Among the many worthwhile inventions of scholastic logic that did not survive the general denigration and destruction of the logical arts during the renaissance is the dichotomy of the class of nouns and adjectives into those called 'quidditative' terms on the one hand, and those called 'denominative' on the other. I say that it was a worthwhile invention because it turns out to be one that marks an important distinction in the way terms have meaning, a distinction that now finds an important place in philosophical discussions of natural kind terms. Although this paper is dedicated to the historical task of tracing some important stages in the development of the dichotomy, and not, except implicitly and by allusion, to showing its current relevance, I am certainly hoping that what I have to say will stimulate philosophers and linguists to take a new interest in this bit of ancient logical lore.

Readers who are not at all acquainted with the quidditative/denominative terminology will doubtless be expecting or hoping for some preliminary sketch of what this is all about before embarking on the inquiry into its origins. I hope they will not give up before even starting if I disappoint them and instead gradually uncover the nature of the dichotomy in the course of explaining how it arose. The problem is that under this one rubric fall a number of important but prima facie very disparate distinctions. To understand the dichotomy is to see how these various distinctions might in fact all be pointing to one and the same basic conceptual division. An historical approach has the advantage of isolating the different surface distinctions and letting us see how philosophers could think them related.

I

It is convenient to begin with that transmitter of ancient logic to the medieval scholars, Boethius, for although in his writings the quidditative/denominative dichotomy is not yet explicitly drawn, all the materials are there, and certainly the scholastics considered themselves as only elaborating on his ideas when they made it a fundamental part of their logic.

First of all, we find in Boethius a contrast between two modes of predica-
tion: in eo quod quid sit (or simply in quid) and in eo quod quale sit (or in quale). The contrast is used by Boethius to draw the distinction between genera and species on the one hand, and differentiae on the other. The former are predicated in quid of whatever they are predicated of; the latter, in quale.

Genus, species and differentia are, of course, key concepts in the Aristotelian logic, and along with proprium (distinguishing feature) and accident compose what Porphyry called the five ‘predicables’. The distinction of differentiae (i.e. διαφοραί) from genera and species is not clearly explained in Aristotle’s own writings. In the Categories we find that like genera and species of substances differentiae (at least differentiae of substances) are never ‘present in’ anything; they are only predicable of things. (Cat. 5: 3a21-28) This, Aristotle notes, is evidenced by the fact that the definition of a differentia is predicable of whatever the differentia itself is predicable of, just as definitions of genera and species are predicable of whatever the genera and species are. Although it is intuitively obvious that differentiae differ in some semantic or grammatical way from genus and species terms, even from those they are necessarily co-extensive with, e.g. ‘alive’ with ‘organism’, ‘three-dimensional’ with ‘body’, it is not exactly clear what that difference is.

In Topics IV,6 Aristotle says that ‘some think the differentia is predicated of a species in the “what-is” sense (ἐν τῷ τί ἐστι), (128a20) as though he might well want to dissent from this view; and then proceeds to give some criteria for distinguishing differentiae from genera. Among these we find:

... in rendering an account of what something is it is better to cite the genus rather than the differentia; for he who says man is an animal makes it clearer what a man is than he who says he is a pedestrian. (128a24-26)

And in Topics I,5 we find this:

A genus is what is predicated in the ‘what-is’ sense of many things that differ in species. We should treat as predicated in the ‘what-is’ sense such things as make an appropriate reply to the question: ‘What is the thing set in front of you?’ For example, in the case of a man a fitting reply to the question: ‘What is the thing set in front of you?’ is ‘an animal’. (102a30-35)

Boethius notes much the same sort of difference between genera and differentiae in his Dialogus Primus on Porphyry’s Isagoge:

If someone were to ask what is a man, we should say: an animal. But if someone were to say: How is a man characterized? (Qualis est homo?), we would answer: rational. Always, then, we say that the differentia is not in eo quod quid but is in eo quod quale. (Migne, PL: 64, 34A)
It is apparent that the phrase ‘in eo quod quid’ is a virtual word for word rendering of Aristotle’s ‘έν τω τι έστι’, but there is, so far as I know, no exact Aristotelian equivalent for ‘in eo quod quale.’ Aristotle does say that ‘he who says “pedestrian” gives some character (ποιόν τι) of the animal, but he who says “animal” does not give some character of the pedestrian.’ (Top. IV,6: 128a27-29). No doubt then Boethius, or someone earlier, has constructed on the model of ‘in eo quod quid’ the phrase ‘in eo quod quale’ to express this alternative of indicating ποιόν τι about something.

The ‘what-is’ question is, as is well known, closely linked with the category of substance in Aristotle’s thought. On several occasions he uses the phrase ‘τι έστι’ as the name of the category called substance (ούσια) in the Categories (vide Topics I,9: 103b22; Met.Δ,7: 1017a25). And in Met. Z,1 (1028a10-20) he as much as says that any predicate which says what something is is in the category of substance. This suggests that only substances can have something predicated of them in eo quod quid, for only they fall under the predicated in the category of substance. Indeed, the passage in Met. Z suggests that only substances are subjects of any sort of predication, for all the predicates in the non-substantial categories are said to answer questions about substances, but not the ‘what-is’ question, of course.

Nevertheless, this is not Aristotle’s doctrine in the Organon. When he discusses in Categories 2 the class of items both predicable of things and present in things, none of which can be substances, he gives as an example science (ἐπιστήμη), saying that it is predicable of grammar (1b2). It seems clear that what is intended is that grammar is one of the sciences just as man is one of the animals, and so is predicated of grammar as its genus. Similarly in Topics IV,6 we find music said to be ‘a certain science’ and walking ‘a certain movement’ and these taken as examples of locating something in its genus (128a31-35). But if science and movement are genera, they must say what something is, despite their non-substantial character.

Still the close connection of in quid predications with substance is acknowledged by Boethius. He often refers to the in quid predicates as substantial and to the genus in a definition as importing the substance of the thing defined. For example:

. . . if someone leaves out the genera, for example, says justice is a state productive of equality or what distributes equally, but omits from his definition virtue, he has left out the genus of justice and does not say what its being is (quid est esse), for the substance of each thing is in its genus.’ (Top. Arist. Int. VI,3: Migne, PL: 64, 975C)

Note that virtues are clearly not things in the category of substance, yet Boethius can still talk about their substance.
What we have before us, then, is basically a semantic distinction within the class of words and phrases that can stand as predicate nouns and adjectives following the verb ‘to be’. Some of these can properly answer the question ‘What is X?’, and some cannot. Some of those that do, like definitions, do so in virtue of one word within them, the genus. Does this distinction reflect a genuine linguistic phenomenon? I think it does. Like many important semantic distinctions it evidences itself in the possibility of a certain type of pun. Consider this form of humour, much enjoyed by children: Question: What is a purple, horned, one-eyed carnivore? Answer: scary! The ‘what-is’ question taken in its primary sense is not met by such an answer. What we want is a term like ‘cyclops’ or ‘ape’; expressions like ‘scary’, ‘ugly’, ‘a monstrosity’, ‘a failure’, ‘a mutant’, etc. just will not do or are at least very unsatisfying.

Likewise questions such as ‘What is this bald eagle?’ require an unusual context to make sense, for if we take them as straightforward ‘what-is’ questions they are self-answering. We do, however, in the case of human beings, at least, employ ‘what-is’ questions to ask for a person’s occupation or function: What is Harry? Harry is a salesman. And certainly in some contexts the ‘what-is’ question just asks for some characterization of the subject: If Harry is brilliant, then what is George? But neither of these sorts of cases should be allowed to obscure the lesson of the puns and the self-answering questions: ‘what-is’ questions have a primary use or meaning which requires for its answer the placing of the subject in some classification scheme; hence the pre-eminence of species and genus terms as answers to those questions.

II

The second component of the quidditative/denominative dichotomy that we find in Boethius is the notion of a ‘denominative noun’. This concept was evidently current in the grammatical teaching of the day, for we find that Boethius’ contemporary, Priscian, devotes a whole book of his Institutiones Grammaticarum to the subject of denominativa. Priscian says this by way of definition:

Something is called denominative which receives its name from the expression for what is primitive, not from some special signification . . . Thus it covers all forms which are derived from a noun, for patronyms, possessives, comparatives, superlatives, diminutives, as well as verbal and adverbial forms and those which are constructed from prepositions are for the most part denominative, i.e. derived from nouns. . . . Therefore denominatives have many forms and different meanings. Because these are generally thrown together, the writers of the arts have
given them the general name of ‘denominative’. *(Inst. Gram. IV, p.117)*

Priscian goes on to list all the different sorts of suffixes which can be used to derive an expression from another word or root. For example, using the suffix ‘*ia*’ we get ‘*sapientia*’ from ‘*sapiens*’; using the suffix ‘*lis*’ we get ‘*aedilis*’ from ‘*aedis*’, ‘*amabilis*’ from ‘*amo*’; using ‘*x*’ we get ‘*audax*’ from ‘*audeo*’. This last case shows that the word from which another is derived need not be a noun or adjective; a verb will do. And Priscian even mentions cases where the derived term is a verbal form, e.g. ‘*scriba*’ from ‘*scribo*’. *(Inst. Gram. IV, p.121, 1.5)*

For Priscian, then, the term ‘*denominativum*’ has a very broad sense related much more to morphology than to semantics or syntax. It merely marks the morphologically derived status of certain words, mainly nouns and adjectives formed by adding some standard suffix to a root. Boethius works with a much less general notion and imports into it a semantic, or even ontological, significance. He says:

If denominative words are to be set up three things are necessary: first that something share (*participet*) in a thing (*re*), next that it share in a noun, and finally that there be some transformation of the noun. For example, when someone is called brave from bravery, for here there is some bravery in which the brave man shares, and he also shares in the noun for he is called brave. And there is some transformation, because ‘brave’ (*fortis*) and ‘bravery’ (*fortitudo*) do not end in the same syllable. And if there is something which does not share in a thing, it cannot share in the noun either. Therefore, whatever does not share in a thing cannot be denominative. Also what shares in a thing but not in a noun is also different from the nature of denominatives; for example, where although a virtue exists and someone shares in virtue itself, yet we call him by no other noun than ‘wise’. But virtue and wisdom are different in respect of the very nouns, and, therefore, this person definitely shares in the thing [i.e. virtue] but not in the noun [because unlike English Latin has no noun meaning virtuous derived from ‘*virtus*’]. A wise (*sapiens*) man is not said to be so-called (*denominatus*) by reason of virtue, but by reason of wisdom (*sapientia*), in which he also shares and to which noun he is linked although there is a transformational difference. Further, there are cases where there is no transformation; for example, if there is a musical woman (*musica*) who shares in the art of music which is called *musica*. Here the reference (*appellatio*) is not denominative, but equivocal, for we call both the art and the woman herself by one noun, *musica*. *(In Cat. Arist. I, Migne, Pat. Lat. 64, 168A-C)*
The main difference between Boethius' account and Priscian's is the introduction by Boethius of 'sharing in a thing' as necessary for being denominative. Boethius had strong Platonist leanings and these are very likely evincing themselves at this point. The two examples of things shared in, bravery and wisdom, could have been drawn directly from the early Socratic dialogues, such as the Protagoras. Certainly there is no trace of this doctrine in the particular Aristotelian text Boethius is commenting on, viz. Categories 1. ‘Denominativa’ is Boethius’ translation of Aristotle’s ‘παρώνυμα’, ‘paronyms’, and Aristotle’s definition of ‘paronym’ is characteristically brief: ‘Those things are called paronyms which get referred to by a noun differing from some other in ending, as, for example, “grammariam” (γραμματικός) differs from “grammar” (γραμματική) and “brave” (άνδρεία) from “bravery” (άνδρεία). (1a12-15)

The first thing to note about this remark is that it is not, on Aristotle’s usage, words that are called paronyms, but things. This is more evident when you look at the whole of Categories 1 which discusses ‘homonyms’ and then ‘synonyms’ before coming to paronyms. It is quite clear that homonyms are defined as things that share one and the same noun but do not share one and the same definition which can be given of that noun, although the noun itself can be defined in several ways and different ones of these definitions will apply to the different homonyms. Synonyms, on the other hand, are things which share both a noun and some one definition of that noun. Paronyms are then a final class of things which share a noun that differs in ending from some other noun, as remarked earlier.

Clearly, then, ‘paronym’ is not equivalent to ‘denominativum’ as we find it in Priscian, where it applies exclusively to words; and probably not to Boethius’ ‘denominativum’ either, for he speaks of ‘denominativa vocabula’ while also talking as though the thing which ‘shares in a thing’ and is ‘denominated’ is denominative. I suspect Boethius is simply inconsistent on this matter. When we look at an early scholastic such as Peter Abailard we find that it is consistently vocabula which are called denominative, and, so far as I know, Aristotle’s usage was never reverted to.

But it would be pedantic to make a great deal of this divergence from Aristotle, for the point he is making is basically a linguistic one and is only clarified by transferring to the usage of the scholastics. There are homonyms in Aristotle’s sense because certain nouns are equivocal and
there are synonyms because some nouns are used univocally when predicated of different things. And now there are paronyms because some nouns differ from others, morphologically speaking, only in suffix, i.e. are denominative.

It might well be wondered why Aristotle chooses to discuss paronyms in the same chapter with homonyms and synonyms; paronymy seems radically different from the others. The reason, I think, is that the predication of denominative nouns of some subject is used to express the fact that some thing is ‘present in’ the subject rather than ‘said of’ it, to use the terminology Aristotle develops in the very next chapter of *Categories*. The item which is present in is referred to by the noun from which the denominative term is derived, e.g. bravery is present in Ajax so Ajax is brave. But where we have something present in a subject there is no corresponding definition which can be said of the subject. At least, I take it this is a consequence of the passage in *Categories* 5 where Aristotle says that even though the noun ‘white’ is said of subjects its definition, i.e. the definition of the colour white, is not said of those subjects since that colour is only present in, not said of, those subjects. (2a29-34) When we compare this with his remarks in ch.8 (10a27-b11) about qualities such as whiteness, grammar, justice, etc. often giving rise to denominative terms that are predicated of the subjects these qualities are present in, we see that ‘white’ in so far as it is predicable of white things is a denominative term, and evidently Aristotle in ch.5 was unwilling to allow it any definition of its own apart from the definition of ‘whiteness’, i.e. the noun it differs from in suffix. I suggest then that Aristotle held the view that denominative terms have no definition other than the definition of the term from which they are derived, so to speak, i.e. than the definition of the quality whose presence in a subject they indicate.

This proposal makes sense of why paronymy appears in ch.1 along with homonymy and synonymy. In the case of homonymy we have a term predicable of each of a class of things but no *one* definition of that term is predicable of all, although each thing has *some* definition of that term predicable of it. In the case of synonymy we again have a term predicable of each of a class of things, but in this case there is *one* definition of the term that is predicable of all. In paronymy there is as before a term (the denominative term) predicable of each of a class of things, but here *no* definition of that term is predicable of any of those things. The tripartite division of ch.1 reflects three different ways the definitions of a term may relate to the class of things that the term is predicable of.

But having said that, let me note a consequence that will be troublesome later. Aristotle says, as I noted earlier, that not only *differentiae* are predicable of subjects but their definitions are too (3a21-28). This feature
would, on my gloss of Aristotle's notion of paronymy, mean that differentiae could not be denominative terms. And, indeed, Aristotle's examples of differentiae in that text, viz. 'pedestrian' and 'two-footed' (πεζόν καί τὸ δί-ποιτο) do not look much like terms differing from others only in suffix and even less like terms indicating the presence of some quality in something.

Further if we turn to Aristotle's remarks in *Metaphysics* H,2, we discover that terms from any of the non-substantial categories can be differentiae, even terms from the categories of time and place, for dinner and breakfast are differentiated by their names, and the winds by their place of origin (1042b20-21). This suggests that many terms from the various accidental categories are not denominative and signify something predicatable of rather than present in their subjects. I generally tend to the view that in Aristotle's mind paronymy is a phenomenon pretty much limited to the category of quality where we find in ordinary usage an abundance of abstract nouns associated with concrete correlates, the latter being what Boethius calls denominative. In the other categories we have mostly terms that are not denominative and express what is univocally predicatable of subjects but not present in any, even though they frequently express accidents of what they are predicatable of. A quick look at some of the terms in these categories reveals many that have no natural abstract correlates. In a way this bears out Boethius' insistence that a denominative term denote something that 'shares in a thing', for the thing shared in is just the quality named by the abstract noun. Nevertheless, I put forward this interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of paronymy only as one among several plausible candidates; it is always dangerous to draw conclusions about Aristotle's thought by putting together passages from such disparate works as the *Categories* and *Metaphysics* H. No doubt there are texts that argue against my view.

Boethius' requirement of the 'shared thing' fills one obvious gap in Aristotle's discussion of paronymy. The morphological criterion that Aristotle relies on in *Categories* I gives us no reason to treat, for example, 'grammariam' as any more a denominative term than 'grammar', or 'brave' than 'bravery'. If 'grammariam' differs in ending from 'grammar', so does 'grammar' from 'grammariam'. But we can say that 'grammariam' denotes something that shares in something, while 'grammar' denotes something that is shared in, and likewise wherever we have a concrete term associated with an abstract correlate. The asymmetry of these pairs is evident in Boethius' discussion but not in Aristotle's, nor in Priscian's, for that matter.

Did then Aristotle intend by his notion of paronymy merely to draw attention to the existence of concrete/abstract pairs of terms, and so treat every concrete member of such a pair as denominative? I think not, for there are differentiae like rational which in both Greek and Latin have a
natural abstract correlate, and yet we have seen that there is good reason to
doubt that differentiae introduce paronymy. The definitions of differentiae
are predicable of what the differentiae themselves are predicable of, but on
my view Aristotle notes paronymy just where there is a term no definition of
which is predicable of what the term is predicable of.

I take it that Aristotle would, if pressed, distinguish within the class of
concrete/abstract pairs those where the abstract member is the object of
definition and the concrete member just derives its meaning from this
definition, and those where the concrete member is the object of definition
and the abstract has the derived meaning. In the former cases we have
things present in subjects they are not predicable of and we get paronymy,
in the latter we have only things predicable of but not present in subjects
and no paronymy. Aristotle might well have imbibed such a distinction
from the definition experts at Plato’s Academy. But, as I said, I put for­
ward this interpretation only tentatively while admitting the existence of
other plausible glosses.

If I am right about Aristotle’s intentions it must be admitted that
Boethius was not fully aware of them. Boethius did not see the point about
denominative terms not having definitions of their own, and his explanation
of what a denominative term is rests solely on two points: (1) the term refers
to something that ‘shares in’ some thing, and (2) the term varies only in its
suffix from some other expression that refers to the thing ‘shared in’, i.e.
some quality like thing. What emerges then is something equivalent to the
concrete/abstract dichotomy as long as we are willing to be realists about
the referent of the abstract term. And this is what was conveyed through
Boethius’ writings to the medieval scholastics. But, as I said, I doubt that
this quite catches the Stagirite’s own views.

Now, I think it is not too difficult to see how the distinction of ‘in quid’
from ‘in quale’ discussed in Section I might be merged with the denom­
inative term/abstract term contrast we just saw developed. We could claim
that every term predicated in quale is denominative, and the nouns
predicated in quid either are nouns to which the concrete/abstract contrast
does not apply, like ‘man’ and ‘animal’, or are the abstract correlates of the
denominative terms, like ‘grammar’, ‘bravery’, etc. On the one hand, the
very expression ‘in quale’ suggests that a quality is involved, and where
qualities are involved there we might well expect to find the denominative/
abstract contrast. It is not a great leap, then, to suggest that all the terms
predicated in quale admit of abstract correlates and are thus denominative.
On the other hand, these abstract correlates do seem to answer the ‘what-is’
question: Q: What is this science? A: Grammar. Q: What is this virtue? A:
Bravery. So it does not seem to stretch things very far to claim they are all
predicated in quid. Given all this we can then claim that the class of all
predicable terms can be divided into the quidditative ones and the denominative ones, and thus we have the distinction which gradually arises in later scholasticism.

But against it is Aristotle's apparent unwillingness to treat differentiae as denominative, even though he admits they are not predicated in quid. Differentiae, he says, are predicated 'synonymously', i.e. univocally, just as are genera and species. (Cat. 5, 3a33) This apparently rules out the other two alternatives mentioned in Categories 1, viz. homonymy and paronymy. No doubt this was the prime impediment to arranging the merger we are discussing. There would be other objections as well, of course. Language simply does not provide us with abstract forms for lots of terms that are predicated in quale. We do not, for instance, have for 'bipedal', 'bipedality' or for 'terrestrial', 'terrestriality'. These abstracts have to be artificially invented. But if we are going to invent them why not also invent abstracts for paradigmatic quidditative terms, e.g. 'manness' for 'man', 'horseness' for 'horse', and so on? But then are the concrete forms here both quidditative and denominative?

Nevertheless, I think the later scholastics did come more and more to accept the merger, and as evidence for this, and also in order to delve more deeply into the roots of the dichotomy, I want to turn now to some texts from William of Ockham in the 14th century.

III

In distinction 2, qu. ix of his Ordinatio Ockham is concerned to defend the thesis that 'there is some one general concept predicable of both God and creatures in quid and per se primo modo.' (Op. Th. II, p.312) This last phrase means that the concept is part of the fully expanded definition of what it is predicated of, as for example a genus or differentia is in the definition of a species. In the ensuing argument there are several lemmas, so to speak, that receive sub-proofs. Among these are two that relate to our topic. One is 'that God can be conceived by us in a general concept predicable both of Him and other things.' The other is 'that some such concept by which we can conceive of Him is quidditative to Him.' (pp.312-3) Now given these two lemmas, Ockham says the desired conclusion that we have a concept predicable of both God and creatures in quid and per se primo modo follows. It is clear that the conclusion does follow from these lemmas only if all quidditative concepts are predicated in quid and per se

primo modo. But this means that only genera and species concepts, and not for example differentiae, can qualify as quidditative, since only they both answer the ‘what-is’ question and figure in the definition of what they are predicated of.

The second of the above lemmas, viz. the one asserting that some concept common to God and creatures is quidditative, Ockham argues for with a piece of reasoning that he attributes to Duns Scotus:

If God is conceived in some common concept applicable both to Him and other things, I ask: Is this concept quidditative or denominative? If it is quidditative, then my conclusion is granted. If it is denominative, then I ask of it: To what do you attribute this denominative concept? Now what it is attributed to is either denominative, and then we have an infinite regress, or it is quidditative, and then my conclusion is granted. (p.315)

Note first that the very question which sets the argument in motion, ‘Is this concept quidditative or denominative?’ assumes that any concept is one or the other, in other words it assumes the exhaustiveness of the quidditative/denominative dichotomy within the class of predicable concepts. This assumption goes unquestioned by Ockham.

Another assumption is that when we have a denominative concept there must be another concept which can serve to answer the question what sort of things the denominative term applies to, i.e. another concept whose extension includes that of the original denominative one. This assumption Ockham does try to support in the text we are discussing. He goes on to say:

Every denominative concept has a definition that expresses the meaning of the noun (quid nominis), and in this we find something in the nominative case and something in an oblique case. Then I ask of one part of this definition [i.e. the part in the nominative case]: Does it have a similar definition of its own expressing the meaning of the noun, or not? If not, then my conclusion is granted, because such a part is necessarily quidditative. If it has a definition expressing the meaning of the noun, then I ask about a part of it just as before, and we are into an infinite regress unless we stop at some quidditative concept predicable of what the original denominative concept is predicated. (p.316)

We see here that Ockham takes it as a necessary feature of denominative terms that they admit of a definition expressing the meaning of the noun and consisting in a noun accompanied by appropriate modifying expressions. An example would be the definition of ‘pater’ as ‘vir qui liberos generavit’. ‘Vir’ would here be the term in the nominative case and ‘liberos’ the one in the oblique case. Ockham would then ask about ‘vir’ whether it was denominative or quidditative, and if it were the former then there
would have to be a definition of it too, e.g. ‘homo masculinus’ or something of that sort. And now in ‘homo’ we have an indubitable instance of a quidditative term, and it is predicable of anything ‘pater’ is. Ockham assumes here that quidditative terms do not themselves require any definition expressing the meaning of the noun. We shall return to this important point in a moment, but first let us review the implications of the exhaustiveness of the quidditative/denominative division within the class of predicatable terms.

First of all, differentiae will turn out to be denominative, contrary to the implications of Aristotle’s discussion in Categories 5. Ockham explicitly accepts this consequence in his commentary on the Categories. There he says that in the broad sense of ‘denominative’: ‘every concrete term to which there corresponds an abstract will be denominative whether or not that abstract term signifies a thing that actually inheres formally in that of which or for which its concrete term is predicated. . . . And in this sense frequently or always essential differentiae are predicated denominatively of the things of which they are the differentiae.’ (Op.Ph. II, p.146-7)

Ockham goes on to give two stricter senses of ‘denominative’, the less strict of which insists on some formally inhering thing referred to by the abstract term, while the more strict further insists that the formally inhering thing be an accident. Obviously Ockham’s broad sense is arrived at simply by dropping altogether Boethius’ demand for a ‘shared in thing’, and this leaves us with only the morphological criterion for distinguishing out the denominative terms, a criterion differentiae frequently fulfill.

Moreover, Ockham does not accept the threefold distinction of univocal (synonym), equivocal (homonym) and denominative (paronym) as a proper trichotomy, for he allows that denominative terms are univocal when the definitions expressing the meaning of their nouns contain no equivocal terms. (Op.Ph. II, p.146). This gets round any problem with Aristotle’s remarks in Categories 5 that differentiae are, like genera and species, univocally predicated of their subjects; Ockham can say (although I know of no place where he does so explicitly) that differentiae are both univocal and denominative.

Further texts show, however, that Ockham was not happy with resting the quidditative/denominative distinction mainly on the morphological criterion. No doubt he was moved here by the prevalence in later scholastic philosophy of a host of invented abstract correlates for plainly quidditative terms. Such barbarous expressions as ‘animalitas’, ‘corporeitas’, and ‘equinitas’ were in frequent use among the 13th and 14th century meta-

physicians, and make it appear that even 'animal', 'corpus', and 'equus', and other genus and species terms are denominative. And yet Ockham, with his aversion to abstract entities, could hardly go back to Boethius' 'shared in things' as a restriction on the class of denominative terms.

The result is that Ockham offers us a new distinction, with new terminology, which bases itself in the asymmetry in respect of definitions expressing the meaning of the noun, which we have already touched on. Ockham calls this distinction that of absolute from connotative terms. The connotative clearly correspond to those called denominative in the text we examined from his *Ordinatio*, for they all have definitions expressing the *quid nominis* and involving a term in the nominative and another term in an oblique case:

A connotative noun is one which signifies something primarily and something secondarily. Such a noun properly has a definition expressing the meaning of the noun (*quid nominis*) and frequently we have to put one element of this definition in the nominative case and another in an oblique case. For example, this noun 'white' has a definition that expresses the meaning of the noun and in which one word is in the nominative and another in an oblique case. Thus if you ask what this noun 'white' signifies, you reply with this whole word string: 'something informed by whiteness' (*aliquid informatum albedine*) or 'something having whiteness' (*aliquid habens albedinem*). (S.L. I, ch.10, p.34, 1.38-45)

The absolute terms, on the other hand, do not have definitions of their *quid nominis*, properly speaking, for if we do try to formulate definitions of them we find that there are several equally good yet non-synonymous definitions to be given:

Properly speaking such nouns do not have a definition expressing the meaning of the noun, because properly speaking for a single noun that has a definition expressing the meaning of the noun there is a single definition laying out the meaning of the noun. Consequently for such a noun we do not have expressing the meaning of the noun different word strings with distinct parts one of which signifies something which is not referred to by some other part of one of the other word strings. Rather these absolute nouns, so far as the meaning of the noun is concerned, can be explicated in a way by several word strings which do not signify the same things through their respective parts; and consequently none of

7. Page references here are to *William Ockham, Summa Logicae, Pars Prima*, edited by Ph. Boehner, in *Franciscan Institute Publications*, text series no.2, published by The Franciscan Institute, E. Nauwelaerts & F. Schöningh, 1957 (reprint of 1951 edition). Ockham's *Summa Logicae* has recently appeared as *Opera Philosophica*, vol. I, in the *Opera* mentioned in notes 5 and 6, but this was not available to me at the time of writing.
these is properly a definition expressing the meaning of the noun. (S. L. I, ch. 10, pp. 33-34, 1.12-21)

Ockham goes on to give the example of 'angel', which he says can equally well be defined by 'a substance separated from matter', 'an intellectual and incorruptible substance', and 'a simple substance involving no composition with something else'. As other examples of absolute terms he lists: 'man', 'animal', 'goat', 'stone', 'tree', 'fire', 'earth', 'water', 'sky', 'whiteness', 'blackness', 'heat', 'sweetness', 'odour', and 'taste'.

The point is that in the case of absolute terms there is no possibility of claiming that the noun signifies anything other than what it denotes or is true of. (This does not mean the term has a different meaning every time its extension changes. Ockham associates a mental concept with the term which remains associated with it despite such changes. But the term does not signify this concept.) Whereas with connotative terms you have signification not only of what the noun denotes, a signification conveyed through the nominative case term in its definition, but also of something else conveyed via the oblique term. Thus 'pater' signifies not only viros but liberos as well, since the definition would be 'vir qui liberos generavit'.

In other words, the connotative terms are used to say something definite about the things they denote (to call a man a father is to say he has sired children) but absolute terms refer to things in virtue of criteria that admit of no definite formulation. (What does calling an animal a goat say about it?) In the case of connotative terms we can specify necessary and sufficient conditions for being in the extension of the term which express the very meaning of the term. But this is not possible with absolute terms. All we can do in their case is give various necessary and sufficient criteria none of which really express the meaning of the term since they are not synonymous with each other although the term itself is perfectly univocal.

One is immediately reminded here of the situation in respect of defining natural kinds. Consider, for example, 'animal'. The Concise OED says:

'organized being endowed with life, sensation and voluntary motion'

But another just as adequate definition might be:

living organism incapable of manufacturing organic material from inorganic and thus reliant on the ingestion of organic material found in other living things

And a biologist could doubtless come up with many more definitions of roughly the same adequacy. Moreover, and this is the important point, different biologists might define 'animal' in different ways without thereby disagreeing about the meaning to be attached to the word or introducing new and various senses of the word. Their disagreements are more likely to be highly theoretical ones about biological taxonomy.
In sum, what Ockham is pointing to is a difference among definitions. Some definitions are such that anyone who grasps the ordinary meaning of the *definiendum* is in a position to assess the correctness of the definition. Such are the definitions of connotative terms. Other definitions can be assessed only by an expert, someone who has achieved some theoretical understanding of what the *definiendum* is true of. Such are the definitions of natural kinds, or absolute terms generally. It is a very interesting fact about language that some terms admit only of the latter sort of definition. Whether it is also a fact, as Ockham may be suggesting, that some terms admit of only the former sort of definition, or that generally a term admits of only one sort or the other but not both, is more dubious and deserves consideration in some other place.

But does all this have anything to do with the original intuitions of Aristotle that led to the quidditative/denominative dichotomy? Certainly Ockham’s category of absolute nouns corresponds neatly with those that properly answer the ‘what-is’ question, i.e. are predicated *in eo quod quid sit*. And, indeed, Ockham’s point about definitions deepens our understanding of why this is so. The absolute nouns are not used to say anything definite about what they are true of. Rather they provide the pigeon holes for a classification scheme. And when we ask what something is we want a pigeon hole, not some description.

The notion of a connotative term, however, seems to explicate more the notion of a term predicated *in eo quod quale sit* than it does that of *denominativum*. Gone entirely is the morphological criterion which was so important in Aristotle’s discussion of paronymy. Gone too is Boethius’ notion of the ‘shared thing’. And yet we can see the connection. The absolute terms are certainly ones that have no natural abstract form (or are themselves abstract) whereas many connotative terms do have abstracts. But more important is this: In the case of connotative terms we can always isolate something which is being said about something, and when we define the term we define this; we do not define what it is said about. Similarly with the older notion of denominative terms there was always the referent of the abstract correlate which the denominative term in effect said belonged to a subject. And it was this quality or character which was the object of definition.

Is it the case then, and I leave this as a suggestion for further research to confirm or disconfirm, that the development of the quidditative/denominative dichotomy follows a course from a beginning in Aristotle where there is a very limited realism as regards the characters we attribute to things and a consequent sharp restriction on the extent of denominative terms, through a period in scholasticism where realism extends its grip and in so doing expands the sphere of denominative terms and their abstract
correlates, followed by Ockham’s return to a very limited realism but retention of the increased scope of the term ‘denominative’ so as to maintain its equivalence with what is predicated *in quale?* If so, it becomes apparent why Ockham changes the terminology; it is part and parcel of his rejection of extravagant realism with respect to what we say of things.