Within the generative tradition, predication has been the driving force behind several analyses of obligatory control (henceforth OC). Such theories are typically built upon the empirical effects of control into infinitival – and to a lesser extent, gerundive – complements. In this paper, I investigate control into nominal complements, and argue (i) that OC manifests in this environment and (ii) that the relevant data pose a non-trivial problem for syntactic predicative approaches to OC, such as Landau (2015). I suggest that the data are best accounted for with an analysis along the lines of Chierchia (1984), in which all control complements are ‘nominalised’, referential entities.

I focus this investigation of nominal complement control around the empirical divide between exhaustive control (EC) and partial control (PC). I observe first that EC does obtain into nominals, while PC does not:

(1)  a. The Vandals began [ PRO_i/*j/*ARB the destruction of Rome ] (EC)
b. The Vandals promised [ PRO_i/*j/*ARB the destruction of Rome ] (PC)

I then demonstrate that several empirical correlates of the EC/PC distinction obtain within the nominal domain. For example, the tense mismatch distinction manifests wholesale in nominal complements to control predicates:

(2)  a. Yesterday, the Vandals began the destruction of Rome (*tomorrow).
    b. Yesterday, the Vandals promised the destruction of Rome (tomorrow).

Similarly, the overt embedded subjects correlation obtains in nominal complements. As demonstrated in (3), overt by-phrase subjects are prohibited in EC nominal complements, while those same subjects are licensed in PC nominal complements.

(3)  a. The Vandals began the destruction of Rome (*by the Goths).
    b. The Vandals promised the destruction of Rome (by the Goths).

I show that these empirical facts of control apply uniformly to all nominal complement types (morphologically complex vs. simplex, argument-projecting vs. non-argument-projecting, etc.), so long as that nominal refers to an event.

These observations pose a problem for predicative approaches to control in which predication is represented syntactically. For such theories, *The Vandals began to destroy Rome* instantiates a syntactic predication relation between a subject (in this case, *the Vandals*) and the property $\lambda x. x$ destroys Rome.

(4)  [ The Vandals_i [ vP $ν$-began_i [ VP $t_j$ [ XP $x_i$ to destroy Rome. ] ] ] ]

Such a relation is only possible given an appropriate analysis of the infinitival XP: either as (i) a naturally predicative lexical VP, or (ii) an extended clausal projection with movement creating a lambda abstraction.

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1 I adopt PRO here as a purely notational tool, and make no claims concerning the presence of a null pronoun within the control complement.
It is immediately evident, however, that the nominal complements at hand are not paradigmatic syntactic predicates. Aside from their participation in control constructions, they behave like typical argument NPs; they may saturate a predicate in copula structures (*the destruction of Rome was a great achievement*), and similarly participate in predicate inversion and consider-to-be constructions:

(5) a. Their great achievement was **the destruction of Rome**.
   b. I consider **the destruction of Rome** (to be) a great achievement.
   c. I consider a great achievement *(to be) the destruction of Rome.*

Furthermore, if they do predicate, they do so as predicative NPs: they require the help of a copula, and their argument can never be construed as the external argument of the underlying nominal event (e.g., *John invaded my privacy* vs. *(??)John is an invasion of my privacy*).

We may further demonstrate that such nominals do not possess the necessary predicative properties within the nominal itself. If the extension of *destruction of Rome* were the property $\exists x. x$ destroys Rome, we should expect any non-minimal referential DP projected as a prenominal possessor to obligatorily saturate the open subject position. However, an appropriate discourse context may instead license an abstract possessor/beneficiary reading of this argument ((6a), contra Grimshaw (1990)). Crucially, EC is still enforced in such a context (6b).

(6) a. Nero was advised to keeps his hands clean. As such, **Nero’s destruction of Rome** was carried out by the Vandals.
   b. The Vandals began [ Nero’s PRO $\nu^{i_1/*\nu^{i_2/*\nu^{i_3/*ARB}}}$ destruction of Rome ].

In order to generalise across infinitival and nominal complements, I suggest an analysis extending Chierchia’s (1984) notion of verbal argument (VA) to include nominalisations. In this way, *to destroy Rome*, *destroying Rome* and *the destruction of Rome* all constitute VAs: individual projections (entities) which refer to the action of destroying Rome. The EC relation must then be built into the lexical semantics of the selecting predicate. I take Chierchia’s meaning-postulate analysis as a starting point:

(7) $\begin{align*}
\text{begin}’(P)(x) & \rightarrow \Box_j P(x) \\
\text{whenever } x \text{ begins to bring about } P, \text{ then in all contextually relevant situations, } x \text{ does } P.
\end{align*}$

Further, I argue that the lack of PC into nominal complements is expected if PC, unlike EC, is mediated by a syntactic relation, and that the observations considered in this paper are in line with the split semantic/syntactic approach proposed in Wurmbrand (2002).

I conclude by discussing our earlier observations concerning the tense mismatch correlation. The fact that the temporal orientation of PC predicates is preserved in nominal complements – despite the lack of any control – poses a serious problem for any analysis of PC in which control and tense are packaged together. Furthermore, any account of temporal orientation in nominal complements faces several challenges; these nominal complements behave as though they contain a syntactic temporal operator (with regards to tense-shift diagnostics) – a functional element generally reserved for the extended verbal projection.