The Practice of ὀνοματοποιεῖν: Some Peculiar Statements in the Ancient Neoplatonic Commentators on Aristotle

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1.

By ὀνοματοποιεῖν we usually mean the practice of *impositio*, which is required when sciences and arts lack specific names for phenomena they are examining. Of course, this is a practice different from the natural *impositio*, which came about through the organizing of individual human beings into social groups: a common language was undoubtedly essential for building any kind of relationship.[1] The verb ὀνοματοποιεῖν itself means

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[1] John Philoponus (*In Cat.* 11.34–12.2) states that humans imposed a proper name on each thing after they came together in communities, so as to indicate one thing with one word and hence communicate easily. Language emerged in the Mesolithic period, a phase of transition between the Upper Paleolithic and the Neolithic. Certainly, the occurrence of a cultural revolution and the birth of a fully developed language were concurrent phenomena. For more technical information, see the following captivating volume: Salzmann, Stanlaw, Adachi (2015: 143–164).

creating a new name from a model and that is why this practice belong to arts like grammar and linguistics, dispositions towards production and innovation. The easiest application of ὀνοματοποιεῖν is to be found in poetry: by their very nature, poets capture the undefined and give it a recognisable image.[2] Aristotle refers to this practice in *Rhetoric* III 2, 1405a35–37, while exemplifying the metaphor. Sometimes we use metaphor to name nameless things, in order to indicate immediately what we have in mind.[3] There is a riddle that goes: «I saw a man gluing bronze with fire to another man's body».[4] In this statement 'gluing' is used as a metaphor to mean a particular nameless process, the application of cupping-glasses (ἡ τῆς σικύας προσβολή – 1405b3), an ancient medical treatment.[5] The verb κολλήσαντα in the riddle metaphorically means the sticking of the bronze glass to the body. Here Aristotle advises us to choose a name for what is nameless from akin and similar things in order to be as clear as possible. As already noted, the metaphorical ὀνοματοποιεῖν is the easiest, because it occurs in poetry, where the poetic translation of meaning is allowed.[6] In science and arts, metaphor, as a homonymy, is dangerous and discouraged since it often causes fallacies.[7] Hence, when sciences discover new elements and perspectives on reality that need to be named, ὀνοματοποιεῖν must be used carefully[8] and literally means the creation of a brand new name, signifying a brand new thing, through a brand new thought: in a word, it is a technical *impositio*. Aristotle was the first philosopher to codify this practice, because his conceptual system was much more complex than his predecessors' ones.[9] In Aristotle, this practice was twofold: on the one hand, ὀνοματοποιεῖν was meant to re-semanticize words well-known in IV century BC Greek, so as to lend them a new meaning and role in philosophy; on the other hand, it was meant to create *ex novo* a name for something that hadn't been discovered or studied yet.

The first case is illustrated, for example, by the name κατηγορία: well before Aristotle,[10] this term in ancient Greek had entered the legal language, where it meant the charge

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[2] This practice, however, is problematic for modern translators of Aristotle: see Corcilius (2007).

[3] See Georgiadis (1985).

[4] «I marked how a man glued bronze with fire to another man's body», transl. by Rhys Roberts (2004). The riddle's author was Cleobulina (fr. 1 West), a poetess famous for this kind of literary work.

[5] See Galen. *De locis affectis libri vi*, 155.14–16. Through the application of cups on injured body points, the vacuum draws the skin upwards, assuaging pain and healing muscular wounds. See also Orib. *Collectiones medicae*, 7.16, which reports a summary of Antyllus' *On cupping-glass* (II AD).

[6] See Calboli Montefusco (2004) and Dalimier (2004).

[7] As is well known, a kind of homonymy follows the use of metaphor: see Arist. *Rh*. III 11, 1412b12 and several Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle (Porph. *In Cat*. 66.29-67, 32; Anonym. *In Cat*. 2.17; Philop. *In APo*. 416.19–20). See also Arist. *SE* 17, 176b20–25.

[8] For example, Aristotle chooses to leave some species of animals unnamed, because he prefers to extend a very common name to signify different nameless things, like the name ἀετός used for the eagle, but also for a species of shark (*HA* V 5, 540b18). See Louis (1971).

[9] See Gilardoni (1999).

[10] Aristotle was well aware of this meaning: in *Rh*. I 2, 1358b10–11 he identifies κατηγορία as a kind of legal discourse opposite to ἀπολογία.

brought against a defendant, as opposed to ἀπολογία, the speech by which the latter defended himself. The legal origin of that name is studied with great care by Richard Bodéüs.[11] When examining the most general genres, those only said-of, Aristotle had to find a name to signify them; and instead of coining one *ex novo*, he chose to re-semanticize the name κατηγορία (and the verb κατηγορέω).[12] Aristotle's reasoning is, in my opinion, the following: the act of bringing a charge against someone in court simply consists in attributing a crime to a person (the defendant); Aristotle extends the meaning of these σήματα beyond the legal field, so that κατηγορεῖν comes to mean giving any property to the subject and the passive form, κατηγορεῖσθαι, means that these properties are predicated of the subject. All predicates, then, are by definition κατηγορίαι inasmuch as they are said of subjects.[13]

The second case is rarer in Aristotle's *corpus*, but highly revealing. Here ὀνοματοποιεῖν truly shows its potential, becoming essential for arts and sciences, which discover new subjects of study and have to name them to clarify the study itself. John Philoponus, a Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotle's logics and physics, persuasively explains this practice (*In Cat*. 113.20–28):

> <human> convention imposes names on those things it knows, but because by their nature they discover new things, arts are obliged to impose names in relation to their significance on the things discovered by them, as in the case of the geometer discovering that one of the triangles has two equal sides, one three equal sides and one three unequal sides, called them *isopleurus*, isosceles and scalene[14] and likewise the musician imposed names on different sounds and called one chromatic, another diatonic and in every other way <in which sounds are called>.

That's what happens sometimes to philosophers themselves. Aristotle needs ὀνοματοποιεῖν in *EN* II 7, 1108a16–19 to name the praiseworthy and virtuous dispositions to choose the right *medium* between two extremes. Most of these *medietates* are unnamed and the philosopher has to give them a name for the sake of clarity: towards the truth, the extremes will be boastfulness and irony, while the *medium* is truthfulness

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[11] Bodéüs (1984: pp. 122–127).

[12] Aristotle is no stranger to this practice. Much of his vocabulary is composed of Greek terms well-known in the fifth and fourth centuries BC that are re-semanticized in light of his philosophical project. Think of οὐσία and δύναμις, just to name the most famous and fundamental examples; after Aristotle, these became technical terms for all Greek philosophy, both ancient and Byzantine, as well as for medieval Latin philosophy.

[13] The Commentators' observations are truly interesting: see Porph. *In Cat*. 55.3–14; Dex. *In Cat*. 5.30–6.26; Amm. *In Cat*. 13.1–19; Simpl. *In Cat*. 16.31–18.6; Philop. *In Cat*. 12.17–27; Olymp. *In Cat*. 22.13–19; Elias *In Cat*. 124.7–10 and 127.25–32.

[14] The equilateral triangle is *isopleuros* (see Eucl. *Elem*. I def. 20.1–2), that having two equal angles is isosceles (Eucl. *Elem*. I def. 20.2–3) and the triangle having no equal angles is scalene (see Eucl. *Elem*. I def. 20.3–4). Therefore, the order in which these triangles are listed here is incorrect.

(1108a19–23).[15] Concerning the distinction between dialectical προβλήματα and θέσεις in *Top*. I 11, 104b36–105a2, Aristotle justifies this distinction as part of his noble search for difference and not as something established for the sake of ὀνοματοποιεῖν, which amounts to a rhetorical abuse, if it is not justified. Later in the *Topics* (VIII 2, 157a18–33), Aristotle acknowledges how difficult it is to talk with most people, who proceed only by induction. Therefore, most people have an imprecise awareness of universals, mainly because observing the similarities 'in the many' in such a way as to draw the universal from them is not a method suitable for all. So, the philosopher must attempt to name (157a29–30) universals in order to avoid misunderstanding and cheating. Nevertheless, it is in the *Categories* that this practice acquires a leading role, *expressis verbis* in *Cat*. 7, the chapter about relatives and, on closer examination, in other chapters where Aristotle discusses the opposites and quality. I therefore wish to analyse these texts and, in order to show how and when ὀνοματοποιεῖν is appropriate, I will draw upon the Greek commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, and specifically Philoponus' one.

2.

Let us set out from the explicit text of *Cat*. 7: in order to establish the reciprocation of relatives – the correct relation between two πράγματα which, according to the first definition of relatives (Arist. *Cat*. 7, 6a36–37), are said of each other – the philosopher sometimes may need to create and impose a new name that is properly given to one of the two terms in a relation. Aristotle's example is clear: *rudder* isn't said *rudder* of *boat*, since not every boat has a rudder and hence there's no reciprocation; imposing a new name (because there's no name yet) to every boat with a rudder allows us to give the name properly (οἰκείως ἀποδιδόναι – *Cat*. 7, 7a14): *ruddered is said of rudder* and, in recip-rocation, *rudder is said of ruddered* (*Cat*. 7, 7a5–15). Aristotle briefly comes back to this argument (*Cat*. 7, 7b10–14): if the name of a correlative already exists, it's easy to properly establish the relation and ensure reciprocity between the two terms, whereas, if there's no name, it may be necessary to impose a new name. In relation to the aforementioned text (*In Cat*. 113.19–114.2), Philoponus notes the two kinds of *impositio*: the one based on the original human convention and the scientific and technical one. The most important thing to note, however, is the doubt Philoponus raises against Aristotle:

> If you create new names and change every name as you want, won't the whole convention of words be destroyed, as everyone will be creating new names of his own choosing, and won't it seem, too, that everyone is speaking meaningless words [...]? (113.14–19).

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[15] See Gottlieb (1994).

This objection is actually invalidated by Aristotle's own words: sometimes human convention hasn't imposed names and it's the duty of arts and sciences duty to do so instead. Aristotle, according to Philoponus, also recommended a canon, a general rule, to properly ὀνοματοποιεῖν (*Cat.* 7, 7a18–22): it's correct to impose a paronymous name, deriving from the first term of the relation (114.2–13). Philoponus' subtle question is answered, nevertheless the core problem remains: in the case of relatives, the practice of ὀνοματοποιεῖν might seem more rhetorical than logical. The first definition of relatives (*Cat.* 7, 6a36–37), based on a pure linguistic bond between the two, will be rejected at the end of chapter 7 along with this kind of discourse:[16] words like *ruddered*, *winged* and *headed* will appear, if not meaningless, at least unnecessary and empty. Aristotle actually mentioned these words as relatives in order to reject (κακίσαι – 114.14) the first definition of relative, because it is quite clear that *rudder*, *wing* and *head* are in no way relatives, things which substantially are of something, but they are rather mere substances, which are mistaken as relatives for their being parts of a substance (114.13–29).[17]

In the other chapters Aristotle doesn't discuss ὀνοματοποιεῖν but the πράγματα studied are nameless. Philoponus, and some other commentators, consider these cases to show how *impositio* works. In *Cat.* 8, 10a29–32 Aristotle notes that in most cases the qualified, as it participates in quality, is called paronymously from the quality, however some qualified things, while participating in qualities, aren't called paronymously from those, because there are no names for those qualities (*Cat.* 8, 10a32–b5). The qualities of the second species have no name: we call 'good at running' and 'good at boxing' those having a predisposition to running and boxing, respectively; we don't call them runner and boxer, because they don't participate in the form of the runner and boxer yet; they aren't called from a quality they participate in, which is nameless, but from a quality they will participate in by passing from potentiality to actuality.[18] Other qualified things, in the end, aren't called paronymously from the qualities they participate in, even though those qualities participated in aren't nameless (*Cat.* 8, 10b5–11).[19] Philoponus accurately argues that in the first case there are no names for this kind of quality, *i.e.* powers (δυνάμεις), because human convention appropriately gives names to concrete things in actuality: the sciences are called from what is in actuality, like the science of boxing and that of running (*In Cat.* 157.9–13).[20]

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[16] See Mignucci (1986).

[17] Philoponus resorts to the 'principle of homonymy' to show that, while father and son are relatives because, if one is removed, there is not even the name of the other, *head* and *rudder*, even when not exercising their functions and detached from the body and ship, respectively, they are still called *head* or *rudder* homonymously. Philoponus' application of this principle (Arist. *Meta.* Z 10, 1035b23–25; *DA* II 1, 412b20–22) is a smart one; *contra* Zucca (2011)

[18] The English text in Ackrill (2002: 25) isn't correct: Ackrill translates πυκτικός and δρομικός, both with the potentiality suffix –ικ, as "boxer" and "runner" (which would be πύκτης and δρομεύς).

[19] Σπουδαῖος isn't said paronymously from ἀρετή.

[20] See Olymp. *In Cat.* 125.17–19: names signify something in actuality and certainly not in potentiality, while predisposition is unnamed (ἀκατονόμαστος). See also Simpl. *In Cat.* 243.2–13, 214.15–24.

In chapter 10 Aristotle (*Cat.* 10, 11b38–12a5) distinguishes between different kinds of contraries: some have an intermediate, for example, between black and white there are gray, yellow and the other colours; some have no intermediate, like odd and even, health and sickness (Philop. *In Cat.* 172.13–15). Aristotle (*Cat.* 10, 12a21–25) further distinguishes different kinds of contraries with intermediates (ὑποδιαίρεσις):[21] some contraries have intermediates whose names are known, like gray and red between black and white; some have intermediates which are named only on the basis of their relationship with the extremes and the negation of the latter, as in the case of the intermediate between good and bad, which is named the neither good nor bad (Philop. *In Cat.* 172.21–27). Richard Bodéüs[22] observes that the absence of the names of intermediates is not to be underestimated, because it implies their lack of ontological consistency: *e.g.* with regard to fair and unfair, the unnamed intermediate is what is neither fair nor unfair and this intermediate 'ne suppose pas d'état'. Bodéüs' observation is, in my opinion, confirmed by the fact that there are names of things in actuality, which is why some nameless things do not have an independent *status*.

This argument about names also concerns another species of opposites: *habitus* and privation (Philop. *In Cat.* 178.26–179.10). In order to demonstrate that these opposites are different from relatives, Philoponus notes that privation is often named after *habitus*, by its negation: it must be said that the privation opposed to knowledge (γνῶσις) isn't nominally determined (ὠνομασμένην – 178.27), while the privation opposed to sight is called blindness. We name this privation from the negation of knowledge ignorance, incompetence and illiteracy (ἀγνωσίαν καὶ ἀμαθίαν καὶ τὸ ἄσοφον): in each case we don't say that the privation is a privation of knowledge, but rather a privation of the soul.[23]

Let's recapitulate what we have inferred from these passages: names are imposed only on self-consistent things, which have substantiality on their own and in actuality. When we name correlatives in order to create a properly given relation, we grant ontological existence to new and non-natural classes of πράγματα. Worse still, we have to ὀνοματοποιεῖν in order to give substantiality to intermediate qualities (contradicting the extremes) and to the privation of *habitus* (by means of a privative alpha). Also, we apply names deriving from a quality in actuality even to a quality in potentiality, which – properly speaking – hasn't got a name of its own. In Aristotle's logical-ontological system (*Int.* 1, 16a3–8), things that are not concretely existent obviously do not have a proper name: names signify a πράγμα through the affection of the soul (παθήματα τῆς ψυχῆς) and if there's no well established and knowable πράγμα in actuality human convention doesn't

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[21] Philoponus (*In Cat.* 172, 15-21) initially distinguishes between contraries that must be in the subject, like hotness in fire and coldness in snow, and contraries that may not be in the subject, like black, white, gray and other colours (Arist. *Cat.* 10, 12a5–20).

[22] Bodéüs (2001: 144–145).

[23] Philoponus continues the argument by proving that even if you could say blindness of sight (privation of *habitus*), and similarly for the other species of privation, privation and *habitus* would never be relatives because while the privation is of the *habitus*, *habitus* is certainly not of the privation.

impose a name.[24] Then, ὀνοματοποιεῖν is a rhetorical practice that helps to make up for the shortcomings of natural *impositio*. Philoponus, nevertheless, recommends that this practice follow strict logical guidelines (113.14–114.3) in order to avoid meaningless words: for these are meaningless when there aren't any concepts or πράγματα to be signified. Now, we have to inspect the general position of the Neoplatonic commentators, as they decreed universal rules on *impositio* and ὀνοματοποιεῖν.

3.

The most general position is found in Olymp. *In Cat*. 125.18–19. The commentator clearly says that there are names of things in actuality, while things predisposed to be something in actuality are nameless. Like Olympiodorus, Elias explicitly endorses this position (*In Cat*. 212.8–20). The lesson of Aristotle's *De intepretatione* must have been of central importance for all subsequent philosophers, but by exploring other texts in addition to *In Categorias* we find that the logical question is, as is usually the case, linked with physical and metaphysical inquiries. Philoponus, in his *In Physicorum libros commentarium*, while discussing Aristotle's criticism of Plato's two indefinite principles, the Great and Small, in Arist. *Phys*. III 6, attacks 'those people' who claim matter to be a whole and perfect because of its being τὸ ἄπειρον.[25] The commentator argues that matter is not a whole, because it's limited by form and that it is not the limit that encompasses everything (475.32–476.4); also, matter is part of the composite of matter and form, and hence, as a part, it cannot be a whole (476.4–6). Nevertheless, before rejecting this theory, Philoponus explains the linguistic reasons that led 'those people' to affirm that matter, *qua* infinity, is a whole and perfect (*In Phys*. 475.23–30). Matter is ἀόριστος and τὸ ἄπειρον and part of the composite with form, which, instead, is ὅρος and πέρας. Matter is the form it can take in potentiality and «we often call things in potentiality with the names of things in actuality (475.24–25)»: we call statue the bronze still without form and in the same way we call bed the wood, food the wheat, man the seed. Because of being everything in potentiality, matter is called infinite and indefinite, bond and limit. Philoponus illustrates the method of *impositio*, which – as we have seen – concerns quality in potentiality: a name properly belongs to things in actuality, but it can be bestowed also to things in potentiality, by common usage.

To take a different example, we are used to bestowing the name of a finished product on the producer's activity. In Proclus' *In Parmenidem* (1168.27–1169.4), the first principle is beyond and before ἐνέργεια and produces ἐνέργεια, however if someone were to call the first principle ἐνέργεια, there would be nothing wrong with this: in our world (ἐπὶ τῶν τῇδε πραγμάτων – VII 1168.33) we commonly assign the names of ἀποτελέσματα

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[24] For a careful analysis of this system, see Noriega-Olmos (2013).

[25] These are the materialist physiologists: see Giardina (2012: 253–255).

to the ἐνέργειαι producing them. Furthermore, for the first principle we use verbs such as ὑπέστησε καὶ παρήγαγεν, which properly belong to ἐνέργεια, giving the name of actualized things to the first principle in order to signify the non-actualized manifestation of beings from it. Let me try to exemplify this linguistic practice: we properly call 'construction' the finished product of building, but we bestow this name also to the act of building itself. Similarly, we call 'design' the product of drawing and the art of drawing itself. The act of building and the act of drawing are not accomplished things but movements towards πράγματα and their names are bestowed from the finished products of these activities. Proclus is right, then, when he justifies an improper use of language to describe the first principle, which is, in itself, indescribable by human words.

Given this particular practice in the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle and Plato, according to which names and the signification of things depend on their being in actuality, we have to consider how Aristotle's theory of signification became an ontological theory. Someone might say – and rightly so, I would argue – that *De interpretatione* 1, 16a was already a key passage to interpret reality by means of language, by establishing connections between different levels of being, things, concepts and words.[26] However, the application of the potentiality/actuality pair in linguistics and semantics is a worthy innovation. Only things that are well established in their own nature deserve a name, maybe because giving a name to a thing in potentiality could result in a mistake: we could call 'bed' a piece of wood that, instead, will become a chair. For this reason, signification had to be regulated in such a way as to understand the πράγματα in *Int.* 1 as real existing πράγματα in actuality, thereby excluding things such as the goat-stag, τραγέλαφος. In my opinion, the ontological roots of this precise innovation are to be found in the strict theory of definition expounded in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* H 2–3:[27] here the philosopher discusses whether a definition is said of the composite of matter and form, of matter or of form.[28] In substances, what is predicated of matter is form and actuality, so in definitions what is predicated is actuality (*Metaph.* 2, 1043a5–7). A definition cannot be said of matter, because matter is potentiality and if we define 'house' from matter we only say it's stones, bricks and wood, and that's clearly not enough to differentiate this being from that being (*Metaph.* 2, 1043a14–16). Instead, by saying it's a shelter, we define 'house' from its actuality, differentiating the house from other products made by stones, bricks and wood (*Metaph.* 2, 1043a16–21).[29] Excluding matter and potentiality, Aristotle notes that names are used sometimes to signify the sensible composite of form and matter, other times to signify only form and actuality (*Metaph.* 1043a29–36): in saying 'human' we could be referring to both the sensible human composite and the form 'human' that

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[26] See Bolton (1985) and Noriega-Olmos (2013).

[27] See Bolton (1993) and Charles (2010).

[28] Multiple definition is possible as testified by Arist. *DA* I 1, 403a31–b31 and his commentators, such as Philoponus, *In Cat.* 22.21–23.1.

[29] See Ferejohn (1994).

shapes its matter. Definition can't help to determine being without form: definition is a discourse about τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι,[30] the true substance of beings, which lies in εἶδος and ἐνέργεια (*Metaph.* 3, 1043b1–2). While the soul and soul's being are the same thing, human and human's being aren't, unless we say that human is the soul, but Aristotle does not inquire any further (*Metaph.* 3, 1043b2–4). Alexander of Aphrodisias, in his *In Metaphysicam commentaria*, proves a fine reviser of this theory, paving the way for Neoplatonic positions about names and their *impositio*. Alexander wonders whether names are signs of composite things or of forms (551.11). Aristotle didn't provide a solution, but it's clear that names are τῶν εἰδῶν σημαντικά, signifying forms (19–20). The name of what the definition is δηλωτικός is σημεῖον and definition shows the being, so the name must signify the being, that is the εἶδος and ἐνέργεια.[31] Definitions are said of forms (51–22) also because if the name meant the composite, we would say the substances πρὸς ἕν, because the animal composite has certain desiderative powers belonging to the soul, the form 'animal' (25–27). 'Animal', signifying the composite, is a homonym of the true 'animal' from which the composite derives its features. Alexander specifies that proving whether a definition means the composite or only the form is the aim of the dialectical conversation, διαλεκτικὴ συνουσία,[32] searching for the difference among beings and for methods to justify that difference; but for metaphysics it's enough to say that definition is a discourse pertaining to τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι and that this latter belongs to form and actuality (34–35).

4. Conclusions

This brief survey has showed at least two things. The first: linguistics and the theory of signification in Neoplatonism are firmly bound to ontology. Names aren't mere products of the conventional interaction between humanity and nature: all the previous linguistic theories recognised the value of words in understanding and interpreting reality, but failed to establish a solid theoretical perspective. Of course, by setting out from the uncertainty of Plato's *Cratylus*, Aristotle had a primary role in determining the right relation between words, meanings and concrete things. However, he wasn't clear enough, maybe because of the heterogeneous nature of its works, from the conciseness of *De intepretatione* 1[33] to the ambiguity of *Metaphysics* H, where mutually contradictory positions about the true identity of οὐσία are presented. Alexander frankly said – and this is the second

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[30] See *Metaph.* Δ 8, 1017b21–22; Z 4, 1030a6–10; H 1, 1042a17; *Top.* I 5, 101b37–39, VII 3, 153a15–16, 5, 154a31–32, 155a20–21.

[31] See Arist. *APo*. II 7, 92b26–34 and 10, 93b29–37.

[32] A dialectical conversation is a conversation where the speakers do not transgress the dialogue's laws and do what's proper (Alex. Aphrod. *In Top.* 554.25–27).

[33] Ackrill (2002: 113) is contemptuous towards the *incipit* of *De interpretatione*: «this account of relation of things in the world, affections in the soul, and spoken and written language is all too brief and far from satis-

point illustrated by this paper – that Aristotle missed the point. In commenting upon *Metaphysics* H, he suggested a neat theory of ontological signification, which earned him a following. Names signify the real being of things and this has to be the form acquired in actuality, because form is clearly more being than matter. Imposing names starting from potentiality could be misleading and philosophers must avoid fallacies and misunderstandings, but common people must avoid them too. The practice of ὀνοματοποιεῖν, despite its rhetorical origin, finds some philosophical applications, under the guidance of logic, which includes an ontological way of observing reality. A lot of nameless things should remain nameless, as in the case of some 'hypothetical' relatives, some intermediates between opposites or qualities as powers, because they still don't have a recognisable nature. In other words, they're not definable and in late-antique philosophy, after centuries of research into τί ἐστι, it would have been unthinkable to theorise or even communicate with ambiguous words.

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factory. (...) there are grave weaknesses in Aristotle's theory of meaning». Walz (2006) defends the value of the *incipit*, reading Aristotle in a subtler way.

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The Practice of ὀνοματοποιεῖν: Some Peculiar Statements in the Ancient Neoplatonic Commentators on Aristotle

This paper shows the role of ὀνοματοποιεῖν in Neoplatonism and how this practice is ruled by an onto-logical canon. While ὀνοματοποιεῖν itself means the making of a brand new name, its usage is manifold. As Aristotle explains in *Rh.* III 2, poets take advantage of ὀνοματοποιεῖν to catch the undefined and give it a recognisable image, by means of a metaphorical name. In science, this practice, codified by Aristotle, is twofold: ὀνοματοποιεῖν meant both to re-semanticize words well-known and to create names *ex novo* for things not discovered or studied yet. After analysing ὀνοματοποιεῖν's recurrence in Aristotle, I illustrate that, according to Neoplatonic Commentators, *impositio* can be, both natural and technical, only of things in actuality, having a solid consistency. Intermediates between contraries, presumed relatives and powers as qualities are nameless – as Philoponus notices in his *In Categorias* – since they haven't an independent *status* and aren't definable. This bond between the original rhetorical practice and the ontological perspective, sketched in *Int.* 1, was strengthened by Alexander, who filled Aristotle's gaps, stating that names signify things' being, *i.e.* the form acquired in actuality.