

PHIL 4233: Philosophy of Language  
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Mill, "Of Names"

- 1st division of names — the general and singular

general name: "a name which is capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of each of an indefinite number of things"

E.g., 'man'.

All general names express qualities that are common to objects to which the name applies.

They are used to assert general propositions.

A general name is not to be confused with a *collective* name. A general name applies to each member of some group. Collective names do not apply to individuals, but only to whole groups (collections). Collective names, like 'the Green Bay Packers', are actually singular names. (But note how Mill says that some names with an indefinite article are both collective and general, relative to different comparisons.)

singular (individual) name: "a name which is only capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of one thing"

E.g., 'John' and 'the King who succeeded William the Conqueror'.

Note that descriptions count as names.

There can be people with the same singular name (e.g., many people named 'John'), but there are no qualities that they must share in virtue of this fact.

- 2nd division of names — concrete and abstract

concrete name: "a name which stands for a thing"

E.g., ‘John’, ‘the sea’, and ‘this table’.

Adjectives like ‘white’ and ‘old’ also are concrete names (they name things).

Study Mill’s defense of the claim that “white is a name of all things whatever having the color, a name, not of the quality whiteness, but of every white object.” Note especially his claim that: “a name can only be said to stand for, or to be a name of, the things of which it can be predicated.”

abstract name: “a name which stands for an attribute of a thing.”

E.g., ‘whiteness’, ‘humanity’ and ‘old age’.

Are all abstract names general? Mill answers that the most determinate names for attributes are not. But why not? For as Mill observes, such a name still “denotes an attribute of many different objects”. It seems like names for tropes would be the only abstract names that would not be general.

- 3rd division of names — connotative and non-connotative

connotative name: “one which denotes a subject and implies an attribute”

E.g., ‘white’, ‘long’, and ‘virtuous’.

The word ‘white’, for example, denotes all white things and implies that the attribute whiteness applies to them.

“All concrete general names are connotative.” E.g., ‘man’.

Connotative names signify their subject *directly*, and the attributes *indirectly*. Or, in other words, they denote the subjects and connote the attributes. The attributes *denominate* the subjects.

Some abstract names are connotative too, as attributes may themselves have attributes. E.g., ‘fault’.

Some names of individuals are also connotative — e.g., ‘the sun’ and ‘God’. They are general terms which simply happen, as *a matter of fact* (he assumes), to be predicable of one thing in the actual world.

Definite descriptions are connotative individual names.

Connotative names are still names — they name what they denote, not what they connote. The meaning of a name is not its denotation, however. The examples of ‘Sophroniscus’ and ‘the

father of Socrates' are supposed to show this. Think of Frege's puzzle about identity statements, in this context.

One can know all the referents of a term without knowing the meaning of that term.

It is even possible that I might know every single individual of whom a given name could be with truth affirmed and yet could not be said to know the meaning of the name.

The quest for definition is the search for a fixed connotation.

non-connotative name: "one which signifies a subject only, or an attribute only"

E.g., 'John', 'London', 'England', 'whiteness', 'length', and 'virtue'.

All proper names are non-connotative (e.g., they imply no attributes of the subject).

It may be said, indeed, that we must have had some reason for giving them those names rather than any others, and this is true, but the name, once given, is independent of the reason.

Dartmouth would still be so-called even if the river were to change its course.

Proper names are attached to the objects themselves and are not dependent on the continuance of any attribute of the object.

Meaning lies with connotation, so proper names are meaningless.