The Opening of On Interpretation: Toward a More Literal Reading

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle begins *On Interpretation* with an analysis of the existence of linguistic entities as both physical and meaningful. Two things have been lacking for a full appreciation of this analysis: a more literal translation of the passage and an ample understanding of the distinction between symbols and signs. In this article, therefore, I first offer a translation of this opening passage (16a1-9) that allows the import of Aristotle's thinking to strike the reader. Then I articulate the distinction between symbol and sign so crucial to understanding this passage. Aristotle employs this distinction, I argue, in order to show how the linguistic entities he defines later in *On Interpretation* (that is, name, verb, denial, affirmation, declaration, and articulation) are both conventional and natural, owing to their being both symbols and signs, respectively. Finally, I suggest why Aristotle's analysis of how linguistic entities exist as both physical and meaningful is fitting, since man himself, "the animal that has speech," lives at the boundary between nature and intelligence.

In his commentary on the opening lines of *On Interpretation*, J. L. Ackrill says, "This account of the relation of things in the world, affections in the soul, and spoken and written language is all too brief and far from satisfactory."[1] Perhaps it is easy to agree with Ackrill that the account is all too brief – indeed, does not every reader of Aristotle wish that he would be more prolix at times? I am not convinced, however, that the account is far from satisfactory. Rather, it satisfies when one attends to two tasks: first, translating the passage more literally; second, probing fully the distinction between symbol and sign that Aristotle employs here.

With regard to the first task, Ackrill does not fare too badly,[2] although I will present a translation that more accurately conveys Aristotle's thinking. With regard to the second task, Ackrill and others have fared badly.

In fact, Aristotle's use of the concept of symbol is one of Ackrill's explicit complaints about this passage. "Again," Ackrill asks rhetorically, "what is it for a spoken sound to be a 'symbol' of something in the mind?"[3] The opening lines of *On Interpretation* should be taken as a metalinguistic reflection on human language's mode of being, and I intend to show that Aristotle's use of the notions of symbol and sign in this passage allows him to manifest both the natural and the conventional character of the existence of linguistic entities.[4] The focus of 16a1-9, therefore, is not on the genesis of human language psychologically, nor on what meaning is or how it is achieved. Rather, the focus is on how a human linguistic entity actually exists, as both a physical and a meaningful reality, and a clear articulation of the distinction between symbol and sign is crucial for understanding Aristotle's analysis.

I. *First task: a more literal translation*

Throughout I will refer back to the following Greek text and my translation of it. I have broken 16a1-9 into numbered parts for ease of reference.

[1] Πρῶτον δεῖ θέσθαι τί ὄνομα καὶ τί ῥῆμα, ἔπειτα τί ἐστιν ἀπόφασις καὶ κατάφασις καὶ ἀπόφανσις καὶ λόγος.
[2] Ἔστι μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα, [3] καὶ τὰ γραφόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ. [4] καὶ ὥσπερ οὐδὲ γράμματα πᾶσι τὰ αὐτά, οὐδὲ φωναὶ αἱ αὐταί· [5] ὧν μέντοι ταῦτα σημεῖα πρώτων [πρώτως], ταὐτὰ πᾶσι παθήματα τῆς ψυχῆς, [6] καὶ ὧν ταῦτα ὁμοιώματα, πράγματα ἤδη ταὐτά. [7] περὶ μὲν οὖν τούτων εἴρηται ἔν τοῖς περὶ ψυχῆς, – ἄλλης γὰρ πραγματείας.

[1] First one must put down what a name is and what a verb is, then what denial is and affirmation and declaration and articulation.[5]
[2] Ones in vocal-sound, then, are symbols of affectednesses in the soul, [3] and ones written are symbols of ones in vocal-sound. [4] And as letters are not the

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[Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996]), and H. Apostle in *Categories and On Propositions* (Grinnell: The Peripatetic Press, 1980).

[3] *Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*, 113.

[4] Ackrill seems to agree with at least part of this claim when he says that 16a3-9 "is intended as an argument for the view that language is conventional" (*Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*, 113). What I think he misses, and what I think is revealed by taking seriously the distinction between symbol and sign, is that Aristotle is also showing how human language can be understood to be natural.

[5] Translating λόγος as "articulation" here deviates from the currently accepted rendering of it as "sentence" in this context. I render it "articulation" for two reasons. First, this rendering retains some of the connections with Aristotle's use of λόγος in other contexts, e.g., when λόγος refers to the definition of a thing as an ordered

same for all, neither are vocal-sounds the same. [5] But those firsts of which these are signs {*or*: those of which these are signs firstly} – the affectednesses of the soul – are the same for all, [6] and those of which these [affectednesses] are likenednesses – the things – are already the same. [7] Now about these it was said in those [discussions] about the soul; for it is of another treatment.

This translation, though quirky and perhaps even offputting at first, attempts to capture Aristotle's thinking in ways that less literal translations have not. In the remainder of this section, then, I will address certain features of this translation, and by the end of the paper I hope that its quirkiness will be seen as conducive to receiving the full import of Aristotle's analysis.

One thing missed in almost every translation of this passage is the continuity between [1] and [2]. The "ones" (τά) in vocal-sound that Aristotle refers to here are the linguistic entities listed in [1].[6] Fully spelled out, then, [2] would read, "Name, verb, denial, affirmation, declaration, and articulation in vocal-sound, then, are symbols of affectednesses in the soul." This reading is justified not only by the μὲν οὖν in [2], which suggests a connection back to [1], but also by passages later in *On Interpretation* in which Aristotle replaces the "ones" of "ones in vocal-sound" with certain items listed in [1]. In Chapter 14, 23a32-35, for example, Aristotle asserts, "For if what are in vocal-sound [τὰ μὲν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ] follow upon what are in thought, while a contrary opinion holds of what is contrary, . . . then it must hold likewise about affirmations in vocal-sound [τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ καταφάσεων]." Here Aristotle employs the same phrase,

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complex account of it or when it refers to the form of a thing as manifested in its ordered complexity. Second, "sentence" is too narrow a notion for λόγος in *On Interpretation*. Aristotle defines λόγος at 16b26 as φωνὴ σημαντικὴ ἧς τῶν μερῶν τι σημαντικόν ἐστι κεχωρισμένον, ὡς φάσις, ἀλλ᾽ οὐχ ὡς κατάφασις ἢ ἀπόφασις ("significative vocal-sound of which something of the parts is significative when separated, as an expression, but not as an affirmation or denial"). For Aristotle, articulation occurs when something that is significative when separated is brought into a context. Articulation, then, entails ordered complexity, but not necessarily the achievement of what one would call a "sentence," since even a "phrase" suffices as λόγος. The complexity of articulation, therefore, is opposed to the simplicity of expression (φάσις). Hence "sentence" is too determinate as a translation of λόγος. Another possible translation of λόγος, of course, is "speech," although in *On Interpretation* this rendering is too vague.

[6] By translating τά as "ones," I do not intend to suggest anything as specific as "units"; rather, I am using "ones" merely as a place-filler for the previously mentioned linguistic entities, more along the lines of "those" or "what are." I prefer such a rendering to "things" or "entities," since these latter may obscure the continuity between [1] and [2] as well as introduce notions too determinate in this context.

τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ, that is found in [2], and he is comfortable moving from a universal claim about "what are in vocal-sound" to a particular claim about "affirmations in vocal-sound."[7]

Recognizing the continuity between [1] and [2], moreover, justifies the presence of 16a3-9 in *On Interpretation*, since it implies that this passage concerns the same linguistic entities discussed individually from Chapter 2 onward. In Chapter 1 as a whole, Aristotle is concerned with these linguistic entities as a group. In 16a3-9, on which this paper will focus, Aristotle attempts to explain how linguistic entities exist as both natural and conventional. In the remainder of the chapter (16a9-18), Aristotle divides the group. He sets names and verbs apart from the others insofar as names and verbs befit thoughts without composition or division and, consequently, do not express truth and falsity. Further implications of the continuity between [1] and [2] will be spelled out below.

Another thing lost in translations of 16a1-9 is the structural similarity in [2] between "ones in vocal-sound" and "affectednesses in the soul." I have retained the "Xs in Y" structure common to these two phrases, because Aristotle is presenting this structure as a model for thinking about the linguistic entities listed in [1]. What one should make of this structure as well as what kind of relation is expressed by "in" will be discussed below.

In my translation, moreover, I have rendered παθήματα ("affectednesses") and ὁμοιώματα ("likenedness") more literally than most translators. These renderings capture the passive aspect of the Greek words and

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[7] Cf. 24b1-4: Ὥστε εἴπερ ἐπὶ δόξης οὕτως ἔχει, εἰσὶ δὲ αἱ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ καταφά-σεις καὶ ἀποφάσεις σύμβολα τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, δῆλον ὅτι καὶ καταφάσει ἐναντία μὲν ἀπόφασις ἡ περὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ καθόλου ("And so since it stands thus about opinion, and affirmations and denials in vocal-sound are symbols of what are in the soul, it is clear also that the contrary to an affirmation is the denial concerning that universal"). This passage also suggests that Aristotle understands the τά in τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ to refer to items listed in [1].

In addition, the second half of Chapter 1 indicates that names and verbs are among "ones in vocal-sound" (and that thoughts are "affectednesses in the soul"). In 16a9-11, Aristotle says: ἔστι δ', ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ὁτὲ μὲν νόημα ἄνευ τοῦ ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι, ὁτὲ δὲ ἤδη ᾧ ἀνάγκη τούτων ὑπάρχειν θάτερον, οὕτω καὶ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ· περὶ γὰρ σύνθεσιν καὶ διαίρεσίν ἐστι τὸ ψεῦδος καὶ τὸ ἀληθές. τὰ μὲν οὖν ὀνόματα αὐτὰ καὶ τὰ ῥήματα ἔοικε τῷ ἄνευ συνθέσεως καὶ διαιρέσεως ("Now, just as in the soul there is sometimes thought without showing-truly or showing-falsely and there is sometimes thought to which it is already necessary that one of these belong, so also in vocal-sound. For the false and the true are about composition and division. Thus names and verbs themselves befit thought without composition and division").

provide insight into how Aristotle understands the causality of πράγματα ("things")[8] on the cognitive soul. These renderings, in other words, reveal that Aristotle is referring to the results of the soul's having been acted upon and likened to things. These affectednesses and likenednesses, moreover, are the νοήματα ("thoughts") that Aristotle begins discussing immediately after these opening lines. It is the intellect itself, then, that has been acted upon and likened to things, and this complex process is formally discussed in *De anima*, Γ.4-8, to which Aristotle alludes in [7]. The affectednesses and likenednesses in [5]-[6] are intellectual achievements not reducible to, even if dependent on, φαντάσματα.

Before proceeding, I should acknowledge the textual difficulties with [5]. I don't claim to have the last word as to whether πρώτων or πρώτῶς belongs in [5], although J. Magee has argued persuasively that πρώτων is the more accurate reading.[9] For this paper, a final decision on this issue is not necessary, since it will not affect much of what I have to say here. I will take, therefore, the accepted reading of πρώτων.[10] But I do think, as Magee points out, that choosing between these two readings may affect the way one reads Aristotle's allusion in [7] to his treatment of the soul, since construing πρώτων as a reference to the πρῶτα νοήματα ("first thoughts") mentioned in *De anima*, Γ.8, 432a12, could make sense of this allusion.

In general, this translation, even though it is awkward in English, allows the nuances of Aristotle's thinking in 16a1-9 to come through. Thus the import of the Greek – such as the "Xs in Y" structure of [2] and the passive character of both "affectednesses" and "likenednesses" – works on the reader so that he can adjust his thinking more precisely to Aristotle's. In addition, this translation brings a number of issues to the fore that are often ignored by interpreters. It is clear that the passage invites one to account, first of all, for the continuity between [1] and [2]. Second, it invites one to make sense of the structural uniformity of "ones in vocal-sound" and "affectednesses in the soul" in [2] and determine how these

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[8] The Greek word πράγμα has a wider extension than "thing" (taken as referring to an individual being) and could be rendered more literally as "fact," an English word whose etymology is similar to πράγμα. "Thing," however, works well enough for the purposes of this paper.

[9] For Magee's account of these matters, see *Boethius on Signification and Mind* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 7-48. See also C. Whitaker, *Aristotle's* De interpretatione: *Contradiction and Dialectic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 20-25.

[10] By "accepted," I mean the one adopted by L. Minio-Paluello in the Oxford Classical Texts edition. H. Tredennick accepts πρώτῶς in the Loeb edition.

phrases help one to understand linguistic entities as both symbols and signs. Finally, it invites one to consider the discussions of the soul that frame this passage and show up in Aristotle's use of "affectedness" and "likenedness." My focus here is on the first and second of these issues, although I hope to shed a little light on the third as well.

II. *Second task: symbols and signs as keys for understanding*

A full understanding of the distinction between symbol and sign is key to unpacking the opening lines of *On Interpretation*. In this section, I begin with a general discussion of symbols and signs, and then I show how grasping what Aristotle means by these words helps one understand 16a1-9 better.

A. *Symbols and signs in general*

Σύμβολον can be traced back etymologically to συμβάλλω, to "throw-together."[11] In its earliest uses, σύμβολον refers to each of two halves or corresponding pieces of a bone or coin that the two parties of a contract break between themselves. Each party keeps its part as proof of his own identity as well as the identity of the other. (At times σύμβολον refers to each of the parts, while at other times it refers to the whole composed of those parts. My use of "symbol" will betray this same ambiguity, although context usually makes clear whether the whole or the part is being referred to.) For the sake of convenience, I call this first denotation of σύμβολον the "original symbol," and I will show how it can serve as a model for understanding Aristotle's conception of "ones in vocal-sound" as symbols of "affectednesses in the soul."

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[11] The following summary of the meanings of σύμβολον is based in part on U. Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), 130; P. Bellemare, "Symbole: fondements anthropobiologiques de la doctrine Aristotelicienne du langage," *Philosophiques* 9 (1982): 265-79 (especially 269-72); Whitaker, *Aristotle's* De interpretatione: *Contradiction and Dialectic*, 9-13; and H. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1676-77. It is important not to confuse σύμβολον with συμβόλαιον. According to Liddell and Scott, in a few instances συμβόλαιον had a meaning similar to one of the meanings of σύμβολον, but in Aristotle's time συμβόλαιον had only a legal meaning equivalent to "contract," "covenant," or "bond." Aristotle uses it in this sense in a variety of works, especially the *Politics*.

Over time the use of σύμβολον was extended so that it no longer had such a particular reference to the original symbol. It began, for instance, to refer to any agreement between people or political entities, to any sort of ticket or token, and even to any sign or mark whereby we infer something.[12] A perusal of the use of σύμβολον in Aristotle's writings, however, suggests that he keeps in mind the features of the original symbol and uses them to illustrate certain characteristics of various things he discusses. Indeed, the original symbol equips Aristotle with a unique model for elucidating a surprising variety of subjects, including virtue, friendship, the role of males and females in reproduction, the elements of natural bodies, mixed forms of government, the instructive power of hearing, and, as I hope to spell out, the existence of linguistic entities.[13]

Given the unique character of the original symbol as a model, it is unfortunate that some interpreters of 16a1-9 take σύμβολον to be practically synonymous with σημεῖον[14] and that σύμβολα has even been translated as "symbols or signs."[15] Other interpreters distinguish symbols from signs to some degree, considering the former to be a species or type of the latter, but this too seems insufficient.[16] I am not alone, of course, in recognizing that the distinction between symbols and signs in the opening lines of *On Interpretation* is crucial, although I think its significance has not been fully articulated.[17]

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[12] This last sense seems to be the one that causes some interpreters to conflate the meanings of σύμβολον and σημεῖον in 16a1-9. See further below.

[13] These instances of σύμβολον can be found, respectively, in *Eudemian Ethics*, 1237b26, 1239b31; *Generation of Animals*, 722b11; *On Generation and Corruption*, 331a20-b4, 332a32, and 332b29; *Politics*, 1294a35; *On Sense and Sensibilia*, 437a15; and, of course, *On Interpretation*, 16a3.

[14] See, e.g., D. Modrak, *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20; also, J. Magee, *Boethius on Signification and Mind* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 37-45. I would also include Ackrill in this group, since he makes little or nothing of the distinction between symbol and sign (see *Aristotle's Categories and De interpretatione*, 113-14).

[15] For example, Cooke's translation renders [2]-[3] as follows: "Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken."

[16] See, e.g., M. Wheeler, "Semantics in Aristotle's *Organon*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 37 (1999): 191-226 (especially 198-200). This also seems to be the view of R. Polansky and M. Kucsewski in "Speech and Thought, Symbol and Likeness: Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16a3-9," *Apeiron* 23 (1990): 51-63 (especially 59), although they want to draw such a clear distinction between symbol and sign that they almost belong in the next footnote.

[17] N. Kretzmann was perhaps the first to see some of the ramifications of distin-

When Aristotle uses σύμβολον, then, he sets up the original symbol as a sort of model, and in order to illustrate certain characteristics of what is under discussion, he alludes to one or more of the following aspects of that symbol: (a) The original symbol involves a whole made up of complementary parts, that is, parts that fit together because they are somehow suitable for each other. In the case of the original symbol, this complementarity exists, of course, because a whole (for example, a bone or a coin) has been broken into parts. (b) Although the parts of a symbol are complementary, there is no necessity in their being together. In the case of the original symbol, this lack of necessity is evident in two ways, namely, in that the two parties choose to bind themselves to each other and in that the parts of the bone or coin may never be physically put together again. (c) The complementary parts of the original symbol correspond to and stand in the place of other things.[18] In the case of the original symbol,

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guishing between symbols and signs for interpreting the opening lines of *On Interpretation*. See his "Aristotle on Spoken Sounds Significant by Convention," in: *Ancient Logic and Its Modern Interpretations*, ed. J. Corcoran (Dordrecht-Holland: Reidel, 1974), 3-21. Following Kretzmann's lead is J. Pépin ("Σύμβολα, Σημεῖα, Ὁμοιώματα: A propos de *Peri hermeneias* 1, 16a3-8 et *Politique* VIII 5, 1340a6-39," in: *Aristoteles: Werk und Wirkung*, vol. I, ed. J. Wiesner [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985], 22-41). P. Tselemanis ("Theory of Meaning and Signification in Aristotle," in: *Language and Reality in Greek Philosophy: Proceedings of the Greek Philosophical Society* [Athens: Greek Philosophical Society, 1985], 194-203) maintains that "the word «σημεῖον» . . . is introduced precisely in order to mark clearly that the relation in question [i.e., between spoken sounds and affections in the soul] is a *semantic* relation" as opposed to the "rule-governed correlation" of the symbolizing relation (197-98). G. Manetti (*Theories of the Sign in Classical Antiquity*, trans. C. Richardson [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993]) offers a good analysis of Aristotle's distinction between symbols and signs (70-91). D. Charles (*Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000]), although he doesn't provide a detailed commentary on this passage, does recognize that "symbol" and "sign" are not coextensive (81, n. 5). See also Bellemare, "Symbole: Fondements . . .," *passim*; and Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 26-28. Whitaker makes a strong case that "symbol" – or "token," as he translates it – indicates that a word is adopted by convention, whereas saying that a word is a "sign" of a thought and of a thing "simply means that there is some thought and some thing corresponding to the word" (*Aristotle's* De interpretatione: *Contradiction and Dialectic*, 23).

Hence many interpreters recognize that symbols and signs differ for Aristotle, but they do not spell out the important consequences of making this distinction. Kretzmann and Whitaker have made the most progress in this respect, and this paper builds on some of their insights.

[18] That Aristotle is concerned with this aspect of the original symbol when talking about language is clear from *Sophistical Refutations*, 1, 165a6-10, which will be explicated below.

the parts correspond to and stand in the place of the two parties who have chosen to be in this or that relationship to each other. Below I will spell out how these three aspects of the original symbol are helpful for understanding how "ones in vocal-sound" are symbols of "affectednesses in the soul."

Now, if a symbol is not a sign, what exactly is a sign? Aristotle articulates what a sign is in the *Prior Analytics*. He says:

> A sign wants to be a necessary or reputable demonstrative premise. For the thing that, upon something being, is, or that, upon something coming-to-be, comes to be before or after, is a sign of the coming-to-be or being.[19]

Aristotle exemplifies this account of a sign with certain concomitants of pregnancy, namely, having milk and being pale. A woman's having milk or being pale, in other words, has the power to move the mind to infer that she is expecting. There is a connection, then, between the being or coming-to-be of the sign and the being or coming-to-be of that of which it is a sign, such that the sign regularly accompanies its being or coming-to-be, either before or after.[20]

But can't paleness be a sign of something other than pregnancy, such as fear or a heart attack? It can, of course, but this does not negate the connection between the sign and that of which it is a sign, even if it makes it clear that paleness is not wholly reliable as an indication of pregnancy. A degree of unreliability, however, does not force one to deny its reality as a specific sign, although it does explain why Aristotle says that a sign "*wants to be* a necessary or reputable demonstrative premise."

How, then, does a sign differ from a symbol? If we consider the three aspects of the original symbol enumerated above – that it is a whole of complementary parts, its parts being together involves a lack of necessity, and its parts correspond to and stand in for other things – then it becomes clear that symbols and signs should be contrasted, not conflated. Unlike a symbol, a sign is not conceived of as having complementary parts; unlike a symbol, a sign does not stand in the place of something else, but rather precedes or follows upon it; and finally, unlike a symbol, a sign

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[19] *Prior Analytics*, B.27, 70a8-10.
[20] As Kretzmann points out ("Aristotle on Spoken Sound Significant by Convention," 7-8), σημεῖον could also be rendered "symptom," especially in medical contexts (which may be significant, since Aristotle's father was a physician), and in some ways "symptom" better fits the *Prior Analytics* account of σημεῖον than does "sign." Hence this alternate rendering should be kept in mind whenever I speak of a "sign."

seems to involve necessity, at least insofar as there is some intelligible connection between the sign and the being or coming-to-be of that of which it is a sign. This general account of symbols, signs, and their differences provides the framework within which one should interpret 16a1-9.

B. *"Ones in vocal-sound" as symbols*

Are the three aspects of the original symbol mentioned above at work in [2]? In other words, do τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ consist of complementary parts of a whole? Is there a lack of necessity involved in their parts being together? And do these parts correspond to and stand in for other things? Answering these questions requires a deeper consideration of the phrase "ones in vocal-sound." As I mentioned above, no English translation of *On Interpretation* renders τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνη as "ones in vocal-sound" or something close to that. Rather, it is rendered as "words spoken," "spoken sounds," "spoken expressions,"[21] or some such phrase. Such translations miss Aristotle's clue about the parts of the symbols in question – namely, τά ("ones," that is, the linguistic entities listed in [1]) and φωνή ("vocal-sound") – as well as the relation between those parts suggested by ἐν ("in").

The part of this phrase easiest to clarify is "vocal-sound." Aristotle's most extensive discussion of it is in *De anima*, B.8, 420b6-421a7, from which we can glean the following points: first, that which gives rise to vocal-sound must be living and lunged; second, vocal-sound comes about by the activity of the soul in those parts that correspond with what is called the windpipe; and third, not every sound of a living, lunged animal is vocal-sound (coughing, for example), since vocal-sound is accompanied by an image or appearance (φαντασία) and is significative (σημαντικός).[22] At the beginning of *On Interpretation*, then, Aristotle presupposes that some animals make significative sounds accompanied by an image or appearance. Whatever "ones in vocal-sound" turn out to be, they must be more than this, since such sounds are only one part of the symbol. Aristotle is already suggesting in [2], therefore, that the "ones" that are in vocal-sound are beyond φαντάσματα (images or appearances), because vocal-sound

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[21] These renderings are by Cooke, Ackrill, and Apostle, respectively.

[22] I prefer rendering σημαντικός as "significative" (rather than the usual "significant") in order to emphasize that Aristotle is referring to the *ability* of a vocal-sound or linguistic entity to perform the function of a sign (which is what the suffix -ικος ["-ive"] indicates), which ability is fulfilled in the recipient of a sign.

already involves an image or appearance, and this is only what the "ones" are in.[23]

Now, if τά ("ones") refers to name, verb, denial, etc., listed in [1], what does it mean to say that these are "in" significative sound accompanied by an image or appearance made by an animal? One place to look for an answer is *Physics* Δ.3, 210a14-24, where Aristotle enumerates the following eight senses in which one thing can be said to be "in" another: as a part in a whole, as a whole in its part, as a species in a genus, as a genus in a species, as form in material, as a thing in its first mover, as a thing in its end, and as a thing in a place. Given that vocal-sound is a sensible reality, the ἐν in τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνη suggests the relation between form and material. Moreover, since linguistic entities are not by nature,[24] vocal-sound is comparable not to the material of a natural being, but to that of an artifact. Just as in the case of the original symbol, so in the case of an artifact there is a lack of necessity in the coming together of the "parts" (that is, material and form). There is no necessity, for example, that this piece of wood be carved into the shape of a duck; rather, the carved duck is a kind of accidental composition. Likewise, if "ones in vocal-sound" are likened to artifacts, then a whole linguistic entity (for example, a name in vocal-sound) can be construed as a nonnecessary composition that is in some sense not natural.

That "ones in vocal-sound" should be construed in this way is supported by a passage from *On Sense and Sensibilia*, in which Aristotle compares sight and hearing and their respective advantages. He says:

> Of these two, sight is better with respect to necessities in virtue of itself, but with respect to understanding hearing is better in virtue of something accidental. For the power of sight announces many differences of all kinds, owing to the fact that all bodies partake of color, and so also the common sensibles are perceived especially through the power of sight. (Now, by "common sensibles" I mean figure, magnitude, motion, number.) Hearing, on the other hand, announces only

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[23] Much more could be said about this, though here is not the place to do so. For other arguments that more than mental images are being dealt with here, see Whitaker, *Aristotle's* De interpretatione: *Contradiction and Dialectic*, 13-17.

[24] Aristotle says as much when spelling out part of his definition of name: Τὸ δὲ κατὰ συνθήκην, ὅτι φύσει τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐδέν ἐστιν, ἀλλ᾽ ὅταν γένηται σύμ-βολον, ἐπεὶ δηλοῦσί γέ τι καὶ οἱ ἀγράμματοι ψόφοι, οἷον θηρίων, ὧν οὐδέν ἐστιν ὄνομα ("Now, [a name] is according to convention, because there is no name by nature, but when a symbol comes to be, since indeed even unlettered sounds, such as those of a brute animal, not one of which is a name, show something"). *On Interpretation*, 2, 16a27-30.

the differences of sound and, to a few, those also of vocal-sound. But in virtue of something accidental hearing contributes the largest part with respect to intelligence. For audible speech is a cause of learning, not in virtue of itself, but in virtue of something accidental. For it is composed of names, each of which is a symbol. Accordingly, among those deprived from birth of either sense, the blind are more intelligent than the deaf and dumb.[25]

How does the fact that a name is a symbol explain the fact that audible speech causes learning in virtue of something accidental? It is because the intellectual content of names – in other words, that in audible speech which "contributes the largest part with respect to intelligence" – is accidental to the audible vocal-sound that serves as its material or medium. And this is what it means to say that the "in" in "ones in vocal-sound" indicates that vocal-sound is the material in which the name, verb, denial, affirmation, declaration, or articulation exists.[26] Vocal-sound is to the speaker – better yet, to the speaking community – as marble is to the sculptor or color to the painter. As a sculptor presents his ideas in marble and a painter in color, so a speaker does in vocal-sound. For, like a sculptor and a painter, a speaker embodies his ideas in something perceptible that is able to transfer what he understands to someone else.

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[25] *Sense and Sensibilia*, 1, 437a4-17.

[26] Kretzmann seems to have a similar interpretation in mind when he says the following: "For x to be a symbol of y is for x to be a notation for y, to be a rule-governed embodiment of y in a medium different from that in which y occurs" ("Aristotle on Spoken Sound Significant by Convention," 5). By "medium" he seems to mean something like Aristotle's "material," taken broadly, which is how I am taking it here. Indeed, Aristotle suggests understanding vocal-sound as a medium when he speaks of "articulation that is through vocal-sound" (ὁ λόγος ὁ διὰ τῆς φωνῆς) in *Parts of Animals*, B.16, 660a3.

Another possible sense of ἐν in the context of 16a1-9 that might make sense is the way in which a species is in a genus. According to this interpretation, [2] would read as follows: "Noun, verb, denial, affirmation, declaration, and speech, which are species in the genus of vocal-sound, then, are symbols of affectednesses of the soul." (It appears that Thomas Aquinas considers this a possible reading, although he couches it in part/whole language. See his *Expositio libri Peryermenias* {henceforth, "*Exp. lib. Per.*"}, I.2 (Leonine ed., vol. I*.1, 10:65-87). This reading, however, fails to make the best sense of Aristotle's use of σύμβολον as a model for understanding the relation between "ones in vocal-sound" and "affectednesses in the soul." I will say more about this below.

There is, of course, no way to present a formal argument that ἐν should be taken here in the sense of a form *in* material. The most I can do is persuade the reader that understanding it in this way makes the most sense of the passage as a whole and coheres best with other passages in Aristotle's works.

Furthermore, as Aristotle says in [3], a speaker can communicate his thoughts in writing as well, since writing functions as material in which "ones in vocal-sound" are embodied and presented to others.

In light of [3], in which Aristotle introduces τὰ γραφόμενα ("ones written"), it appears that a linguistic entity (for example, a name) can be considered in three different ways.[27] First, one can consider it as a significative vocal-sound, that is, as something audible that is able to communicate a meaning grasped intellectually. In this way one can say that the vocal-sound "dog" is a name. This seems to be how we normally consider it, and in *On Interpretation* it is how Aristotle considers linguistic entities from Chapter 2 onward.[28]

Second, one can consider a linguistic entity as the intelligible content embodied in vocal-sound, that is, as what "informs" the vocal-sound and gives it meaning. According to this consideration, a name is not the artificial composite itself, but the formal principle of such a composite. In other words, the intelligible content carried by the vocal-sound "dog" that

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[27] Here I am taking my cue from Aquinas, who briefly mentions this threefold existence of "ones in vocal-sound" in *Exp. lib. Per.*, I.2 (Leonine ed., vol. I*.1, 10:69-72): " . . .hec autem tripliciter habent esse: uno quidem modo in conceptione intellectus; alio modo in prolatione vocis; tercio modo in descriptione litterarum." Aquinas, however, does not make much of this distinction, partly because he has Boethius's Latin translation of *On Interpretation*, which does not distinquish between "symbol" and "sign." Along these lines, then, I agree with Kretzmann (see his "Aristotle on Spoken Sound Significant by Convention," 18-19, n. 6) that Boethius's translation of 16a1-9, in which both σύμβολα and σημεῖα are translated as *notae*, was bound to cause medieval interpreters to miss important points that Aristotle was trying to make. Hence, although I agree with a number of the criticisms of Kretzmann made by Magee (*Boethius on Signification and Mind*, 36-48) and J. O'Callaghan (*Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003], 41-77), I disagree with them when they maintain that the conflation of σύμβολον and σημεῖον in Boethius's translation did not lead to a misunderstanding of Aristotle's teaching in 16a1-9.

[28] It is important to consider why in *On Interpretation* Aristotle is interested primarily in "ones in vocal-sound" as certain kinds of significative vocal-sound rather than as certain kinds of vocal sign. Does he want to stress that *On Interpretation* is concerned with sensible entities – more particularly, vocal-sounds that we can hear, albeit ones embedded with meaning? Answering this question and others like it would undoubtedly help us grasp better what Aristotle is up to in both *On Interpretation* and the Organon as a whole. Aquinas is the only interpreter I have come across who explicitly recognizes this issue, and when talking about it he makes some noteworthy comments about the different ways in which artifacts can be defined. See *Exp. lib. Per.*, I.4 (Leonine ed., vol. I*.1, 20-21:56-78).

makes it meaningful to speaker and listener is a name. This seems to be the way the τά of 16a3 should be taken. In the opening lines of *On Interpretation*, then, Aristotle is considering linguistic entities in [1] as what inform vocal-sound and make it meaningful.

This becomes evident when Aristotle lines up "ones [linguistic entities] in vocal sound" with "affectednesses in the soul." Structurally speaking, [2] says that "Xs in Y" are symbols of "Zs in Q." In the symbols mentioned in [2], then, the linguistic entities listed in [1] (as formal principles) correspond with affectednesses, while vocal-sound corresponds with the soul.[29] Hence it is the soul's having been affected that is embodied by the vocal-sound infused with meaning. To be sure, one doesn't normally think of the linguistic entities listed in [1] as formal principles composed with vocal-sound – unless, that is, one is trying to come to grips with how linguistic entities exist, as Aristotle is here.[30] Such a consideration may be called "metalinguistic" or even metaphysical, insofar as it presents the framework within which one can understand how linguistic entities exist. Such a consideration seeks to uncover the principles and the unity of such artificial composites, and it demands that one probe the depth of the normal usage of words and, consequently, stretch their meaning, as Aristotle does here.

Finally, one can consider a name as something written, insofar as it takes the place of the artificial composite of a linguistic entity in vocal-sound. And so in [3] Aristotle says that "ones written are symbols of ones in vocal-sound." The string of letters "d-o-g" on a piece of paper, then, is said to be a name. Such a perspective is more fitting for a grammarian, who tends to focus on the very expression of a language, especially in written form, and thereby determine the customary rules of usage within a language.[31]

So far, then, according to my interpretation, by calling "ones in vocal-sound" symbols, Aristotle is saying that they are accidental, quasi-artificial form/material composites. The parts of such symbols (that is, the form in

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[29] The fact that "ones" and "affectednesses" are plural whereas "vocal-sound" and "soul" are singular is a further indication that the latter are to be understood as material for the former.

[30] It seems to me that this second sense of "name" is comparable to the sense of οὐσία when it denotes μορφή. See, e.g., Metaphysics, Z.3, 1029a2-3.

[31] Perhaps one could say that the grammarian focuses on linguistic entities more as symbols, whereas the logician focuses on them more as signs. But this point would take too much time to develop here. With regard to the grammarian, see Aquinas, *Exp. lib. Per.*, I.2 (Leonine ed., vol. I*.1, 10:49-56).

the material) correspond to and stand in for "affectednesses in the soul." An analogy that Aristotle makes in *Sophistical Refutations* may be helpful for grasping the significance of this latter point. He says:

> For one cannot discuss by bringing in the things themselves, but we use names as symbols instead of the things, and we suppose that what follows about the names follows also about the things, just as those who calculate suppose about their pebbles. But it is not alike. For names and the quantity of calculations are limited, whereas things[32] are unlimited in number. It is necessary, then, that the same calculation and one name signify for many.[33]

Just as an accountant using a counter can consider this or that pebble as corresponding to and standing in for $100, so we can consider a name as standing in for a thing. Men use names to stand in for things, moreover, because they allow them to talk about things in a universal way. In other words, they allow men to express the intelligible character of a thing that it shares with many other such things. Linguistic entities, therefore, re-present things, and they re-present things in their universality and intelligibility. This is extremely helpful, because in a discussion a person cannot simply bring in the things themselves and have his interlocutors be acted upon and likened to them in the way that he has been. Rather, men naturally use agreed-upon vocal-sounds to communicate the intellectual content that results from the soul's having been acted upon and likened to things.

It is no easy task, of course, to explain how the soul is acted upon and likened to things, especially on the level of intellect. As I said above, it is a complex process formally discussed in *De anima*, Γ.4-8. In these chapters Aristotle maintains that the intellect is affected by what is understood[34] and that this intellectual achievement in some way makes it the same as what is understood by means of the thing's εἶδος. Hence Aristotle makes the following claims: "Knowledge according to act is the same as the thing" (431a1); "Generally, the intellect according to act is the things" (431b17-18); and, most famously, "The soul is in a way all beings" (431b21). A full account of how this comes about is not possible here, but these general points should be kept in mind for understanding the affectedness in the soul mentioned in the opening lines of *On Interpretation*.

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[32] This may be an instance in which "facts" better renders πράγματα than does "things."

[33] *Sophistical Refutations*, 1, 165a6-10.

[34] See, e.g., 429a14-18 and 429b30-430a2.

Linguistic entities, therefore, are symbols of "affectednesses in the soul." In other words, vocal-sound infused with meaning corresponds to and stands in for the soul's having been affected by and likened to things. But such linguistic entities do not exist naturally, but "according to convention," and it is precisely Aristotle's construal of linguistic entities as symbols that allows him to account for the conventional character of linguistic entities. In Chapter 2, when explicating his definition of name, he says:

> Now, [a name] is according to convention, because there is no name by nature, but when a symbol comes-to-be, since indeed even unlettered sounds, such as those of a brute animal, not one of which is a name, show something.[35]

The fact that a name is a symbol, then, explains why names are not by nature, but according to convention, namely, because a symbol is an accidental, quasi-artificial composite whose parts, though complementary, do not need to be together. In other words, this or that intelligible aspect of reality need not be communicated by the particular vocal-sound that has been agreed upon within a linguistic community. This is in contrast with a dog's bark or a cat's meow; for these sounds show something by nature and not because the dogs or cats have agreed that they are to be used to express some affectedness of the soul. Put otherwise, dogs and cats can neither make nor recognize symbols. Introducing τὰ γραφόμενα ("ones written") in [3], moreover, brings to light the conventional character of linguistic entities even more, because written words are more obviously symbols – in other words, they are more obviously artifacts that correspond to and stand in for other things. Aristotle's depiction of linguistic entities as symbols, therefore, elucidates their conventional character.

C. *"Ones in vocal-sound" as signs*

By mentioning "unlettered sounds" in the passage from Chapter 2 just cited, Aristotle reminds us of the "letters" (γράμματα) mentioned in Chapter 1, which are important for understanding the other facet of linguistic entities, namely, that they are signs. Recall [4]-[6] of the opening of *On Interpretation*: "And as letters are not the same for all, neither are vocal-sounds the same. But those firsts of which these are signs – the affectednesses of the soul – are the same for all, and those of which these [affectednesses of the soul] are likenednesses – the things – are already the same." It is noteworthy that Aristotle does not speak of signs until

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[35] *On Interpretation*, 2, 16a27-29. See note 24.

after he has introduced "letters." He does this because it is the lettered character of vocal-sound that underlies a linguistic entity's existence as a sign.[36]

It is important to recognize that when speaking about language Aristotle uses γράμματα to refer both to parts of written words and to parts of vocal-sound, and usually he uses it to refer to the latter.[37] It seems to me that in [4] Aristotle has both referents in mind, and, consequently, he has two points to make here. The first is straightforward and obvious, namely, that vocal-sounds are not the same for all, just as written letters are not, and these are in contrast with affectednesses of the soul and things, which are the same for all. This point supports the conventionality of both written and spoken languages, since they differ according to different human communities.

The second point is to focus the reader's attention on the written words and the vocal-sounds themselves that embody intellectual content, in order to recognize that they are wholes composed of letters as parts. In other words, Aristotle wants the reader to consider the material or medium that bears the name, verb, denial, etc. – be it written or vocal – and see that it is composed of parts. And this is especially important when the material or medium is vocal, for the expression of lettered vocal-sound is a sign of the soul's having been prelinguistically affected by and likened to things.

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[36] I am taking the "these" in [5] that are "signs" to refer back to "ones in vocal-sound" mentioned in [2], now known to be lettered. It seems, however, that one could take "these" as modifying "signs." Then [5]-[6] would read thus: "But those firsts which these signs are of – the affectednesses of the soul – are the same for all, and those which these [affectednesses] are of – the things – are already the same." According to this reading, then, "these signs" would refer back to "vocal-sounds" in [4], not "ones in vocal-sound" in [2]. The biggest difference between these two readings is that the latter points to lettered vocal-sounds themselves as signs, which would distinguish symbols from signs more clearly in this passage, since that which is a symbol (i.e., a linguistic entity in vocal-sound) would not be the same as that which is a sign (i.e., a vocal-sound). As I read it, however, Aristotle is saying that "ones in vocal-sound" are both symbols and signs, though for different reasons. I will comment more on this below.

[37] Texts in which γράμματα refers to parts of vocal-sound are numerous. See, e.g., *History of Animals*, A.1, 488a32-33; II.12, 504b1-3; *Parts of Animals*, B.16, 660a3; *Metaphysics*, B.4, 1000a3; B.5, 1002b18. *Nichomachean Ethics*, Γ.3, 1112b2 is the only passage I have come across in which γράμματα clearly refers to written letters. Cf. also Aristotle's account of στοιχεῖον ("letter") in *Poetics*, 20, 1456b22-25. In mathematical contexts, of course, Aristotle uses γράμματα to refer to lines.

In this way, then, the vocal-sounds that are signs of the affectednesses of the soul are unlike the "unlettered sounds" of beasts, since the former consist of letter-parts that constitute vocal-sound wholes whereas the latter do not. Indeed, as Aristotle sees it, this is a fundamental distinction among animals that make vocal-sounds. In *History of Animals*, he distinguishes animals on the basis of their sound-making abilities as follows: "Some are able to make sound but are without vocal-sound, and some are vocal-sound-making. And of the latter, some have διάλεκτον, some are ἀγράμματα."[38] Here Aristotle distinguishes unlettered vocal-sounds from διάλεκτον, that is, "something-said-through," which I am taking to denote a whole vocal-sound consisting of parts that have to be gone through.[39] This understanding of διάλεκτον is supported by a passage in *Parts of Animals*, in which Aristotle asserts that humans have sharp front teeth especially for making such vocal-sound: "And [human beings] have teeth of this sort [that is, sharp teeth] and so many such teeth especially for διάλεκτον. For the front teeth contribute many things toward the coming-to-be of letters."[40] To produce διάλεκτον demands letters, because something-said-through is a gathering together of parts to constitute some one vocal-sound; it is, in other words, an articulation of a present whole. Interestingly, human beings and birds are the primary producers of such vocal-sound. "Most among animals besides man," Aristotle says in *History of Animals*, "certain kinds of birds utter letters, and such kinds among these are mostly the flat-tongued."[41] The song of a bird, then, is lettered vocal-sound, for it is composed of particular vocal-sounds brought together to constitute a whole. It is "something-said-through," as is the articulation "Polly wants a cracker."

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[38] *History of Animals*, A.1, 488a32-33.

[39] Others have translated διάλεκτον too strongly here so that it seems only to apply to human beings. For example, in the ROT, Thompson translates thus: ". . . of these latter some have articulate speech, while others are inarticulate." In the Loeb edition, Peck renders it thus: ". . . of the latter some are articulate and other inarticulate." It seems that a more literal rendering, such as "something-said-through," is more accurate here, since Aristotle connects διάλεκτον to the use of letters, of which birds are capable. Moreover, in *History of Animals*, Δ.9, 536b11, Aristotle says that ἡ [φωνή] δ' ἐν τοῖς ἄρθροις ("vocal-sound in joined-parts") can be called διάλεκτον.

[40] *Parts of Animals*, Γ.1, 661b13-15. See also *Generation of Animals*, E.5, 788b3-5: Περὶ μὲν ὀδόντων, ὅτι μὲν οὐχ ἑνὸς χάριν, οὐδὲ πάντα τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν τὰ ζῷα ἔχουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν διὰ τὴν τροφήν, τὰ δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἀλκὴν καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ λόγον, εἴρηται πρότερον.

[41] *History of Animals*, B.12, 504b1-3. See also Δ.9, 436b8-20.

If we combine Aristotle's account of lettered vocal-sounds with his account of what a sign is from the *Prior Analytics* – that is, a sign is something that regularly precedes or follows upon the being or coming-to-be of something else – then in [4]-[6] Aristotle is indicating that vocal-sounds composed of letters regularly precede or follow upon the soul's having been affected by and likened to things. Now, not all vocal-sound signifies that the soul has been affected in such a way that gives rise to the linguistic entities listed in [1]. When my baby daughter cries, for example, this vocal-sound does not signify that the soul has been affected by and likened to things in the way that a name or an articulation does. But when my sons were first uttering *lettered* vocal-sounds, I reliably inferred that some level of intellectual achievement had been reached and was being expressed. And when I hear an adult speaking in full sentences, even if in a language I do not understand, I can infer that such vocal-sounds accompany and manifest intellectual activity.[42] For Aristotle, then, linguistic entities in lettered vocal-sound signify – in other words, regularly precede or follow upon – the soul's having been affected by and likened to things on the level of intellect.[43] The significative character of linguistic entities in lettered vocal-sound, therefore, lies in their regularly accompanying – and, when heard, giving rise to – determinate thoughts,[44] which thoughts are related to particular vocal-sounds according to convention.

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[42] Here I am excluding from consideration the "zombies" of recent debates in the philosophy of mind. For besides the fact that Aristotle never encountered such entities, it is not yet clear to me how introducing them could help one determine what linguistic entities are as human beings actually experience them.

[43] So what about birds (and perhaps even dolphins)? Wouldn't their lettered vocal-sounds also be signs of the soul's being affected in the way that gives rise to the linguistic entities listed in [1]? This would amount to saying that birds are capable of producing linguistic entities that are not only signs, but also symbols. In other words, one would have to say that birds embody intellectual content in lettered vocal-sound according to convention. There seem to be many reasons for denying this – in fact, at least as many as there are for denying that birds (and dolphins) operate with essentially the same intelligence that humans have. Their apparent inability to attach intelligible content to lettered vocal-sound arbitrarily and then communicate this, their apolitical existence, and their lack of scientific inquiry all point to lives not lived at the intellectual level at which humans live. This is not the place, however, for presenting such arguments in full. Birds do show, therefore, that lettered vocal-sounds are ambiguous signs, insofar as they do not always point to the soul's being affected by and likened to things on the level of intellect.

[44] Aristotle seems to indicate this when saying how verbs themselves are also names: Αὐτὰ μὲν οὖν καθ᾽ ἑαυτὰ λεγόμενα τὰ ῥήματα ὀνόματά ἐστι καὶ σημαίνει τι (ἵστησι γὰρ ὁ λέγων τὴν διάνοιαν, καὶ ὁ ἀκούσας ἠρέμησεν). *On Interpretation*,

Now, just as Aristotle depicted linguistic entities as symbols in order to explain their conventional character, so he depicts lettered vocal-sounds as signs in order to explain what is natural about these same linguistic entities. Human beings existing within linguistic communities naturally express themselves by means of lettered vocal-sounds when they grasp something about the world, even if the vocal-sounds they use to do so are meaningful only by agreement. It is natural for a human being to embody his understanding of things in lettered vocal-sounds, thus producing symbols to communicate intellectual achievement. Indeed, there is a fittingness here, since linguistic entities usually express the human intellect's apprehension of forms of material beings, which beings can be construed as wholes made up of material parts organized by some governing formal principle.

"Ones in vocal-sound" – names, verbs, affirmations, denials, and articulations – are, therefore, both symbols and signs. It does not seem right, however, to think of a linguistic entity as having a symbol-part and a sign-part that together constitute a whole. Rather, by calling the same linguistic entity both a symbol and a sign, Aristotle focuses our attention on the fact that such an entity is conventional, in that it is an accidental, quasi-artificial composite whose parts, though complementary, do not need to be together, and natural, in that lettered vocal-sounds regularly accompany determinate thoughts. For Aristotle, then, human language is at the intersection of the natural and conventional. It is where nature and intelligence meet so that the innate social inclinations of human beings can be fulfilled.[45]

III. *Concluding remarks*

Aristotle undoubtedly inherited many of the puzzles he addresses concerning human language from Plato, whose *Cratylus* presents a conversation

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3, 16b20-22. Signifying something, then, involves some level of bringing thinking to a standstill in the speaker and bringing thought to a rest in the hearer. This is what a noun and a verb (and every linguistic entity) precisely as a φωνὴ σημαντική can do. In fact, in the speaker the lettered vocal-sound seems to follow upon thought, whereas in the hearer it seems to precede it, which fits well the fact that a sign "comes-to-be before or after" what it signifies, according to the account in *Prior Analytics*, B.27, 70a8-10. Whitaker seems to hold a similar view about words as signs; see *Aristotle's De interpretatione: Contradiction and Dialectic*, 23.

[45] Interestingly, near the beginning of his commentary on the opening of *On Interpretation*, Aquinas considers the fact that intelligent vocal and written communication between human beings, who are naturally political and social, is necessary for their living together. See *Exp. lib. Per.*, I.2 (Leonine ed., vol. I*.1, 9-10:20-48).

between Hermogenes and Socrates concerning the natural and conven-
tional character of language.[46] The opening lines of *On Interpretation* can
be understood in part as Aristotle's entry into this debate. For in these
lines Aristotle probes the reality of human linguistic entities and unveils
how they exist as both physical and meaningful. As usual, he has left it
to his reader to tease out his account, and I have tried to do so here both
by translating Aristotle's words more literally and by underscoring the dis-
tinction between symbols and signs. Separating the symbolic and the
significative aspects of linguistic entities, however, is no easy task, and
undoubtedly much of the difficulty arises from the fact that language
appears to be "second nature" to human beings. In other words, its con-
ventional and natural aspects seem simply to collapse into each other.

In order to determine what a linguistic entity is, however, the conven-
tional and the natural aspects must be teased out. Human beings produce
symbols – for example, names, verbs, denials, etc., in vocal-sound – in
order to convey their thoughts. To call these "symbols" implies, among
other things, that such compositions need not be; that is to say, there is
no necessity that this or that thought be embodied in this or that particu-
lar vocal-sound.[47] The vocal-sounds that embody thought, however, are
not wholly arbitrary, for human beings naturally and fittingly utilize
lettered vocal-sounds, that is, whole vocal-sounds constructed out of dis-
tinguishable letter parts. Linguistic entities, therefore, straddle the realms
of nature and intelligence; they deliver intelligible content in sensible

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[46] The following are good places to begin for understanding the issues in the
Cratylus that are related to this paper, especially the degrees to which linguistic enti-
ties are natural and conventional: R. Robinson, "The Theory of Names in Plato's
Cratylus," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 9 (1955): 221-36; N. Kretzmann, "Plato
on the Correctness of Names," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1971): 126-38;
C. Kahn, "Language and Ontology in the *Cratylus*," in: *Exegesis and Argument*, ed.
E. Lee, A. Mourelatos, and R. Rorty (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1973), 152-76; G. Fine,
"Plato on Naming," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977): 289-301; M. Schofield, "The
Dénouement of the *Cratylus*," in: *Language and Logos*, ed. M. Schofield and
M. Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); R. Barney, "Plato on
Conventionalism," *Phronesis* 42 (1997): 143-62; J. L. Ackrill, "Language and Reality
in Plato's *Cratylus*," in: *Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1997), 33-52; D. Sedley, *Plato's* Cratylus (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2003), 51-74. As Whitaker points out, in *On Interpretation* Aristotle employs
some of the concepts introduced in the *Cratylus*. See *Aristotle's* De interpretatione:
Contradiction and Dialectic, 12-13.

[47] As Whitaker points out, "the token [i.e., σύμβολον] replaces the tool [i.e.,
ὄργανον] as the model for how words do their job" (*Aristotle's* De Interpretatione:
Contradiction and Dialectic, 12-13); for if linguistic entities were tools, then it would

packages. And those packages are articulated wholes that accompany the soul's having been affected by and likened to things on the level of intellect.

It is not surprising, moreover, that Aristotle situates human language at the intersection of nature and intelligence, since he locates man there as well. As he says in the *Politics*:

> Now, the other animals live mostly by nature, though in some small ways they live also by their customs; but man lives also by speech, for he alone has speech. So these must be in harmony with each other. For men do many things beyond what they are accustomed to and beyond nature because of speech, if they are persuaded that to be disposed differently is better.[48]

For Aristotle, "man alone among the animals has speech," whereby he communicates his awareness of the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, the sharing of which underlies human communities.[49] A man shares his ideas by embodying intelligible content that can be expressed to others by means of the voice he has in virtue of being an animal. Man the speaker, therefore, lives in the realm where the intellectual and the physical meet. There he dwells with man the moral agent and man the artist, for all three of them encounter the material world in order to discover it, express it, and bring about order therein.[50]

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seem that a particular vocal-sound would be intrinsically ordered to embodying this or that meaning, just as a saw is intrinsically ordered to cutting wood.

[48] *Politics*, H.13, 1332b3-7.

[49] *Politics*, A.2, 1253a9-18. In both of these passages from the *Politics* I render λόγος as "speech" rather than "reason," as it is usually translated. I do so not only to make the connection between these passages and *On Interpretation* clearer, but also because in both passages – the first concerning persuasion, the second concerning communication – Aristotle is dealing specifically with the ability of human beings to articulate thought and communicate it to others.