

ROGER BACON

On Signs

Roger Bacon's *Opus maius* represents an attempt to create a whole new vision of what Christian education should be, one centered on service to the Church. In the second chapter of Part 3 of this work he presents a semiotics with several original features as a partial hermeneutic for studying the scriptures and sacraments. It distinguishes itself in offering a non-Augustinian definition of signs and maps out their logical and natural functions. Bacon spells out numerous ways in which words equivocate, distinguishes between analogy and equivocation, classifies five degrees of equivocation, and comes up with a new notion of analogical signification. Words, he claims, originally were imposed only for existing things and, in contrast with the majority opinion, name directly the things for which they are imposed and not the latter's concepts. When a name signifies a thing, he says, it also co-signifies anything logically or naturally connected with that thing – its concept, its genus, the thing's matter and form, its Creator, and so on. And to understand the myriad ways in which things and words signify, he says, is "a thing of marvelous usefulness and beauty." So what we have here in Bacon's "On Signs" is the most comprehensive and innovative treatise on semiotics in the thirteenth century.

Mediaeval Sources in Translation

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ROGER BACON

On Signs

(*Opus maius, Part 3, Chapter 2*)

Translated with an introduction and notes by

THOMAS S. MALONEY



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MANUFACTURED IN CANADA

This work is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my brother,
John Patrick Maloney, *dimidium animae meae*.

“Words without thoughts never to heaven go.”
Shakespeare, *Hamlet* III.iii.98

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Abbreviations

- CCSL Corpus Christianorum, Series latina. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953– .
- CSEL Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum. Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1866– .
- Cst Roger Bacon. *Compendium studii theologiae. Compendium of the Study of Theology*. Ed. and trans. Thomas S. Maloney. Leiden, New York, Copenhagen, and Cologne: Brill, 1988. [References are to paragraphs of this edition.]
- “Ds” Roger Bacon. “*De signis*.” “An Unedited Part of Roger Bacon’s *Opus Maius: ‘De Signis’*” Ed. K.M. Fredborg, Lauge Nielsen, and Jan Pinborg. *Traditio* 34 (1978): 75–136.
- Sd Roger Bacon. *Summulae dialectices*. “Les *Summulae dialectices* de Roger Bacon. I–II. *De termino, De enuntiatione*.” Ed. Alain de Libera. *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 53 (1986) 139–289; “Les *Summulae dialectices* de Roger Bacon. III. *De argumentatione*.” Ed. Alain de Libera. *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 54 (1987) 171–278. *The Art and Science of Logic: A Translation of the Summulae dialectices with Notes and Introduction*. Trans. Thomas S. Maloney. *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 47. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2009.
- Obi *Opera hactenus inedita Rogeri Baconi*. Ed. Robert Steele. 16 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1909]–1940.
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina. Ed. Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols and 4 vols indexes. Paris: Garnier, successors of Migne, 1878–1890.