

## Mill, “Of Names”

### I. Names are Names of Things, Not of our Ideas. (Ted asks: Can't I name my ideas?)

A name is “a word (or set of words) serving the double purpose of a mark to recall to ourselves the likeness of a former thought and a sign to make it known to others [what thought the speaker has in mind]” (p. 284)

So (i) names prompt a recollection, (ii) what is recalled is the “likeness” of a former thought, and (iii) names inform others of the relevant thought.

### III. General and Singular Names

“All names are names of something, real or imaginary...” (ibid.)

-Composing names *ad hoc*, e.g. ‘this stone’ (today, we’d say “complex demonstrative”). These “may be used of many other objects...though the only object of which they can both be used at a given moment, consistently with their signification, may be the one of which I wish to speak” (ibid.) (Ted asks: Trivial or false? Tokens vs. Types.)

-General vs. singular names: The former are used in “general propositions,” and can be “truly affirmed, in the same sense, of each of an indefinite number of things” (But: mass nouns vs. count nouns.) The latter can only be “truly affirmed, in the same sense, of one thing.” (ibid.) Mill’s example.: ‘The king who succeeded Wm the Conqueror’ (!)

-General names vs. collective names: The former “can be predicated of *each* individual of a multitude,” the latter can only name the multitude. E.g., ‘the 76<sup>th</sup> regiment of foot in the British army.’ (Today, we’d talk instead of “a name *used* distributively vs. collectively,” cf. ‘Mammals are a large species’ vs. ‘Mammals have hair’. Mill seems aware of such cases, though describes things differently; see the last paragraph of the section.)

### IV. Concrete and Abstract

-“A concrete name...stands for a thing; an abstract name...stands for an attribute of the thing” (p. 285). (Today, today we’d predicate ‘concrete’ and ‘abstract’ not of names, but only of objects. Also, we’d distinguish the *predicate* ‘is red’ from the *singular term* ‘redness’, and disambiguate tokens of ‘red’ between these two. Thus we avoid Mill’s awkward questions: ‘Are abstract names general or singular?’ and ‘Are adjectives abstract names?’ Mill’s answers btw are ‘Neither’ and ‘It depends’.)

### V. Connotative and Non-Connotative

“A non-connotative term is one which signifies a subject only, or an attribute only. A connotative term is one which denotes a subject and implies an attribute” (p. 286). “*white* denotes all white things...and implies, or in the language of the schoolmen, *connotes*, the attribute *whiteness*. The word *white* is not predicated of the attribute, but of the subjects, snow, etc., but when we predicate it of them, we convey the meaning that the attribute whiteness belongs to them.” (ibid.) (Cf. Aristotle’s Third Man argument) Note further down: Mill says ‘virtuous’ is the name of a *class*, even though *members* of the class are denoted by the word. But also, ‘virtue’ names an *attribute*.

“All concrete general names are connotative” (ibid.) (Ted says: They apparently *exhaust* the connotative names, see below.)

[-p. 286, 2<sup>nd</sup> column, middle of the full paragraph. Stipulative?]

“**Proper names are not connotive**” (p. 287) That’s so, even if the name was given for some particular reason, e.g., Dartmouth was so called because it was at the mouth of the Dart river. But if the mouth ended up changing to a different locale, Dartmouth wouldn’t need a name-change.

Sometimes the proper names ‘God’ or ‘The Sun’ imply certain attributes to their objects, but not always, since they are sometimes not even proper names, as in ‘Zeus is a God’, or ‘A planetary system orbits a Sun’.

*Connotive phrases.* There are phrases that denote a unique thing and are connotive, e.g., definite descriptions. (Mill does not use that term.) Still, these phrases are not names since they do not always denote the same thing, e.g., ‘The Prime Minister of England.’ Still, they can be modified so as to accomplish this effect, e.g. ‘The present Prime Minister of England.’ (Ted asks: Really?) Mill: “And as this appears from the meaning of the name without any extrinsic proof, it is strictly an individual name” (p. 288) (Ted asks: So some proper names *are* connotive?)

*Meaning vs. Denotation:* “[B]y learning what things it is a name of, we do not learn the meaning of the name; for to the same thing we may, with equal propriety, apply many names, not equivalent in meaning” (p. 288). (E.g., ‘the father of Socrates’ and ‘Sophroniscus’)

“[T]hose who know nothing about the names except that they were applicable to Sophroniscus would be altogether ignorant of their meaning. 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” (ibid.)

*On Regimentation:* “Since...the introduction of a new technical language...would not be free from inconvenience...the problem...is, in retaining the existing phraseology, how best to alleviate its imperfections” (ibid.)

“This can only be accomplished by giving to every general concrete name...what attributes...we really mean to predicate of the object. And the question of most nicety is ohe to give this fixed connotation to a name...with the least possible disarrangement...of the group of objects which...it serves to circumscribe...and with the least vitiation of the truth of any propositions which are commonly received as true.” (p. 288-9).

The purpose “is the end aimed at whenever any one attempts to give a definition of a connotative name being an attempt...to declare and analyze...the connotation of the name. And the fact no questions...in the moral sciences have been subjects of keener controversy than the definitions of almost all the leading expressions is a proof how great an extent the evil to which we have adverted has attained” (p. 289)