales* in *Sent. I*, d. 41, art. 2, q. 2. There he writes that

if I say now "Socrates is running today," and tomorrow I say "He ran," then since there ought not to be a different time understood with the different verb and so not a different action, the statement [*enuntiabile*] is not changed however much the consignification is changed, and because the same signification is retained, the statement is always the same. Since it is not the same except when the same signification is retained, they say that what now is true is always true. Since God forgets nothing, they say that every statement which God knew he knows. . . . And this was the opinion of the *Nominales* who are called *Nominales* because they founded their position on the unity of the name.

This very position is also ascribed by Thomas Aquinas to the "old *Nominales*."<sup>21</sup>

19. John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, bk. II, ch. 10.

20. St. Bonaventure, *Commentarius in IV Libros Sententiarum Petri Lombardi III*, d. 24, art. 1, q. 3, c.

21. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae I*, q. 14, art. 15, ad 3.

Who held this position? M. D. Chenu, perhaps the scholar who has studied this question most deeply, thinks that the position under discussion is that of Bernard of Chartres and that it developed within the tradition of speculative grammar.<sup>22</sup> If his view is correct, there is a delicious irony about it, for there is no one farther from the traditional stereotype of a nominalist than Bernard. He believed firmly in Platonic Separated Forms, and the tradition of speculative grammar with which Chenu connects him was mercilessly criticized by the Buridanian "nominalists." Pierre d'Ailly even devoted a tract specifically to its refutation.<sup>23</sup>

But there is really no need to accept Chenu's hypothesis, for the doctrine which Bonaventure and Aquinas attribute to the *Nominales* is advanced in Peter Abaelard's *Introductio ad Theologiam* (PL 178: 1102–3) where Abaelard claims that God knew before I was born that I was going to be born and does not know now that I am going to be born and yet knows now what he knew then "although then and now this knowledge of his would have to be expressed in different words." Abaelard again seems to have originated the views which the *Nominales* propounded.

But is this all? Is the secret of nominalism just that Abaelard adopted a peculiar view about the unity of names and that a band of his students followed him in this obscure and eccentric practice?

Of course not! What is at stake here, I think, is nothing less than the question of the nature of reality itself. I hypothesize that we can sum up the views that make Abaelard's theses hang together as:

- (1) There are more truths than truth-makers.
- (2) There are more true sentences than truths.

If this is right, then nominalism is, at bottom, a position about what makes sentences true.

Thanks especially to recent work by Martin Tweedale and Peter King, we are at last in a position to begin to appreciate Abaelard's ontology and its relation to his philosophy of language.<sup>24</sup> In his ontology, Abaelard seems prepared to admit two kinds of things—individual substances and individual forms. But in his philosophy of language, he is prepared to talk about statuses, dicta, and natures. Statuses, dicta, and natures are not things, and there can be changes in the status

22. M.-D. Chenu, *La Théologie au Douzième Siècle* (Paris, 1957), pp. 95 ff.

23. Pierre d'Ailly's tract, so far little studied, is the *Destructiones Modorum Significandi*.

24. M. Tweedale, *Abailard on Universals* (Amsterdam, North-Holland, 1976), and P. O. King, "Peter Abaelard and the Problem of Universals" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton, 1982).

a thing has without any change in the thing itself. For example, if you and I are similar, then I have the status of being similar to you, but

what is more ridiculous than that if someone now be born to whom I am made similar, on account of that, some new thing be born in me which necessarily leaves when he perishes?<sup>25</sup>

Statuses are no more real than is the relation of similarity.

When do two terms pick out different statuses? Part of Abaelard's answer is that they do so when they differ in definition. As he remarks in the *Theologia Christiana*:

we are accustomed to use "same status" or "different statuses" for what is the same in definition, and we do not call this status that status except when this thing is wholly the same as that thing in definition.<sup>26</sup>

Dicta are to sentences as statuses to things. Abaelard seems not to have given identity conditions for dicta in any of the works we have, but a very plausible sufficient condition for distinctness of dicta is that two dicta are distinct if terms in the sentences expressing them pick out distinct statuses. Sentences with the same copula signifying or consignifying the same time will express the *same* dictum if their terms express the *same* status. This fits the view Abaelard expresses in his *Introductio ad Theologiam* that to say today that Socrates is running and to say tomorrow that Socrates ran (yesterday) is to say the same thing, i.e., to express the same dictum. Differences in tense do not suffice to differentiate dicta. Abaelard does not indicate exactly which differences in grammatical form reveal differences in dictum or status, but what he does say suggests that differences in consignification in general would not reveal such differences. Thus, changes of gender, like changes of tense, would leave the dictum or status unaffected. Distinct sentences can express the same dictum; there are more true sentences than truths.

What of the claim that there are more truths than truth-makers? By a truth-maker, I understand an item in the ontology in virtue of which a truth obtains. The claim that there are more truths than truth-makers is then the claim that distinct dicta can correspond to the same item in the ontology. We saw earlier that it is very plausible to think that dicta are distinct if they express distinct statuses. Abaelard is very clear that (1) statuses are not themselves items in the ontology

<sup>25</sup> Peter Abaelard, *Theologia Christiana*, in *Petri Abaelardi Opera Theologica*, vol. 2, ed. E. Buytaert (*Corpus Christianorum, Cont. Mediaevalis*), vol. 12 (Turnholt, Brepols, 1969), bk. III, par. 170.

<sup>26</sup> *Theologia Christiana*, bk. III, par. 157.

and (2) the same thing has many statuses. Indeed his account of change depends on the possibility that the same things may come to have or cease to have different statuses.

Two of the positions we have seen attributed to the *Nominales* are views directly relevant to the theory of change. One is the view, mentioned by Jacques de Vitry, that nothing increases (*nihil crescit*). The other is the view mentioned in the *Compendium Logicae* that a whole is nothing other than its parts. How can such views be defended?

I remarked earlier that Abaelard draws a sharp distinction between things like substances and forms, and statuses. What I wish to suggest now is that it is the former and not the latter which are the subjects of predication in normal contexts. That is, when I say

- (1) Socrates is a human

this can be rephrased as

- (2) The thing which is Socrates is (has the status of being) human.

To see the significance of this consider the sentence

- (3) Socrates is a thing-which-is-human.

Sentence 3 is true but not, I think, equivalent to sentence 1. Sentence 1 ascribes to Socrates—that very thing—a certain status—namely, that of being human. Sentence 3 on the other hand claims of Socrates that he is identical with a certain thing, which thing it picks out by the expression "a thing-which-is-human." Sentence 3 expresses, if I am right, exactly what is expressed by the claim "Socrates is that"—pointing to whatever is picked out by "a thing-which-is-human" in (3). But sentence 1 is not an identity claim at all.

Why does this matter? Abaelard is much concerned with problems of identity. The working out of an account of identity is crucial to his study of the Trinity.

Consider the following problem. Suppose a block of stone has been made into a statue by a sculptor. (What such making consists in, I suppose, is separating those bits of stone which make up the statue from other bits which do not.) Now if the block of stone is the statue—if there is just one thing there—then every feature the stone has the statue has and vice versa. After all there is just a single thing there, and for any feature it either has it or does not. But the stone was made by God and the statue was made by the sculptor and not made by God. Does this not show that the stone is a different thing from the statue?

This way of approaching the problem seems to suppose that making a statue is making a thing, and it is this which I think Abaelard would not accept. Moving bits of stone around is not making anything; it is just changing the statuses things have. Thus Abaelard's resolution of the problem is to deny that the statue, i.e., the thing which the statue is, was made by the sculptor. It was made by God (and it may be that in making it God made it with the status of being a stone because such is essential to it). The sculptor did not make anything but gave the stone the status of being a statue.

With this analysis at our disposal let us return to the two claims of the *Nominales* about change. Note first that they are connected. If a thing just is its parts, then if there are different parts there must be different things. But one way, perhaps the typical way, that a thing grows or increases is by adding new parts. So a thing which is just its parts cannot, strictly speaking, grow or increase. So growth or increase is not a change in things. Neither for that matter is alteration or local motion. Alteration is a change in status; for example, what had the status of being cold comes to have the status of being hot, and what had the status of being white comes to have the status of being black. Abaelard never explicitly says that local motion involves change of status, but what he does say strongly suggests it. Thus we can see a connection between the claims attributed to the *Nominales* and the underlying view in virtue of which they are so called. If we except generation and destruction, every change is a change of status. Just as there are more truths than truth-makers so there are more changes than things. Indeed Abaelard goes so far as to suggest that causal connections are not primarily connections among things but connections among statuses.

There seem to be no thirteenth-century figures who are called *Nominales*. Aquinas' reference to the "old *Nominales*" may suggest newer ones, but if there are such I have not yet found them. It would not be particularly surprising if the term ceased to be applied even if there continued to be people holding the characteristic positions of the *Nominales* because, so far as we can now tell, the emergence of the universities at the beginning of the thirteenth century marked the end of the twelfth-century schools as schools intellectually as well as institutionally. To find a term much like *Nominales* used again we have to turn to the late fifteenth century. There we find certain fourteenth-century figures being referred to as *Nominalistae*. The canonical list appears in a Royal Edict issued in 1473 and includes Ockham, Buri-

dan, Pierre d'Ailly, Albert of Saxony, Marsilius of Inghen, Adam Dorp, and "other nominalists."<sup>27</sup> What do these folk have in common and what do they have in common with the twelfth-century *Nominales*?

The Royal Edict of 1473 provoked a reaction within the University of Paris and led to a letter addressed to the king of France defending those whom the edict mentioned. Although the authors go to some pains to tell us what nominalism is, there is, of course, no mention of universals, but there are the following terse remarks:

Those doctors are called nominalists who do not multiply things that are principally signified by terms according to the multiplication of terms. Realists on the other hand are those who contend that things are multiplied with the multiplication of terms. For instance, nominalists say that deity and wisdom are one and the same, but realists say that divine wisdom is divided from deity.<sup>28</sup>

Also those are called nominalists who apply diligence and study to know all the properties of terms from which depend the truth and falsity of speech, and without which there can be no perfect judgement of the truth and falsity of propositions. These properties are *suppositio*, *appellatio*, *ampliatio*, *restrictio*, *distributio exponibilis*. In addition they know obligations and insolubles, the true foundations of argumentation and dialectic, and all their defects.

A little later the defence mentions a few concrete points of difference between nominalists and realists, claiming that

in those matters which concern nominalism and realism the position of the nominalists is always more in conformity with the faith and frequently approved by the church, while the position of the realists is precarious and reproved in many things by the church, as is plain in the matter of universals concerning the eternity of propositions, and the multiplying of entities without cause.<sup>29</sup>

The theme which we saw in the twelfth-century discussions, that nominalists believe the truth-makers of sentences to be fewer than the sentences themselves, here reappears in the claim that realists posit as many things as terms while nominalists suppose fewer. But in the Royal Edict and this defence we are given not merely characteristic nominalist doctrines but a canonical list of nominalist doctors. Perhaps by looking to it we can gain some idea of how and why these figures were grouped together.

Two figures stand out among those mentioned on the list. They are

27. For details cf. L. Thorndyke, *University Records and Life in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1944), pp. 355 ff.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

mentioned first, they are the first chronologically, and it is pretty clear that they influenced all the others. They are William Ockham and Jean Buridan. I wish to suggest that Ockham and Buridan are the common authors of an approach to the relation between language and what makes it true which is characteristic of all those on the royal list.

Like Professor M. Adams, I see Ockham as primarily an ontologist whose ultimate concern is the metaphysical furniture of the world.<sup>30</sup> But Ockham's method in ontology depends on a recipe which is inextricably connected with the philosophy of language. Here, very briefly, is the recipe.

First divide the expressions of your language into those which purport to pick things out (the categorematic expressions) and those which do not (the syncategorematic expressions). Then see whether some of those which purport to pick things out have nominal definitions and so can be eliminated without decreasing the expressive power of the language (these expressions Ockham calls connotative). Finally admit into your ontology whatever an undefinable (or absolute) term purports to pick out.

This is Ockham's explicit programme, and it certainly does yield the consequence that there will be many sentences containing connotative terms which express the same thing (or, in Ockham's framework are subordinated to the same mental sentence). I have argued elsewhere that although there are some differences of detail it is also Buridan's view.<sup>31</sup> But there is a deep difference between this approach as Ockham and Buridan employ it and the Abaelardian view that different sentences can express the same dictum. Both Ockham and Buridan believe, and Buridan repeatedly insists, that once one has said what the terms of a sentence signify, one has expressed all the signification there is. Abaelard, on the other hand, holds that the sentence as a whole signifies—though the dictum signified is in no way a thing.

This issue also divides the sides of one of the sharpest struggles among the doctors whom the Royal Edict calls *Nominalistae*; for while Ockham, Buridan, and Buridan's students all deny that sentences signify, Gregory of Rimini held what appears to be Abaelard's view, and as Gideon Gál has argued, he got it from someone deeply involved with Ockham, namely, Adam Wodeham.

We can get some perspective on the debate from the *Logica Magna*

30. Marilyn M. Adams, "Things versus 'Hows', or Ockham on Predication and Ontology," in James Bogen and James E. McGuire, eds., *How Things Are* (Dordrecht, 1985), pp. 175–88.

31. Cf. "Buridan's Ontology" in Bogen and McGuire, op. cit.

of Paul of Venice, written nearly a century later. In his *Tract on the Signification of a Sentence* Paul summarizes Gregory's position as that

the significate of a sentence is that things are somehow and *complexe significabile*.<sup>32</sup>

The terminology of the *complexe significabile* is apparently Gregory's, but the doctrine is clearly in Wodeham, who in the first question of bk. I, d. 1, of his commentary on the *Sentences* writes:

the total object of a sentence is its significate. Moreover its significate is to be such and such as the sentence indicates.<sup>33</sup>

Note the adverbial form. Both Wodeham and Gregory, like Abaelard before them, are concerned to avoid hypostasizing the total significate of sentences, and the adverbial form seems intended to do that.

Wodeham seems to have been moved to the doctrine of *complexe significabile* by the desire to find an appropriate object for verbs like "knows" and "believes." When one believes, one believes somehow. He takes Walter Chatton to task for holding that one knows or believes ordinary substances and accidents, and Ockham to task for holding that one knows or believes sentences. Thus the need for something else to know or believe and so the theory of the *complexe significabile*.

But the theory of the *complexe significabile* was, despite both Wodeham's and Gregory's claims not to be doing ontology, too rich for Buridan's taste, and he and his students attacked it mercilessly. They thought that if the theory was to do the work it was designed for, it would have to admit *complexe significabile* into the ontology, and that these entities were unacceptable. On their view only terms signify, and sentences have no signification other than that of their parts.<sup>34</sup>

We have come full circle. To avoid multiplying truth-makers, Abaelard introduced a layer of "non-things" between sentences and objects. But Ockham and especially Buridan find that this layer threatens to dissolve into another layer of things and so eliminate it. The doctrine which gave the *Nominales* their name divides the *Nominalistae*, and the doctrinal unity we found seems to have disappeared.

32. Paul of Venice, *De Significato Propositionis*, c. 3, in F. del Punta and M. M. Adams, eds. and trans., *Pauli Veneti Logica Magna*, pt. II, fascic. 6 (Oxford, 1978), p. 94. I have retranslated the text to focus on the adverbial form of the Latin.

33. Adam Wodeham, *In I Sent.*, d. 1, q. 1 (Gonville and Caius 281/674 f. 130rd), ed. in Gideon Gál, "Adam of Wodeham's Question on the *Complexe Significabile* as the Immediate Object of Scientific Knowledge," *Franciscan Studies* 37 (1977), p. 87.

34. Cf. J. Buridan, *Sophismata*, ed. T. K. Scott (Stuttgart, 1977); Peter of Ailly, *Concepts and Insolubles: An Annotated Translation*, P. V. Spade (Dordrecht, 1980).



But not the underlying motivation of the twelfth-century movement, for in my discussion of Abaelard I left out something crucial; I neglected to say why he thought dicta and statuses were not things and why his followers thought that wholes were nothing other than their parts.

What I want now to suggest is that the reason Abaelard is unwilling to reify dicta and statuses and Ockham and Buridan are unwilling to countenance them at all is the same, namely, the view that if there are two things (distinct from God) then God could make or conserve one of them without the other.

That Ockham believes a restricted version of this is well known. The restriction needed for Ockham's view is that neither be God and neither be part of the other.<sup>35</sup> But Abaelard also accepts a similar principle. In *Theologia Christiana*, bk. III, he claims that having no overlap of parts is what characterizes numerical distinctness.<sup>36</sup> Because wholes cannot be created or conserved "apart" from their parts, Abaelard and his followers the *Nominales* could not consistently consider them to be distinct from their parts.

Applying the principle that numerically distinct things are wholly distinct cuts a wide swathe through metaphysics. In particular it suggests a programme for ontology—admit into your ontology as entities only truth-makers, that is, res which are required to account for the truth of some sentence.

What becomes of statuses, dicta, and *complexe significabile* within such a programme? They simply do not have a place. To see why, consider for a moment the status of a status—that of being human, for example. Imagine that Socrates is the only human. Suppose he is destroyed. What happens to the status of being human? One plausible answer is to say that it no longer exists either. If we take that line, then we have to deny that it is a *res* distinct from Socrates. But it is certainly not a *res* identical with Socrates, for if it were, then any other being which had it would be identical with it (by parity of reasoning) and so identical with Socrates (by the transitivity of identity). That seems absurd. So if the status "perishes" when whatever has it perishes, the status is neither identical with nor a *res* distinct from what has it. Hence it is no *res* at all. Similar reasoning will show that dicta and complexe significabilia are not things either. Since only *res* are in the ontology, statuses and their ilk are not. There can still be a family quarrel

35. Cf. *Ordinatio* I, d. 2, q. 4 (*Opera Theologiae*, 2) ed. S. Brown (St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1970), p. 115.

36. Abaelard, *Theologia Christiana*, bk. III, pars. 148–53.

about whether one can use in semantics items which do not have a place in the ontology (and that is what Wodeham and Buridan seem to disagree about), but about the criteria of ontological commitment there is agreement.

The test for an ontological programme like this will be in its ability to provide an analysis of change. Change is expressed by differences in the truth value of the same (or of equiform) sentences at different times. It is implausible to suggest that such differences are primitive. Differences in the truth value of equiform sentences generally require differences in the world. But if the world is the collection of things, so that a world is specified by saying what there is and not also by going on to say what statuses and the like things have, by saying how it is, then all changes will have to be analyzed as changes in what there is. This suggests a slogan—all change is the creation (generation) or destruction of some real thing—which is both tempting and at least prima facie implausible.

We can see the force of the temptation in this slogan by considering how change is accounted for within supposition theory. Consider two singular categorical sentences in which all the terms occur with personal supposition—that is, are used to stand for (*supponere*) those things which they signify:

- (1) Socrates is human.
- (1') Socrates is pale.

At one level the truth conditions for (1) and (1') are perfectly parallel. Each is true just in case what the subject term "Socrates" stands for (namely, Socrates) is among the things for which the predicate term stands. The predicate term of (1) stands for all humans and the predicate term of (1') for all pale things. Thus (1) is true if Socrates is among the humans and (1') is true if Socrates is among the pale things—which is as one would expect.

But there is one difference which shows up when we ask what determines whether Socrates is in the extension of either predicate. "Human" is an absolute term while "pale" is connotative. One consequence of this is that "human" applies to the things it applies to essentially; they could not be what they are without "human" applying to them. "Pale" on the other hand has as its nominal definition "thing having paleness" and so applies to the pale things in virtue of their connection with paleness. One consequence of this is that "human" changes what it stands for only when some human is created or destroyed, but "pale" can change what it stands for without any sub-

stances being created or destroyed—they need only alter their connections with palenesses. The question arises whether for a substance to gain or lose a connection with a quality involves the creation or destruction of anything. The conventional wisdom about supposition (in which I partake) has it that the supposition of a phrase like “thing having paleness” is completely determined by the suppositions of its categorematic parts, “thing” and “paleness,” and the meaning or con-signification of its syncategorematic expressions—in this case “having.” But if this is so then “pale thing” can change its supposition only if “thing” or “paleness” does. These are absolute terms and change their supposition only if something is created or destroyed. But both Ockham and Buridan think that a thing can be separated from its accidents by the power of God without either the thing or the accidents being destroyed.<sup>37</sup> Thus nominalism taken together with the standard interpretation of supposition theory can lead one to search for new entities to be what is created or destroyed when more ordinary things are just altered or moved in space. I believe that at least part of the history of the *Nominalistae* is the history of the working out of this programme, but this, the saga of the nominalist search for an adequate theory of change and its connections with the rise of the New Physics, is another story.<sup>38</sup>

What, then, is mediaeval nominalism and with which of the two faces of twentieth-century nominalism does it connect? My argument here has been that mediaeval nominalism began in a series of worries about the relation of sentences and clauses to the world, worries made central by Abaelard, and that it is as much a problem in semantic theory as in metaphysics. I have argued that it has nothing to do with the problem of universals and that seeing it as focused on the problem of universals simply distorts our picture of what went on. I think it less distorting but still inaccurate to see it as a position about the ontological status of abstract entities. The impulse toward eliminating a layer of semantic entities for sentences to signify would support a parsimony about abstract entities but does not absolutely require it. Nominalists resist multiplying things when they multiply terms, but there remains ample room for disagreement about how this economy is to be obtained. This disagreement about the methods by which language can describe the world without being in any way isomorphic with it is what underlies the debate between supporters of the *complexae*

37. Cf. Normore, *op. cit.*, for discussion.

38. It is also a large one. Some of the beginnings can be found in Normore, *op. cit.*

*significabile* and their opponents. It is a family quarrel and I suspect just one of the many which a thorough investigation of the tradition of mediaeval nominalism and the efforts to do physics and theology from a nominalist perspective will reveal.

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