THE THEORY OF PROPER NAMES

A CONTROVERSIAL ESSAY

BY

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SECOND EDITION

LONDON

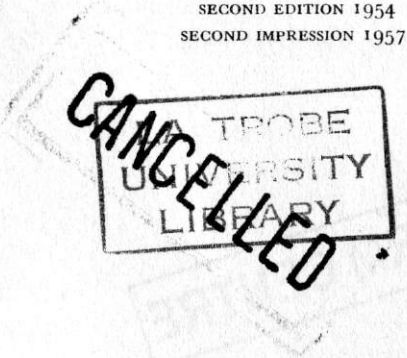
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW YORK TORONTO

Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON
BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS KARACHI CAPE TOWN IBADAN

FIRST PUBLISHED 1940
SECOND EDITION 1954
SECOND IMPRESSION 1957



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

Apart from a few trifling verbal changes and a couple of added footnotes the bulk of this book is the exact reprint of a paper-bound booklet published in a very small edition in 1940. Doubtless owing to the circumstances of the times, but possibly also to the original publication's somewhat *négligé* apparel, this passed almost unnoticed, and I have knowledge of only two reviews, the second of which appeared a whole decade later than the first. Having always felt that a piece of work that had cost me so much trouble deserved a better fate, I decided to see whether the situation could not be remedied by such external allurements as my excellent friends at the Oxford University Press were able to offer. I am sure I have acted wisely in not attempting to alter my main text, since at the age of seventy-four my ability to deal with an exceptionally difficult topic is certainly smaller than it was fourteen years ago. Nevertheless I have been unable to dispense with some pages of fresh comment, appended at the end of the book under the heading 'Retrospect 1953'. Here I have found myself compelled to admit the force of an objection raised in the later of the two reviews above mentioned, and to suggest some alterations in my formal definition accordingly. Had I thought fit to remodel my earlier text, this would have occasioned some changes also there, and particularly in my concluding sentence (p. 67), but for the reason stated I have deemed it more prudent, as well as more honest, to leave my original formulations uncorrected.

In suppressing my earlier Preface I have been prompted by the consideration that at the present time it would have been mainly irrelevant. Its principal theme was the difficulty I had experienced in giving my essay its final shape, and the accompanying acknowledgements turned more upon the encouragement extended to me by friends than upon any fruitful suggestions they had to offer. After all, the chief obligation incurred by a controversial writer is towards those whose opinions he attempts to refute, nothing being more stimulating than to encounter assertions with which one cannot agree. I confess to having wondered more than once whether my criticism of Bertrand Russell ought not to have been rewritten, seeing that the eminent philosopher has now restated his position in considerably modified form (*Human Knowledge*, 1948, Part II, ch. iii, and Part IV, ch. viii). If I have refrained, it is because I am no longer equal to the task. Besides, Russell's main contentions appear to have remained the same; for him *the moon* and *this* are still proper names, and *Socrates* no more than a mere description. On the positive side I feel that my main indebtedness is to Mill and to Dionysius Thrax.

1953

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THE THEORY OF PROPER NAMES

I

MILL's conception of Proper Names as meaningless marks set upon things to distinguish them from one another seems, at first sight, as sensible as it is simple. Applied, for example, to the names of the rock-infesting monsters Scylla and Charybdis a definition along these lines appears unexceptionable. Those names might, if chance had so willed it, have been interchanged without impairing their demonstrative efficacy. To us in modern times, at all events, Scylla and Charybdis mean, merely as names, absolutely nothing. No doubt they were fraught with sinister meaning for an Odysseus perilously steering his ship between them. But Mill explicitly excludes from his understanding of the term 'meaning' any previous knowledge of the object denoted. In speaking of proper names as meaningless marks he makes 'meaning' synonymous with 'connotation', and by a connotative name he understands one which not only denotes something, but also connotes or implies some attribute of it: such a concrete general name, for instance, as *tree*, which may be used to denote this or that particular tree, but which in so doing simultaneously implies of it the attributes shared by it with other trees. Since the names *Scylla* and *Charybdis* connote no such attributes, they are non-connotative or meaningless according to Mill's terminology. And since also these names are undeniably

distinguishing marks, for him they would have been typical 'proper names'.[1]

To the objection arising from the fact that proper names are usually given for a reason, which reason may have been the possession of characters actually indicated in the names, e.g. *Dartmouth*, *Rochefort*, *Mont Blanc*, Mill has again an answer. Concerning Dartmouth he writes:[2]

'A town may have been named Dartmouth, because it is situated at the mouth of the Dart. But it is no part of the signification of the word Dartmouth, to be situated at the mouth of the Dart. If sand should choke up the mouth of the river, or an earthquake change its course, and remove it to a distance from the town, the name of the town would not necessarily be changed. That fact, therefore, can form no part of the signification of the word; for otherwise, when the fact confessedly ceased to be true, no one would any longer think of applying the name.'

The argument is not convincing as it stands. The name *Dartmouth* seems at least to imply the attribute 'lying at the mouth of the Dart', seems at least to be connotative. But if it is connotative, and if none the less we continue to regard it as a proper name, then Mill's definition breaks down. From that definition combined with the situation conjured up by him, we might rather conclude that *Dartmouth* could become a proper name only after the sand or earthquake had accomplished its character-effacing work. Such was, indeed, the view advocated by the Swedish grammarian Noreen,[3] who contended that

[1] Mill gives no formal definition, but the statement of his position in my opening sentence is roughly accurate. For some qualifications see below, p. 34, n. 1, and p. 35, n. 1.

[2] J. S. Mill, *System of Logic*, Bk. I, ch. 2, § 5. I shorten the passage slightly, since it is mixed up with discussion of the name *John*.

[3] *Einführung in die wissenschaftliche Bedeutung der Sprache*, Halle, 1923,

Spittal, the name of a well-known place in Carinthia, was no thoroughbred proper name so long as a hospital existed there, and acquired that rank only when the hospital disappeared. As against this argument, linguistic feeling and the consensus of philological opinion would alike assure us that *Spittal* was the name of that town, and a proper name, from the very start. It is easy to reduce such an argument *ad absurdum*. Will it be seriously maintained that a Mr. Ironmonger would lose his name if he returned to the trade of his forefathers, or a Mr. Coward if proved guilty of acts of cowardice?

I shall return later[1] to the problem of *Dartmouth* and other names like it, the debate concerning which has been recalled at this early stage merely to show that the theory of Proper Names presents difficulties not obvious at a first glance. That Mill's explanations have not completely satisfied either philologists or logicians is evident from the many disquisitions devoted to the question since his day. None the less I am convinced that his view is not far wide of the mark, and needs only a little alteration and elaboration in order to set it on a solid foundation. Mill's chapter on Names has at least one merit not earned by every subsequent book on Logic; it shows that his mind distinguished with all requisite clearness between nameable things and the verbal instruments used for reference to them. The defect of his linguistic theory is that it is neither broadly enough conceived nor yet sufficiently detailed; it is absurd to think that the highly complex mechanism of communication could be adequately treated in the few

p. 384. As noted below, pp. 41–42, Noreen barely saves his thesis by the insertion of the epithet 'thoroughbred' (*vollblut*). The argument is repeated in exaggerated form by V. Bröndal, *Ordklasserne*, Copenhagen, 1928, p. 83.

[1] See below, p. 41.

pages he devotes to it. The purpose of my admittedly imperfect essay is threefold: first, to adapt Mill's conception of proper names to the general theory of Semantics I have endeavoured to expound elsewhere; second, to test that conception by the adducing of many more examples, and in particular to study the conditions which lead to the imposition of proper names; and last but not least, to animadvert on a view of proper names much in vogue among modern logicians, but which I regard as a wholly pernicious aberration of thought.

II

The term 'Proper Name' comes to us from the Greeks, among whom *ὄνομα κύριον*, rendered in Latin by *nomen proprium*, meant a 'genuine' name, or a name more genuinely such than other names.[1] Accordingly the *ὄνομα κύριον* was contrasted with the *προσηγορία* or 'appellation', a term used to describe what we call 'general names' or 'common nouns' like *man*, *horse*, *tree*. The Stoic Chrysippus made a sharper distinction, confining *ὄνομα* to what we now call proper names. The later grammarians, by using the epithet *κύριον* either with or without *ὄνομα*, imply that the *προσηγορία* is a sort of *ὄνομα*, but not a quite genuine one. No better account exists than that by Dionysius Thrax, a pupil of Aristarchus who lived in the second century B.C. His statement[2] may be rendered:

[1] Schoemann, *Lehre von den Redetheilen*, Berlin, 1862, p. 82, n. 2, points out that this term *κύριον* has often been wrongly interpreted to mean peculiar to the individual, cf. Germ. *Eigennamen*, whereas the real meaning is '*authentic*', '*properly so called*'; so too J. Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen über Syntax*, Basel, 1920–4, vol. ii, p. 61.

[2] *Ὄνομά ἐστι μέρος λόγου πτωτικόν, σῶμα ἢ πρᾶγμα σημαῖνον, σῶμα*

'A noun or name' (the one word *ὄνομα* is used, this covering both notions; cf. the French *nom* = *nom substantif*, whereas the Germans, like ourselves, distinguish *Nomen* = 'noun' and *Namen*) 'is a declinable part of speech signifying a body or an activity, a body like "stone" and an activity like "education", and may be used both commonly and individually; commonly (*κοινῶς*) like "man", "horse" and individually (*ἰδίως* "privately") like "Socrates".' Dionysius himself also uses the term *κύριον*, identifying it with such names or nouns as are used 'individually' (*ἰδίως*); of the *κύριον* he says it is 'that which signifies individual being' (*τὴν ἰδίαν οὐσίαν*) such as "Homer", "Socrates".'[1]

III

Since any fruitful discussion must start from points of agreement, we shall do wisely to go back to the fountain-head and to adopt its standpoints as our own. It will be seen that Dionysius is concerned primarily with the kinds and the uses of words, and only secondarily with the nature of the things denoted by them. Accordingly we too ought to regard the problem of proper names as essentially a linguistic problem, and so long as it is a question of investigating their essential nature we ought strenuously to deny that there exists any other legitimate road of approach. It will be further observed that Dionysius chooses his examples from the realm of daily experience, in one case indeed referring to something of an abstract nature ('education'), but otherwise concerning himself only with well-authenticated material entities.

μὲν οἷον λίθος, πρᾶγμα δὲ οἷον παιδεία, κοινῶς τε καὶ ἰδίως λεγόμενον, κοινῶς μὲν οἷον ἄνθρωπος ἵππος, ἰδίως δὲ οἷον Σωκράτης. Dionysios Thrax, p. 634*b*, p. 24 of the edition by Uhlig, Leipzig, 1885.

[1] *Κύριον μὲν οὖν ἐστι τὸ τὴν ἰδίαν οὐσίαν σημαῖνον, οἷον Ὅμηρος Σωκράτης*, op. cit., p. 636*b*, p. 33 of the edition.

In contrasting the common and the individual or exclusive employments of names, he apparently failed to take into consideration that the name Socrates could be, and certainly often had been, used of other persons besides the famous philosopher. The other example 'Homer' which he cites shows it was really the philosopher he had in mind. We may, I think, fairly assume that in Dionysius' thought at the moment the name *Socrates* itself was as unique as the celebrity to whom he was referring. Let us take, then, as our starting-point such proper names as are applied, in English usage at the present time, to only one human being, names like *Jugurtha* and *Vercingetorix*, or again the name of a mountain like *Popocatepetl*, or that of a city like *Chicago*.

Tacitly assumed in the words of Dionysius is the fact that the uses of names or nouns to which he refers are constitutional and normal uses, not historically single or exceptional ones. This is evident from his mention of the 'common' use of names, by which he plainly means that a noun like *man* was used sometimes of this man and sometimes of that, not that it was used of two or more persons on any single given occasion—he was certainly not thinking of the dual or plural. Dionysius was, accordingly, concerned with the inherent nature of certain names, not with their momentary uses or extensions or misapplications. Translated into terms of recent linguistic theory, this may be expressed by saying that the category of proper names is a category of Language, not a category of Speech.[1] *Jugurtha*, for example, is a name which belonged constitutionally and permanently to a certain Numidian king, and it is to be deplored whenever a

[1] Gardiner, *Theory of Speech and Language*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1951, pp. 130–4.

logician says anything of this kind: 'Here the word *smith* (*scil.* Latin *faber*) is used as a proper name', just as if the name *Smith* were a fortuitous momentary application, and had not belonged to its owner from the very day of his birth.[1]

Modern philology has followed ancient example by referring to a κύριον like *Jugurtha*, not as a word meaning that particular individual, but as his 'name'. We speak of 'proper names', not of 'proper nouns' or 'proper words'. This, therefore, is a fitting opportunity to consider the difference between a 'word' and a 'name'. Of the two terms, 'name' is far the older. It is indeed inconceivable that any human society, however primitive, should have lacked a word for 'name'. This term belongs to the pre-grammatical stage of thought, to a time when people had no interest in words for their own sake, but thought of them solely as a means of speaking about the things of the external world. They never inquired what such and such a word meant, but only by what name such and such a thing was called. Materially a 'word' and a 'name' are identical. But there is this important difference that the direction of thought is opposite in each case.[2] When we speak of a 'word' our minds travel from the sound-sign to whatever it may mean; when we speak of a 'name' we imply that there exists something to which a certain sound-sign corresponds, something that was the *fons et origo* of the name, something that supplies its *raison d'être*.

[1] e.g. Joseph, *Introduction to Logic*, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1916, p. 29: '*Smith*, for example, as meaning one who works in metal, is a general term, because I mean the same by calling Dick or Thomas a smith; *if I use it as a proper name*, numerous as are the persons who bear it, I do not mean the same in each use of it.' The italics are mine.

[2] On this point see the interesting remarks in Dornseiff, *Der deutsche Wortschatz*, Berlin, 1934, p. 16.

IV

Now in view of this difference of attitude involved in 'word' and 'name' our retention of the designation 'proper name' seems to dictate in advance a decision we need to make without further delay. It has not been recognized as clearly as it should have been that linguistic science is concerned with two closely related, but none the less distinct, kinds of proper name, and we have to make up our minds which of these kinds is that whereof we intend to discuss the theory. We have seen that Dionysius regarded a proper name as a word definitely tied down to a particular entity like Socrates and Homer, and we ourselves, in employing the same term 'proper name', seem committed to not allowing the entity named to vanish out of our sight altogether. On the contrary, it seems incumbent upon us to keep that entity more or less clearly before our minds throughout the ensuing discussion. Nor is the decision we have to make merely a matter of choice, since it will appear in due course that these 'embodied proper names', if I may so call them, are historically prior to, and the actual originators of, the 'disembodied' variety, the separate existence of which has now to be vindicated.

By 'disembodied proper names' I mean those word-sounds that are studied for their etymology, frequency, and distribution in such books as Mawer's *Place-names of Buckinghamshire*, Weekley's *Romance of Names*, Ranke's *Ägyptische Personennamen* and many similar works.[1] These scholars might, however, not unreasonably claim that the

[1] The distinction here made was pointed out in a short article contributed by me to the *Mélanges de linguistique et de philologie offerts à Jacques van Ginneken*, Paris, 1937, p. 308.

subject-matter of their books consists of exactly the same proper names that are dealt with by Dionysius and Mill. They would point out that the word *amo* conjugated in a Latin grammar is just the same word as was heard on many a Roman lover's lips, though in the grammar interest is momentarily withdrawn from the notion of 'loving', whilst any particular instance of amorous emotion is entirely out of the picture. It must be conceded frankly that the categories of 'embodied' and 'disembodied' proper names show a great overlap. When the student of American languages concentrates his attention on a presumably unique name like *Popocatepetl*, this remains still the name of the mountain, though the mountain itself is not engaging the thoughts of the philologist. But the position is different with those proper names which have been attached to hundreds of different entities both real and imaginary. There have been literally thousands of persons called *Mary* or *John* or *Henry*, and even place-names display a certain amount of repetition, as may be seen under such headings as *Sutton*, *Victoria*, *York* in the index to any good atlas. The multitude of persons and places for which proper names have to be found is so great that the same names must inevitably occur again and again. Now when the etymologist focuses attention on the name *Mary*, it is evident that this name is completely disembodied; *Mary* is, as it were, the essence extracted from a vast assemblage of embodied *Marys*. Hence it seems necessary, in the interests of clear thinking, to distinguish between the two classes. The embodied proper names, though we can and indeed must investigate their theory, as being the primary and originating species, are in their multiplicity of no concern to the philologist as such. The works that deal with this latter

class are Encyclopaedias, Histories, Dictionaries of National Biography, Geography books, and the like.

Other reasons may be adduced for treating 'embodied' and 'disembodied' proper names as separate classes. Most words regarded merely as word-sounds, word-forms, or technical terms to be defined, are dealt with mainly in educational and scientific treatises, but disembodied proper names are often to be found in ordinary literature or in conversation. Thus we frequently come across sentences like: *He was a Shropshire farmer, whose name is variously given as Harris or Hobson. His cousin's name was Rose.* Here *Harris*, *Hobson*, and *Rose* are word-sounds predicated of a particular class of word-sound which is called *name* and of which I have already attempted to explain the nature. In these contexts *Harris*, *Hobson*, and *Rose*, though ultimately referred to particular persons through the mediation of the genitives *whose* and *cousin's*, are immediately signs only for certain word-sounds of a specific quality, not signs for persons; you cannot predicate a person of a word-sound like a name. In conclusion mention may be made of the official catalogue of Christian names which enumerates the only ones that French law will allow to be selected for the children of France. As found in this catalogue the names are obviously disembodied, though presenting themselves as candidates for re-embodiment. For all I know some of them may not have been actually embodied for decades.[1]

[1] Brunot and Bruneau, *Précis de grammaire historique de la langue française*, Paris, 1933, § 381: 'Actuellement nous devons prendre les prénoms sur une liste officielle établie en 1865: cette liste contient *Eusébiote* et *Rigobert*, mais non *Henriette*, *Juliette*, *Paulette*, *Pierrette*.' Further, Prof. Bröndal tells me that some years ago the Danish Government, in order to remedy the existing monotony of surnames (most of them formed by means of *-sen* from the father's name), published an official Name-book, out of which

V

Henceforth, accordingly, whenever I use the term 'proper name' without qualification, I shall mean the sort of embodied proper name that both Dionysius and Mill appear to have had in mind, the sort that is exclusively employed of, and tied down to, a particular person or place or whatever it may be. Only if we adopt this course can we hope to save their fundamental distinction between nouns that are 'commonly' used and nouns that are used 'individually'.[1] It has been seen that one and the same word-sound—what has been described as a 'disembodied proper name'—is often applied to different individuals. For example, I have a son called *John*, and so has my neighbour. What is the linguistic relation of the two Johns to one another? Before answering this question I am compelled to strike off at a tangent by the occurrence of the plural *Johns* in my own last sentence. This occurrence might seem to bring to light a third kind of proper name intermediate between the two others, namely an only partly disembodied proper name. It is clear that the singular *John* implied in this plural signifies neither (1) a sound, nor (2) a particular individual; though the plural is used *in reference to* my neighbour's John and my own, its singular *means* in itself only 'person having the (disembodied proper) name *John*'. This is seen even more clearly in *the Marys of England*, where the individual females intended are not, nor could they all be, specified. *Johns* and *Marys* here, to which may be added such examples as *my John*, *your John*, *a John*, resemble such

new names could legally be chosen. Some of these names have never been used.

[1] In point of fact we cannot save it at all, as we shall see later.

general names as *horse* and *tree*, but whereas these latter connote attributes entirely distinct from the sound of the words, the assumed 'partly disembodied proper names' connote merely the possession of a proper name of the wholly disembodied type. It might seem at first sight that proper names of this third kind are derivatives at two removes from the embodied proper names that are their originals, that in fact the disembodied *John* was first distilled out of a whole collection of *Johns*, and then partly re-embodied in what to all appearance is a general name. Such a hypothesis holds pretty well of *the Marys of England*, but fails to do so of *the two Johns*, where *Johns* is evidently constructed, on the spur of the moment, from the two individual persons concerned.

The reason why we must refuse to admit the partly disembodied proper names as an autonomous third variety of proper name is that they do not fulfil the condition laid down on pp. 6–7 above. They are not facts of Language, but facts of Speech, creatures of the moment, formed to meet a purely temporary linguistic need, not permanent constituents of our vocabulary. The best we can say of them is that they are proper names of the one kind or the other used in a partly embodied way like common nouns.

As we shall see later, it is barely disputable that some proper names possess that power of common application which we associate with common nouns (general names),[1] but for the examination of these the moment is not yet ripe. This seems an opportune moment, however, for

[1] Note here once and for all that the terms 'common noun' and 'general name' are synonymous. The former is the term preferred by grammarians, the latter that accepted by Mill and other logicians. I shall use either the one or the other according as seems most appropriate to the context.

mentioning certain employments to which, for the same reason as with the *Johns* and *Marys* already discussed, the title of common noun must be refused. (1) Very remarkable is the ease and virtuosity with which modern European languages can employ proper names to attribute to some other person or place, whether actual or merely postulated, one or more salient qualities which it is desired not to specify. Examples are: *He is a veritable Paderewski. We can well dispense with any more Napoleons. A Shakespeare or Goethe needs no advertisement. Only a Raphael could have painted such a picture.*[1] *The new Jerusalem. Brussels is a little Paris. Every country has its Babylon, only few an Athens or a Florence.* The correct grammatical description of such employments is: an individual proper name used as a common noun. I have elsewhere endeavoured to explain how Speech, i.e. the *ad hoc*, historically unique, utilization of Language, may bend to its immediate purpose a word not constitutionally shaped to the use for which it is employed. By such 'incongruent' uses peculiar nuances are conveyed, and it is through such uses that semantic and grammatical changes are brought about. Some of the employments here envisaged have grown so hackneyed that the reference to the original entity designated by the proper name becomes first obscured and then completely obliterated; in the final stage what was once a proper name has become a common noun like any other. The intermediate stage may be illustrated by *the Mæcenases of New York; a spa*; *a Lido;* the final stage by *a guy* (from the images of *Guy Fawkes* carried about by

[1] The writer intended to imply that a picture of such magnificence could have been painted only by a man possessing the genius of Raphael, and, since there was no other man with that degree of genius, that the picture could have been painted only by Raphael himself.

children);[1] *a robin* (diminutive of *Robert*); *an academy* (from the Athenian garden where Plato taught). (2) Another use of proper names which must be regarded as unconstitutional (if I may be allowed so to express it) arises from a mental doubling or multiplication of the original entity, e.g. *The mirrors all around her showed a dozen separate Janes. Looking up from his place at the breakfast table, John Fortescue saw returning his gaze from above the fireplace a younger and much better-looking John Fortescue*; so too the Latin *Joves*, i.e. images of Jove. (3) Similar, but resulting from the mental bisection of the entity, is *duae Galliae*, i. e. Cisalpine and Transalpine Gaul. Here the plural is obtained by halving the entity and then applying the name of the whole to each half. A curiously analogous process, but one leading to the reverse result of creating a singular form, will be illustrated later (pp. 24–25) by such examples as *Μῆδος*, *Πέρσης*. These latter words are, however, no mere occasional employments, no mere phenomena of Speech, so that consideration of them must be deferred. (4) Yet another secondary use of proper names had better be dealt with here, though it gives rise to real common nouns, in which the originating bearer of the name is in some cases remembered, in others forgotten or half-forgotten. Here the name is applied to something of a wholly different species from that of the original possessor, this being the inventor or original user in the case of persons, and the source of the model in the case of places. Examples are: *a Ford; a chesterfield; a mackintosh; a Panama* (hat); *an ulster*.

It will simplify our task to have eliminated all the above from our discussion. Where a proper name has

[1] I do not quote *dunce*, since this apparently did not refer originally to *Duns Scotus* himself, but only to his followers; the early form is *a Duns man*.

been admittedly perverted from its proper function to serve some other semantic purpose, the latter lies outside our immediate problem. The categorization of *Marys, Johns, a Shakespeare, Joves, Galliae,* is not affected by the abnormal function or by the use of a plural ending. On the other hand, it becomes a matter of opinion, or rather of linguistic feeling, whether the status of proper name should be allowed to cases like *a Ford, a Panama.* The employment or non-employment of a capital letter indicates the line actually taken in this matter by philologists and printers. It is inevitable that there should be hesitation and disagreement as to what words are proper names and what not. We thus find ourselves moving towards a conception in harmony with the Greek view, according to which a proper name is merely a name more genuinely so (*κύριον*) than others. For my part I should have preferred to use a different metaphor and to say that proper names are names that are more purely so than words of any other kind, since in them the process and purpose of naming shine forth like unalloyed metal, whilst in the majority of words that process and purpose are obscured and contaminated by the admixture of meaning, or by the imperfect success with which the purpose of naming is attended.

VI

To return to the point at which I digressed, the best way of making clear the relation of the two proper names exemplified in my own and my neighbour's John is perhaps by reference to the deliberate acts of naming by which they obtained their names. Those acts have a marked resemblance to certain name-givings which do

not give rise to proper names. Similarly deliberate acts have been required to give their names to such a new drug as insulin and to the mechanical contrivance called a *typewriter*, and no one will dispute that these acts have added new words to the English language. It seems to follow that every christening adds a new word, if not to the English language, at all events to the circle or linguistic community in which the name is destined to pass current. Each of these words has a sense, an exchange-value, as different from its fellows, I will not say as the senses of *insulin* and *typewriter*, but at least as the senses of *insulin* and *genasprin*, or as those of *typewriter* and *counting-machine*. My John is tall, dark, and differs markedly in character and ability, not to speak of age, from my neighbour's small and fair-haired John. The two names *John* have, accordingly, a different sense, but the same sound. Is it not imperative then to say that the two names are homonyms? A homonym is a word that has the same sound as another, but a different sense.[1] It can hardly be denied that the names of the two Johns fulfil these conditions.

Since the most fundamental of all the principles governing the mechanism of Language may be expressed in the motto 'distinctive sounds for distinctive meanings', it

[1] (Under this definition, which is that of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1918), 'homonyms' include, not only words of different meaning spelt and pronounced alike (e.g. *file, sound*), but also words pronounced alike, but spelt differently (e.g. *son* and *sun, hair* and *hare*). It is doubtless useful to have so comprehensive a term, but would it not be profitable to reserve the term 'homophone' for pairs of the latter kind? In that case 'homograph' might be employed for words spelt alike, but differing in both sound and meaning, like *entrance*, pronounced *entráhns* and *éntrans*; *progress*, pronounced *prŏgres* and *progrés; produce*, pronounced *prodjūs* and *pródūs*. It is distressing how often B.B.C. announcers confound words like the last two examples.)

must be admitted that a homonymous proper name like *John* is hardly as good a specimen of its class as *Vercingetorix*—in theory at least, and to some extent also in practice, as those who have suffered from the exasperating modern habit of using Christian names in and out of season well know. However, for reasons which need not here be stated, the harm done to comprehension by homonyms is less than sometimes supposed, and since bearers or givers of such names as *John* may indignantly resent the suggestion that they are not as good as any others, I will pass on to my final comment upon them. If we regard *John*, the name of a given John, as a word different from, and merely homonymous with, the name *John* belonging to some other John, we are clearly thereby debarred from using these names as evidence that some proper names can be commonly used.

This brings us to the question: do any proper names exist which simultaneously are common nouns? A little farther on I shall adduce such words as *Πέρσης* and *Μῆδος* as fairly good testimony to that contention, or to describe my thesis more accurately, I shall argue that these words can quite normally and in congruence with their constitutional nature be applied to various individuals, without thereby losing their status of proper names. At this point, however, I must confine myself to proper names which started by being designations of single individuals, and in following out that programme, the next items for consideration must be surnames and Latin gentile names. It may, I think, safely be assumed that the primary purpose of these was the identification of some individual, a purpose which in the right environment, e.g. in a school where there are no two boys with the same surname, is entirely successful. The absence of the plural

ending in the French *les Petitjean*, *les Hamel* seems to hint at an awareness that the name is properly the distinctive badge, not of the family as a whole, but of each of its component members. But there is a good reason to deter us from regarding a name like *Boileau*, when serving as a designation of two members of the Boileau family, or *Claudius*, when found applied to two different Romans of the *gens Claudia*, as a homonym in each respective case. That reason is that there have been no deliberate acts of naming to justify such an interpretation. The names are not purely arbitrary, but pass on from father to son automatically and compulsorily. Ought we then to call *Boileau* and *Claudius* common nouns, and to put them on a level with *horse* and *tree*? Clearly not, for the individual entities called *horse* are bound together by palpable resemblances which might be summed up in an abstract term *horsiness* or *horsehood*, while about different Boileaus and Claudii there is no corresponding resemblance that could be summed up as Boileauness or Claudiushood. Even community of blood is not implied, since one might become a Boileau by marriage and a Claudius by adoption. One is therefore thrown back on the common possession of a particular name or significative word-sound as the sole resemblance, so far as Language is concerned, between the individual bearers of surnames or members of the Roman *gentes*, and, as we shall see with ever increasing clearness, it is dependence upon the sound alone for their significative force which really marks the distinction between proper names and common nouns. On the other hand, one cannot reject the argument that surnames and gentile names are used commonly (κοινῶς) on the ground that their plurals, like *Johns* and *Marys*, are mere facts of Speech, not of Language. Some at least of

these plurals, e.g. *the Plantagenets*, *the Romanoffs*, are more familiar, more stabilized as units of the English language, than the corresponding singulars. If a special grammatical term must be found for surnames, Latin gentile names, and examples like *Μῆδος*, *Πέρσης*, probably the most appropriate term would be 'common proper names'.

VII

Among the postulates with which we started was one to the effect that a name is a kind of word, only looked upon in the reverse direction, i.e. starting with the thing designated and thence proceeding to the linguistic instrument serving for its designation. This postulate involves, of course, the view that a proper name is likewise a word of a particular kind. Consequently if we find, as we now shall, that certain proper names are composed, not of one, but of several words, that will be a valid ground for considering them rather less legitimate specimens of the category than one-word proper names. This disparaging verdict cannot, however, be extended to examples which are really no less compound words than *Dartmouth* or *Oxford*, though written separately without even so hesitating a link as a hyphen. We may undoubtedly rank *Mont Blanc* and *Buenos Aires* as admirable examples of a proper name, or at all events it is not their writing as two words which could prevent us from grading them among the purest of their kind.[1] Many more complex examples of the kind occur, but with varying degrees of inseparability in

[1] On the other hand, the fact that these names have some significance does detract a little, but only a little, from their purity. The purest of proper names are wholly arbitrary and totally without significance.

the component elements. These elements may comprise one or more simple proper names, e.g. *Piero dei Medici*, *Stow-on-the-Wold*, or may dispense with them altogether, e.g. *Les Pays Bas*, *the Black Prince*. Not all the components are of equal significative value; in the place-name *Sutton Scotney*, for example, residents in the neighbourhood may drop the purely auxiliary *Scotney*, but *Sutton* is indispensable. Compound proper names often contain an adjective or a common noun, e.g. *Lord Melbourne*, *le Duc d'Aumale*, *Market Harborough*, *New Jersey*, *Long Island*. Some names of persons cannot be regarded as compounds at all, but may be termed 'composite proper names'. These are combinations of Christian and surname like *Roger Bacon*, or complete Latin names like *Marcus Tullius Cicero*. The mode of functioning here arises, as often in samples of Speech that have not the value of proper names, e.g. *a very poor widow*, from the presentation of successive word-clues, which cumulatively bring to light the entity meant by the speaker. The reason for composite proper names obviously lies in the homonymity of the components; there were other *Rogers* and *Bacons* besides *Roger Bacon*, and other *Tullii* besides the famous orator. As in the compound *Sutton Scotney*, so too in the composite *Edgar Allan Poe*, one of the elements is purely auxiliary; *Edgar* and *Poe* have doubtless served, each in its own milieu, to identify the bearer, but *Allan* could never have done so. In certain composite proper names, as well as in compound ones (the two classes merge into one another, showing how vague the boundaries of linguistic categorization may often be), some honorific elements belong to the proper name, and some not; for instance, *Sir* in *Sir Walter Raleigh* is a more or less integral part of the name, but *Esq.* in *John Henderson, Esq.* is not.

The above desultory remarks on compound or composite proper names seemed appropriate in a wide survey of the theme, but no attempt can here be made to classify the countless varieties. It is, however, necessary to dwell on the function of the definite article. Absence of the article is in many languages a good criterion as to whether a word is a proper name or not, so much so that the use of the article in *the sun*, *the moon* (so too in French, German, Italian, Hebrew, Arabic, and Egyptian) is well-nigh proof that these words are not proper names, a fact which will be shown later to have great importance for our theory. Almost everywhere, however, there is great inconsistency and diversity of custom in the use or avoidance of the definite article. In Latin, of course, this does not exist. In Greek ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος means 'the aforesaid Alexander' and in German *die Anna* has something like the force of 'our Ann' in English. On the other hand, in some languages the definite article is regularly found with names of rivers and mountains, e.g. *la Seine*, *the Thames* (note in Swedish *Themsen*), *der Rhein*, *il Po*, ὁ Αἴγυπτος (the Nile, contrast ἡ Αἴγυπτος for Egypt), *the Alps*, *les Alpes*, *die Alpen*, *the Pamirs*, *the Himalayas*. Combinations such as *the Fraser River* and variants like *the Himalaya Mountains* show, in company with the gender of the article, what is left implicit in the above names, but it would be wrong to assume earlier forms in which the words for river or mountains were expressed. The same holds good for the names of groups of islands like *the Hebrides*, *the Orkneys*, *the Seychelles*, a class in which again are found examples with the implicit word expressed, e.g. *the Leeward Islands*, or with it as a variant, e.g. *the Orkney Islands*. In several European languages names of countries affect the article, e.g. *la Russie*, *die Schweiz*, *l'Inghilterra*, *les Indes*, though

custom is vacillating, contrast *die Schweiz* with *Belgien*, *la France* with *en France*.

VIII

My last paragraph has included a number of plural proper names, and this brings us face to face with the question how far proper names may be considered as individual names. It is incontestable that individual persons and places form the principal source of supply, but negative instances are so frequent that application to individuals can clearly not be made a *conditio sine qua non* in defining proper names. Dionysius, indeed, though citing no examples of a non-individual kind, does not commit himself to the statement that all proper names apply to individuals. All he says is that proper names are used 'individually' (ἰδίως)—note the adverb—or that they signify 'individual being' (τὴν ἰδίαν οὐσίαν), and this *might* mean only that the words called proper names apply globally and exclusively to anything to which they do apply. Mill likewise quotes no non-individual examples, but he goes further than Dionysius inasmuch as his statements show him to have regarded proper names as a sub-class of singular or individual names, a category which he defines as follows: 'An individual or singular name is a name which is only capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of one thing.'[1] Logicians since Mill have often instanced proper names of which the objects are not individuals in any natural sense of the term, but apparently without attaching any great importance to the fact. Alone the school of modern logicians of whom Bertrand Russell and Miss Stebbing have been

[1] Mill, op. cit., Bk. I, ch. 2, § 3.

the chief exponents definitely take as their point of departure the notion that a proper name, to be really such, must be the name of an individual thing.[1]

Nothing, it is true, prevents any plurality being thought of as a unity, if we wish to think of it in that way, and such appears to be the way in which many of the following examples are thought of. The clearest cases are collectives, i.e. nouns of singular grammatical number referring globally to a collection of similar individuals, e.g. *the Mafia*, *the Camorra*, *the Duma*, *the Dodecanese*, *the Heptarchy*; others to which some might refuse either the title of proper name or that of collective are *Parliament*, *Congress*, *the Atlas Insurance Company*. At least one French philologist[2] has claimed *France* as a collective, but whether on account of its thirty-three provinces (in the eighteenth century) or its eighty-six departments or its forty-two million inhabitants I do not know. Not all grammarians would accept *France* as a collective, but the opinion thus voiced at least hints at the troubles in which we may involve ourselves if we maintain that proper names can apply only to individuals. It is surely worthy of reflection that Europe comprises a number of countries of which Germany is one, that Prussia is a province of Germany, that Berlin is in Prussia, and that that same capital houses several million persons. Leaving collectives, we now come to plurals of which no singular is recorded, e.g. the Latin *Quirites*, *Luceres*, *Ramnes*; mountain-ranges like *the Andes*; groups of islands like the *Azores*; groups of stars like *the Pleiades*. I pass over such a name as *Athenae*, since this,

[1] That thing being unlike anything that we call an individual thing, proper names being restricted by these authors to 'particulars'. See below, p. 58.

[2] Marouzeau, *Lexique de la terminologie linguistique*, Paris, 1933, p. 128.

though in developed Latin of plural form, refers to a single city, whereas in the other names I have quoted the plurality of the entities named is beyond dispute.

The thesis that proper names referring to pluralities refer to them globally and for that reason may be considered individual names becomes untenable when proper names are of plural form and have nevertheless singulars of their own. In quite early times tribal names like *Veneti*, *Helvetii* appear to have had no corresponding singulars, but that they were not, or not always, thought of globally is shown by the possibility of sentences like *Venetorum alii fugerunt, alii occisi sunt*. We may dismiss from the discussion names like *Δαναοί*, *Πελασγοί*, the singulars of which designate the eponymous hero. Except for the reason above mentioned *Veneti* might seem pretty well on a par with *the Seychelles*, *the Pyrenees*; one cannot speak of *a Seychelle* or *a Pyrenee*. Difficulties arise, however, over *Μῆδοι* and *Πέρσαι*, which at first encounter us in the guise of *pluralia tantum*, but later evolve the singulars *Μῆδος* and *Πέρσης*, no momentary creations, but permanent forms that have well earned their status as words of the Greek language. Here we find a phenomenon rather similar, except that it is no momentary creation, to *duae Galliae*, but whereas there a *singulare tantum* has developed a plural by cutting the designated entity, like a worm, into two parts and making these into two similarly named entities, here a *plurale tantum* has been resolved into its component individual members, each of whom is thus represented as a bearer of the proper name in question. It must be clearly understood that *Μῆδος* and *Πέρσης* are only in a restricted sense names of individual Medes and Persians, since these will have possessed particular names of their own. Nevertheless, since *οἱ Μῆδοι* means 'the Medes',

Μῆδος will mean 'a Mede', just as it might conceivably become possible one day to speak of *a Seychelle* or *a Pyrenee*. The plural of *Μῆδος* forbids us to regard the singular as signifying 'one belonging to the Medes', though we must regard *Romanus* as meaning 'one belonging to Rome', *un Français* as 'one belonging to France', and *Englishman* as 'a man belonging to England or the English'. These last, like the adjectives identical or connected with them (cf. also *gens Claudia*), are no more than derivatives of proper names, since they do not identify the man to whom they refer, but merely describe him as belonging to the country identified by the proper name. *Μῆδος*, I maintain, is more of a proper name than *Romanus* and belongs, like surnames and gentile names, to the class of 'common proper names', though surnames, for the reason that they were designations of individuals at the start, are even more indisputably examples of the category 'proper name'.

IX

It appears to be equally true that not all singular names are proper names. This was also Mill's opinion, for it will be remembered (see pp. 22–23) that he held proper names to be merely a sub-class of singular names. His remarks on the other sub-class are, however, unsatisfactory, and it is necessary to subject them to careful analysis. Since in his account of proper names he lays all the stress on their being non-connotative, it was natural for him to emphasize the connotative nature of such singular names as are not proper names. But one can hardly refrain from astonishment to find him quoting as authentic examples the following: *the only son of John Stiles*; *the first emperor of Rome*; *the author of the Iliad*; *the murderer of Henri Quatre*. He

does not note, nor will I dwell on, the fact that all these examples contain proper as well as general names. The sole objection I shall make is that Mill here introduces a new kind of linguistic phenomenon not strictly comparable to the names that have been the main subject of his chapter. This has been chiefly devoted to discussing the constitutional nature of isolated words, though it must be confessed he sometimes mixes up with them *ad hoc* combinations like *this table*. If it be retorted that in my many-word proper names I have been guilty of the same error of method, I shall reply that there is a world of difference between designations of acknowledged permanence, which are genuine word-equivalents, and collocations of words capriciously put together on the spur of the moment for a set communicative purpose. In my own terminology Mill's examples are facts of Speech, not of Language, and it was stipulated at the beginning of this essay (pp. 12–13) that our investigation should extend only to the latter. It is true that in some of my many-word names (e.g. *Edgar Allan Poe*) the coherence of the parts is much slighter than in others (e.g. *Mont Blanc*), but if required, I am quite ready to jettison the former. At all events, Mill's examples are of entirely different quality, and must, accordingly, be dismissed as irrelevant. I shall return to such 'descriptions' in another context.

Mill had previously suggested *sun* and *God* as examples of connotative singular names, and the former is really worthy of the most serious consideration, though it may be doubted whether connotative is exactly the right word to describe its meaningful quality. That *sun* is not a proper name will be admitted by all who have a feeling for language, which is not so bad a criterion as some would have us suppose. One has only to put the words *sun* and

moon alongside *Sam* and *Munro* to feel their difference of status, and indeed our task may be defined as to discover a sound intellectual basis for what we already know instinctively. Also the employment of the definite article with the word for 'sun' in a number of different languages, is, as I have already pointed out (p. 21), valuable testimony to that conclusion. Nor does Mill claim *sun* as a proper name; his rejection of it is on the ground that it is not really a singular name. His argument runs as follows:[1]

'These, however, (i.e. *sun* and *God*) are scarcely examples of what we are now attempting to illustrate, being, in strictness of language, general, not individual names: for, however they may be *in fact* predicable only of one object, there is nothing in the meaning of the words themselves which implies this; and accordingly, when we are imagining and not affirming, we may speak of many suns; and the majority of mankind have believed, and still believe, that there are many gods.'

It is a curious, and obviously unjustifiable demand, perhaps inspired by the words *only* and *first* in two of the combinations of words which were quoted above as Mill's authentic examples of connotative singular names, that the meaning of these should have to contain some suggestion of their singularity. It is a demand discountenanced by the proper names which he admits to be singular names, since proper names according to his own view have no meaning, and their meaning, therefore, can contain no such suggestion. His argument that *sun* is not really predicable only of one object, because at will we can imagine several suns, would equally exclude proper names from being singular names, since, as we have seen (pp. 13–15), there is no difficulty at all in imagining two Shakespeares or two Goethes. A better argument would

[1] Mill, op. cit., Bk. I, ch. 2, § 5.

have been that astronomers have now proved that the stars are really suns, these like our sun perhaps the centres of solar systems of their own. But this argument too is not a good one, since in speaking of the stars as suns, we do not use *sun* in its natural and normal sense of the large and brilliant celestial body which, except to the mind of Science, rises in the east and sets in the west. Mill himself has defined an individual or singular name as one 'which is only capable of being truly affirmed, *in the same sense*, [the italics are mine] of one thing'.[1] If, none the less, *sun* is refused the rank of a singular name on account of the stellar suns that astronomers have so inconveniently discovered, I shall fall back on the Latin *sol*,[2] the Greek ἥλιος, and the Hebrew *shemesh*. There is not a scrap of evidence to suggest that either of the two latter was ever used in the plural, or thought of otherwise than as a singular name. Nor were any of these normally taken as proper names, though *Sol* and *Ἥλιος* became so on the occasions when they were personified, i.e. endowed with anthropomorphic attributes.

Singular names that are not proper names are far from numerous. As other examples I submit for consideration *moon*, *paradise*, *hell*, *ecliptic*, *zenith*, *nadir*, *sky*, *zodiac*, *demiurge*, *zero*, *chaos*, *pole-star*; but *zodiac* will possibly be claimed as a collective, and *chaos* and *pole-star* are sometimes regarded as proper names. It is not quite clear, moreover, why names of diseases like *cholera* and *tuberculosis* should be excluded, or again names of elements like *strontium* or of materials like *wood*.[3] Some have declared *strontium*, *helium*,

[1] See above, p. 22.

[2] *Soles* in the sense of 'days' is another example of the type of *duae Galliae*, but with a superadded temporal nuance.

[3] Mill (op. cit., Bk. i, ch. 2, § 5) points out that abstracts are non-connotative, but declares that some at least are general (§ 4), e.g. *colour*.

and so forth to be proper names, but here what I should like to call the Law of Serial Uniformity stands in the way on account of such names of elements as *gold* and *silver*. The doubtful categorization of several of the above examples yet once again shows that we must not regard the category of proper names as a rigidly demarcated domain, but rather as a sort of eminence attained by a large number of words, though their foothold is often somewhat insecure and may be made more so by an incautious step in one direction or another.

X

Summing up the results already obtained we see that the identification of proper names (κύρια) with those that are individually (ἰδίως) used, and the contrast of these with those used commonly (κοινῶς) does not provide a watertight definition, since there exist individually applied names (e.g. ἥλιος) which are not proper names, and commonly applied names (surnames and Μῆδος, &c.) which are. At best Dionysius' account describes an approximately true state of affairs. Thus much may be allowed in its favour, since most individually used single-word names are in fact proper names—they include a majority of singular names and some collectives, see above—while most common nouns are not.[1] It is now evident that the

Abstracts like *propinquity* and *homogeneity* are presented to us by Language as singular names, but Speech might conceivably use even these, like all singular nouns whatsoever, as general names, i.e. a writer might choose to write *There exist many propinquities, a propinquity of place and a propinquity of kinship, for example.*

[1] In my book on *Speech and Language*, p. 41, I wrongly defined a proper name as a word referring to a single individual. In this mistake, however, I am in good company, both the *Oxford English Dictionary* and Prof. Wyld's *Universal English Dictionary* sharing in the error.

secret of the proper name is not to be discovered along the lines followed by Dionysius, and we consequently fall back upon the criterion of meaninglessness advocated by Mill. But this criterion again will not suffice in its present form. It is easy to show that proper names have meaning in various common non-technical senses of the term, and that their meaning may be acquired in different ways. At this point we had better part company with Mill's much disputed term 'connotation', which has come in for perhaps even more than its fair share of criticism.

If 'meaning' be taken to signify simply 'exchange-value', then obviously all proper names have meaning, since they are words and every word is a sound-sign standing for something, this something being its exchange-value. It must be carefully observed that the meaning or exchange-value of a word can never, in strict parlance, be a material thing, but is simply the mental counterpart of that thing, if indeed the word refers to anything material at all. The meaning may comprise a visual or other image and must consist of knowledge of whatever the word means. But in the case of a proper name, say the name of a person or place, we may know next to nothing about that person or place. In such circumstances are we entitled to say that the meaning of the word is nil? I do not think so, and comparison with other words that are not proper names shows we are not entitled to take that view. When dealing with foreign languages we are often at a loss for the meaning of a word, and the like sometimes happens even when concerned with English. Finding ourselves in this embarrassment, we do not assert that the word has no meaning, but we have recourse to the dictionary. If we do not know the meaning, somebody does, and we naturally seek help from those best informed

on the subject. There is no reason why proper names should be regarded in a different light. For a proper name to exist, it is necessary that there should be someone interested in, and having at least some knowledge of, that which it names, and this knowledge, whether great or small, must evidently be accepted as the meaning. And since many proper names name things of extreme complexity like persons and places, it is little wonder that Jespersen argues,[1] in conscious contradiction of Mill, that such names, so far from being meaningless, are absolutely the most meaningful of all.

But Mill has anticipated this argument, and meets it as follows:[2]

'When we predicate of anything its proper name; when we say, pointing to a man, this is Brown or Smith, or pointing to a city, that it is York, we do not, merely by so doing, convey to the reader[3] any information about them except that those are their names. By enabling him to identify the individuals, we may connect them with information previously possessed by him; by saying, This is York, we may tell him that it contains the Minster. But this is in virtue of what he has previously heard concerning York; not by anything implied in the name.'

Mill goes on to contrast the proper names already discussed with the 'many-worded connotative name' *built of marble* in the sentence *The town is built of marble*. Of the latter combination of words he says, in conclusion: 'They are not mere marks, but more, that is to say, significant marks; and the connotation is what constitutes their significance.'

[1] O. Jespersen, *The Philosophy of Grammar*, London, 1924, pp. 64–71.
[2] Mill, op. cit., Bk. I, ch. 2, § 5.
[3] 'Reader' in Mill's text is, of course, a slip; he meant 'listener'.

At first sight the conclusions of the last two paragraphs appear both true, but contradictory. Are these conclusions really irreconcilable? Can a proper name be both meaningful and meaningless? I believe it possible, and that the seeming contradiction lies in the varying degree of immediacy (in both the etymological and the temporal senses of the term) possessed, on the one hand by proper names, and on the other hand by words that are not. Ordinary words, among which general names play a prominent part, directly convey information; proper names merely provide the key to information. To hark back to Mill's own example, *York* certainly does not mean *cathedral-town*, but it provides any knowledgeable listener with a datum which, after only the slightest interval for reflection, will bring to his consciousness the fact that the town he is beholding possesses a cathedral; the same name will doubtless recall to his memory other information as well. Ultimately *York* will prove much more informative than *cathedral-town*, but in itself it does no more than establish the identity of the town spoken about. In order to describe the quality in the possession of which *cathedral-town* has the advantage over *York*, Mill has wisely chosen the term 'connotation', however disputable his further doctrines in connexion with that term may be. Doubtless one motive for that choice was to guard himself against the objection that the identifying power of a proper name is, of itself, 'meaning'.

XI

We must now inquire into the principle underlying the practice of naming, and following up our answer to this question ask in what sense a proper name is more

genuinely a name than other names. For this purpose it will be necessary to cast a rapid glance at the nature of Language and at its mode of functioning. Language owes its existence to the fact that except in a very general and indefinite way the minds of human beings are closed to one another. Sympathy there often is, and occasional thought-transference of a mysterious kind need not be denied, but broadly speaking, if a man wishes to bring something he has perceived or thought of to the notice of a companion he can effect this only by recourse to significant signs accessible to the senses of both and bearing for both the same meaning or reference to thought. Such a sign may in theory be anything perceptible to the senses and easily produced by the maker of the communication, but what we call Language provides far and away the most effective code, its instruments being distinctive sound-signs, so intimately bound up each with its own distinctive thought or meaning that the purposeful utterance immediately evokes in the listener the corresponding thought. The mechanism of Language, i.e. the process called Speech, is comparable to that of a piano. If the performer strikes the white key lying between two isolated black keys, the note D is obtained, while the note E results just as inevitably from striking the next white key to the right. In Language the fixed combination of sound-sign and corresponding thought is called a 'word', and the relation between these two constituents of a word is even more arbitrary than that between the key of the piano and its resultant note. The resemblance between a dog and a wolf is so great that, if Language had been more deliberately created, one might have expected a corresponding resemblance between the two names. Such correspondences are not alien to Language altogether, as

the declensions and conjugations clearly show. But on the whole, linguistic signs are arbitrary, so that diverse languages show very diverse words for the same object, e.g. French *maison*, Latin *domus*, Greek οἶκος, Arabic *bayt* for what we call a *house*.

The house we speak of with any one of these words need not be present to our senses, and indeed what the word calls up to our minds immediately, whether or not it is referred an instant later to an actual house, is the impression left by the houses we have seen *in the past*, or what we have learnt about them in some other way. Since one house differs from another, and as most objects designated by common nouns show similar differences, the impression left by the word may (unless represented by a visual image, as in many minds) be vague and shadowy, and all that the word can then do is to put the listener on the right track and prevent him thinking of a cow or a dog when desired to be thinking about a house. Now whether the thought or impression corresponding to a word, i.e. what we may call the word's 'meaning', be something vague or something precise, the fundamental principle involved is, as I have already mentioned, 'distinctive sounds for distinctive meanings', and such sounds are called 'words'.[1] In cases where the meaning is vague, it is obviously less usual to think back from the meaning to the sound, and accordingly the term 'name' finds its greatest utility where the thing named is precise,

[1] It is of importance to note that the immediate effect of a word-sound can only be to identify, and that its distinguishing power is only secondary and consequential. Mill seems to have been aware of this, but does not state it explicitly. Speaking of proper names, he more often stresses their identifying function, but occasionally, as in his comparison with the act of Morgiana (see below, p. 39), he alludes to their distinguishing function, so that the opening sentence of the present essay can stand.

and where the utterance of the word-sound points towards earlier memories of the same thing, not towards some impression which, owing to its vagueness, would be equally applicable to any number of roughly similar things. Otherwise expressed, a true name ought to call up the thought of something determinate and definite, so much so that we normally forget that all a word can do is to conjure up a thought. Forgetting this, we naturally and conveniently say that a true name is the name of a definite thing.[1]

In the last paragraph the expression 'true name' has been employed, since a true name is not necessarily a proper name, as must now be explained. It is a well-known psychological law that the mind selects from every experience that which is useful to it, and allows all else to fade out completely, or at least to be relegated into the background of the subconscious. A good exemplification of this law has just been quoted: except upon reflection, or in scientific analysis, we are unconscious that all a word can of itself do is to refer us to an associated thought; we, having received that thought, automatically refer it to the thing that seems relevant in the context or situation. Hence the thing is often supposed to be the meaning of the word, though, on an accurate analysis, that it can never be. But the psychological law has another equally important consequence. So intent are we on the things referred to by the words we hear, that unless some peculiar circumstance like a mispronunciation or a particular

[1] Mill (op. cit., Bk. I, ch. 2, § 1) was quite clear on this point, but sensibly prefers to speak in general of names as being the names of things, not of ideas of things. For this reason it cannot be quoted against the opening statement of this essay that op. cit., Bk. I, ch. 2, § 5, he says of proper names: 'We put a mark, not indeed upon the object itself, but, so to speak, upon the idea of the object.'

elegance of diction distracts our attention, we barely perceive the sound of the word, though this sound remains all the while the instrument by which communication is actually effected. In just the same spirit, when we travel to London by train, we may well be thinking of London and what we shall do when we get there, but it seldom crosses our thoughts that a complex steam-driven mechanism is what is bringing about the fulfilment of our purpose.

At this point the evidence of the word *sun* proves of inestimable value. No one can deny the definiteness of the sun, or the fact that the word *sun* directs our attention to that celestial body, or to the thought of it, by means of our previous memories of that selfsame body, i.e. by means of the meaning of the word *sun*. No one can deny that *sun* is the 'true name' of the sun in the sense above attributed to the term. But not only logicians, but also the common consent of mankind, as attested by the use of the definite article *the sun*, agrees that 'sun' is not a proper name.[1] Surely the reason is that when the word *sun* is heard, we usually and predominantly are unconscious of the sound of that word; the word to us is all meaning. It is difficult to define exactly the jumble of visual, tactile, and conceptual impressions which the word *sun* resuscitates in our minds, but that notions of brightness, warmth, vitalizing power, superior size to all other celestial bodies except the moon, association with day and so forth are among them no one will dispute. Further, it is of great importance that these notions

[1] (It is on this point that philologists and at least one philosopher definitely part company. Russell, *Human Knowledge*, p. 87, explicitly states *the moon*—this of course on the same footing as *the sun*—to be a proper name.)

should be common to all mankind, so much so that they spring into consciousness in an unmistakable, though undifferentiated, way as soon as the word is pronounced. So prominent is all this meaning that beside it the sound of the word is as nought; the mind passes right through the sound and is arrested only by the meaning. Mill misses the point in his discussion of the word *sun* as a general name. It is indeed potentially a general name, because if any other entity except our own sun had the same qualities the same word *sun* would have to be used to denote it with brevity and inclusiveness. But it is predominance of the meaning over the sound that makes it a general name, not the factual or imaginary existence of other objects possessing the same qualities.

Let us now, however, consider what would happen if there existed in the heavens a second celestial body almost identical in nature with our sun, but which we were interested to distinguish from it. Obviously to use the same word *sun* of both would be of no avail; the meaning of the word would then serve merely to mark the resemblance of the two suns, but would not help towards distinguishing them. For that purpose a distinctive name would have to be found for the second sun, the name *sun* being reserved for our own. It is easy to see what would happen to the word *sun* in that case. The importance of its distinctive sound would be greatly enhanced, since it would be precisely that sound, and nothing else, which by identifying each would distinguish the one celestial body from the other. It is clear that in this case *Sun* would have become a proper name.

A proper name is, then, a word which identifies its object by virtue of its sound alone, and when we come

to survey the various classes of thing to which proper names belong, we shall find two constant features that were mentioned in our supposed transformation of the word *sun*. In the first place, the things called by proper names are mostly members of a set in which the resemblances considerably outweigh the differences, so that special labels, as it were, are required to mark the distinction. And in the second place, the actual name forces itself upon our attention more prominently than do other words. Think of the place in our lives occupied by christenings and introductions of persons by name, inquiries after the names of places, and so forth. Clearly a proper name is a word in which the identifying, and consequently the distinguishing, power of the word-sound is exhibited in its purest and most compelling form.[1]

XII

It is strange that Mill has taken so little account of the indicative power of the distinctive sounds of proper names and has insisted almost exclusively on the negative criterion of their meaninglessness. This somewhat distorted attitude towards the problem is one of the chief points upon which, in my opinion, his otherwise correct analysis needs rectification. To justify my criticism it is needful only to recall the passage in which he compares a proper

[1] Funke and Marty seem to stand almost alone in emphasizing the prominence of the sound as an essential feature of proper names: '. . . hat Marty betont, daß Mill doch insofern richtig gesehen hat, als jene Vorstellung des 'so und so Bezeichnetseins' zum psychischen Wesen des Eigennamens gehöre,' Funke, 'Zur Definition des Begriffes "Eigenname",' in *Probleme der englischen Sprache und Kultur, Festschrift für Johannes Hoops*, Heidelberg, 1925, p. 77. Further on Funke's views, see below, Appendix, p. 69.

name to the unmeaning mark chalked upon a house-door to indicate that the house is to be robbed. 'Morgiana', he tells us,[1] 'chalked all the other houses in a similar manner, and defeated the scheme: how? simply by obliterating the difference of appearance between that house and the others. The chalk was still there, but it no longer served the purpose of a distinctive mark.' The comparison is not a happy one. It would have been apposite only if Morgiana had placed different chalk marks upon all the doors, thus making it needful for the robber to know, not merely that the house to be plundered was marked with chalk, but through what particular mark the house could be identified. The name *John* serves to distinguish its bearer from Philip and Arthur and Percival, not because these companions of his are nameless, but because his name is different from theirs. If it be objected that the distinctiveness of the sound is true of all words, not of proper names alone, but of all words whatsoever, we cannot of course deny that truth, but must point out that it makes a vast amount of difference whether the distinctive sound is a self-sufficient means of identification, or whether it has to be assisted, as in general names, by consideration of the meaning. A word like *man* cannot by itself identify any particular man. It serves to concentrate the attention upon a complex of characters not possessed by the beings designated by *woman*. This complex of characters is that part of the meaning of the word *man* which holds the attention of the listener when *man* is used in contrast with *woman*, and so important a role does that meaning play in identifying the individual meant that the sound of the word, though really of prior and fundamental importance, vanishes from consciousness as soon

[1] Mill, op. cit., Bk. I, ch. 2, § 5.

as it has automatically fulfilled its function of drawing attention to the complex of characters in question.

The purest of proper names are those of which the sounds strike us as wholly arbitrary, yet perfectly distinctive, and about which we should feel, if ignorant of their bearers, no trace of meaning or significance. Such names are *Vercingetorix* and *Popocatepetl*. Of course these possess meaning in the sense that they are known to refer to something, the mental counterpart of that something constituting the 'meaning'. We may even know a great deal about the entities designated by those words, but such knowledge is completely inoperative in the functioning of the name. We must realize that the term proper name has reference to the mode of functioning which certain words possess within the mechanism of Speech.

The importance here attached to the sound of proper names might possibly be misunderstood without further explanation. It is of course not meant that proper names are pronounced more loudly or emphatically than other words. By speaking of the prominence of the sound I have chosen what seemed the clearest and shortest way of expressing the fact that a proper name functions by means of its external distinctiveness, its outward contrast with other words. 'Sound' has here been taken to include the visible appearance in writing, which indeed to many readers may barely resuscitate the original sound-sensation at all. Nor does it detract from the truth of my argument that personal names, when modified into pet-names (*Kosenamen*), are apt to undergo deformations which may disguise them almost out of recognition, e.g. *Bobby* for *Robert*, *Harry* for *Henry*. An extreme instance is the substitution of *Polly* for *Mary*, in which the stress I have laid

upon the 'distinctive sound', if misinterpreted, might seem to reduce my thesis to nonsense. Let it be understood, therefore, that when I dwell upon the 'sound' of proper names, I am referring only to the preponderating attention paid to their distinctive sensible externals as opposed to the associated meanings. Proper names are identificatory marks recognizable, not by the intellect, but by the senses.

XIII

We must now return to those proper names which, like *Dartmouth* incompletely discussed at the beginning of this essay, possess as mere words an obvious meaning. It was seen that the claim of *Dartmouth* to be a proper name is not vitiated by the fact that the town still lies at the mouth of the Dart, any more than *Mont Blanc* could fail to be a proper name because its summit is covered with snow. These names are proper names because they are accepted as the designations of the town and the mountain in question, and because they are known to be the right linguistic instruments for identifying them. However little logicians may like introducing psychological factors into their cut-and-dried definitions, here it is necessary. Our profound skill in the art of using and interpreting words has led us to acquire an implicit awareness of their different species and of the way in which they are to be taken. Unless that awareness were an objective reality, the task of the grammarian would be nugatory and his distinctions wholly artificial. If an ordinary man without pretensions to grammatical knowledge were asked why he called Dartmouth *Dartmouth*, the most likely answer would be, 'Because that is its name'. Possibly, if he

suspected that you wished for a less obvious reply, he might say, 'Because it lies at the mouth of the Dart'; but it will, I think, be acknowledged that in using the name that position would seldom cross his mind, and it is conceivable he might never think of it at all. Nevertheless, I submit that proper names that have a clear etymology or recall some similarly constructed proper name are slightly less pure examples of the category than completely arbitrary and unintelligible names, because for listeners ignorant of the object to which they refer the meaning thus afforded might provide some identificatory help. For instance, a sharp-witted peasant who knew Weymouth, but had never heard of Dartmouth, might, as we say, put two and two together, and conclude that a town was intended. And for exactly the same reason names like *John* and *Mary*, *Heinrich* and *Giovanni*, *Freiburg* and *Deauville* are less pure proper names than the purest because of the assistance that, on rare occasions, they might give by their suggestion of sex, nationality, or country.

XIV

A few pages farther back a definition of proper names was incidentally given which would suffice if all words bearing the title were up to the standard of *Vercingetorix* or *Popocatepetl*. However, both grammatical custom and the necessities of the case make it reasonable to extend the term to examples of less absolute purity, and it becomes consequently necessary to formulate the definition in a longer and more complicated way. I submit the following to the consideration of philologists and logicians:

A proper name is a word or group of words recognized as indicating or tending to indicate the object or objects to which it refers by virtue of its distinctive sound alone, without regard to any meaning possessed by that sound from the start, or acquired by it through association with the said object or objects.

A few glosses are required to explain why the definition has had to be expressed in so cumbersome a form. 'Or group of words' needs to be added on account of what I have called 'composite proper names' (p. 20). 'Recognized as indicating' instead of 'which indicates' is demanded by the considerations adduced on p. 41. 'Tending to indicate' is due to the existence of homonyms among proper names (p. 16), 'object or objects' to the existence of collective and plural specimens (pp. 22–25). In stating that a proper name becomes such because the indication it gives is given 'by virtue of its distinctive sound alone' I wish to imply that 'the term proper name has reference to the mode of functioning which certain words possess within the mechanism of Speech', a thesis explained in the paragraph that concludes with that sentence (p. 40). 'Meaning possessed by that sound from the start,' see pp. 41–2; 'through association with the said object or objects', see the discussions of *York* (pp. 31–32) and of *sun* (pp. 36–37).

XV

The constructive side of our task is not yet ended. Before criticizing the views promulgated by Bertrand Russell and his school we must survey the classes of objects that call for designation by proper names, and must explain the reasons for which they do so. On account of the

importance that has been attached to the word *sun* it will be well to consider first of all the names of other celestial bodies, the more so since both proper and general names are to be found among them. Sun and moon differ so conspicuously from one another and from the stars and planets that insistence on their distinctive names is not required. The words *sun* and *moon* immediately summon up mental pictures and other psychic responses so distinct, that no difference of quality is felt between them and other common nouns, and the only reason that there could be for placing them in another category is their factual uniqueness. Very different are the stars, whose multitude and similarity are so great that proper names are urgently needed to assert and maintain their individuality. Not all the stars, of course, have names of their own, and for the most part they are taken in groups within which each special star is distinguished by the equivalent of an ordinal number, e.g. *Gamma Pegasi*, *Alpha of the Plough*. The names of the groups or constellations are collective proper names, e.g. *Cassiopeia*, *Perseus*, *Virgo*. The Pleiades provide a good example of a plural proper name. Only the planets and a few of the most conspicuous stars, i.e. those which attract to themselves more interest than the rest, e.g. *Sirius*, *Fomalhaut*, *Vega*, have names of their very own. Naturally all the stars, by those who are experts in astronomy, could be identified by means of descriptions, by the successive ordered and interrelated presentation of general names intermingled with words for spatial relations and the like, though one or more proper names could hardly fail to be present. But such descriptions, necessary as they are in order to instruct the unlearned as to the applications of the individual star-names, would be very cumbrous linguistic

instruments if utilized on every occasion. Only in rare instances can the description of a star be made so short as to compress it into a single word; *pole-star* is such an instance, and this compound word is best taken as a common noun, since most of us, I presume, would regard the name, not as being a mere meaningless designation, but as signifying that star which is nearest to the north pole.

From the different ways in which the celestial bodies are named much can be learnt about the conditions governing the demand for proper names. Among those conditions are: (1) a vast multitude of entities so similar that the distinctions between them are difficult to seize or to describe within brief compass; (2) an interest among a section of the community so urgent that a single-word designation is sought and found; (3) great utility in affording fixed points by reference to which other entities can be identified, or in defining the group or class within which those other entities can be found; and (4) there is an obvious advantage in a designation which completely covers its object in all its aspects and which economizes thought by rendering unnecessary explanations concerning the nature and relations of that object.

XVI

One of the two largest classes of proper names is that which provides designations for places—for continents, countries, provinces, towns, villages, and even private residences, not to speak of expanses of water, mountains, promontories, and so forth. In this class all the four conditions mentioned above come into play, but with

differences deserving of comment. (1) There are but few localities in the world so different from the rest that they eschew proper names and are habitually represented by brief descriptions; indeed I can instance only the North and South Poles. As regards the similarity of the entities named there is not that degree which exists between the stars as seen by a terrestrial observer, but it would be a grievous misrepresentation of my point if someone objected that the Mediterranean and London have nothing in common except that both are localities. When sea is compared with sea and town with town the difficulty of selecting features characteristic enough to serve as basis for differentiating descriptions will be appreciated to the full. The fact that places change from century to century is another reason for giving them immutable names of their own to emphasize their continuity, though this cause of proper names exercises less influence in place-names than it does in names of persons. (2) The interest without which no place would be given a name does not spring from exactly the same kind of source as the interest that prompted the naming of the stars. There the needs of mariners and of those concerned with the measurement of time have co-operated with the scientific preoccupations of a small body of specialists. As regards places, there is scarcely anyone without a home or haunt of his own which is a vital interest to him, whereas his concern with distant places varies greatly and in the majority of cases is simply non-existent. For this reason most places are for him 'mere names'. Again it accords well with Mill's view of the meaninglessness of proper names that place-names can prove serviceable with only a minimum of knowledge. When a railway-journey is being planned one does not stop to inquire details about the junctions at

which one has to change, nor is more information required in giving an address than to specify the larger and smaller regions within which the particular place is located. The interest that different persons display in a given place is apt to be extremely heterogeneous and the virtue of a proper name is that, since it embraces the whole of its object, it caters to all requirements without bias in any direction. (3) It is superfluous to waste words over the utility of place-names in locating other places than those designated by themselves; the postman and the pedestrian are here the best witnesses.

XVII

It would be tedious to cover the same ground again in reference to personal names, the largest class of all. Still it is worth pointing out that there is no human being so wretched as to have no name of his own, and yet the great majority of people whom we meet in the streets of a city are of supreme indifference to us. What is more, they look alike, or at all events the distinguishing marks are not conspicuous enough for the individuality of each to be upheld by words more meaningful than proper names. It is of importance for the theory of personal names that these accompany their owners, as a rule, from the cradle to the grave, and consequently identify these owners at every conceivable stage and in every situation. Indeed, we may pertinently note that a personality sometimes undergoes temporary eclipse by change of name, as in the case of girls who marry or prominent men when elevated to the peerage.

Thus much having been said, it may seem profitable to discuss a few special problems and traits in connexion

with persons and their names. Perhaps someone might think fit to ask why the name of some almost universally known person, like Napoleon or Shakespeare, does not lose its quality of being a proper name as a consequence of acquiring meaning and becoming a household word. I can picture some reader objecting: 'If your hypothesis concerning *sun* and *moon* is correct, why does not the name *Napoleon* present itself to us as a common noun, seeing that here, if anywhere, the mind travels right through the sound to the meaning?' But does it? For the generality of mankind, and it is they who confer their meaning upon words, when the sun's roundness, and brightness, and warmth, and a few other traits have been enumerated, the meaning of the word *sun* is practically exhausted. With a personal name like *Napoleon* it is far otherwise. Whole books are required to set forth the meaning of *Napoleon*, and what the bearer of the name has signified to his contemporaries and to later generations. The meaning of his name by no means confines itself to those traits that have brought him celebrity. His childhood, his experiences as a lover, his life at St. Helena have all to be brought into the account. Another reason which would suffice to uphold the position of *Napoleon* amid the ranks of proper names is what I have proposed to call the Law of Serial Uniformity; this is at bottom only a manifestation of the generalizing tendency of the human mind, which assimilates phenomena with a valiant disregard of the differences that may exist between them. All persons have names of their own, and *Napoleon* is the name of the great Corsican. And that name cannot fail to be regarded by the linguistic consciousness as a proper name, no matter how much more significant it may be to the public at large than that of any ordinary person.

Let us next ask how far designations like *Cook* and *Father*, when employed as vocatives or as means of reference, can be considered to be proper names. They resemble these by not having the article prefixed to them. Here we cannot avail ourselves of the antithesis between Language and Speech which stood us in good stead when dealing with examples like *a Goethe* (p. 13). We cannot say that *Cook* is a mere phenomenon of Speech, for within the limited circle where the word serves as substitute for a personal name it has more than a mere *ad hoc*, momentary application; it may indeed be stabilized for years in a family as the recognized designation of the same person. The grammarian must here forge a nomenclature that does justice to the special case, and I should propose to classify *Cook*, when thus employed, as 'a common noun *adopted* (not merely *used*) as a proper name'. The conception of a proper name as liable to gradations becomes imperative in such instances. Usually *Father* is still less of a real proper name than *Cook*, since, except when the other parent imitates the parlance of her offspring, *Father* is employed only by those to whom its bearer stands in the paternal relation. I pass over the interesting topic of nicknames, but it is necessary that something should be said about examples like *Richard le Spicer* and *Robert le Long*, quoted from a medieval roll by Weekley to illustrate the way in which common English surnames originated. Here it would be fitting, in my opinion, to say that *Spicer* and *Long* are already proper names, inasmuch as their bearers or else the community in which they lived had evidently decreed it that these designations should be the official means of establishing their identity. Naturally the spicer (*l'épicier*) had every incentive to advertise his trade, and it would be wrongheaded to suppose that he wished

the meaning of that epithet to be ignored. But *Richard le Spicer* may possibly have been long of limb, and it is by no means certain that *Robert le Long* was not a spicer. The fact that Richard took *le Spicer* and not any other applicable attribute to be his *epitheton constans* plainly confers on *le Spicer* the right to be considered a proper name, though one rather more questionable than *Dartmouth* (pp. 41–42), a name of long standing in which the meaning doubtless seldom comes to consciousness.

XVIII

A number of other categories of proper names can be dealt with very rapidly, since only in one particular do they teach us anything new. All ships and boats receive proper names of their own on account of the commercial and other interest which they possess for their owners, though not necessarily for the community at large. Houses are not quite so universally accorded this means of distinction, since temporary tenants can feel little objection to their place of residence being identified by a number. The effective motive here comes into view. The man who builds a new house for himself or unexpectedly becomes the proud possessor of one is specially apt to mark his satisfaction by choosing a name for it, and the name chosen is likely to recall some scene of the name-giver's previous activity or to reflect some subject of peculiar interest to him. The like holds good of the naming of animals, pets, and indeed any object of human pride or affection.

XIX

I pass on to more dubious cases. An eminent French philologist has claimed that the names of birds which he personally is unable to identify on sight are in reality proper names.[1] As previously remarked (p. 30), personal ignorance of the meaning of a word—and this is a failing for which everyone ought to feel the greatest sympathy—can carry no weight in determining its categorization. To what category a word belongs is decided by the linguistic feeling of those best acquainted with the object and the manner of its reference, although the assistance of grammarian and dictionary-maker must be invoked to find the technical term appropriate to the definition of the feeling. Now everyone who knows that linnets and corncrakes and shrikes and whinchats are birds, and that these are the ordinary English designations of them, must sub-consciously place those designations in the same category as *sparrow* and *thrush*, and no one with grammatical knowledge will doubt that *sparrow* and *thrush* are common names. External evidence for this is found in the use of the articles and the formation of plurals without any sense of incongruence. If *whinchat* is felt to be more of a proper name than *sparrow*, it is because a proper name is merely a word in which one feature common to all words whatsoever—the power of conveying distinctions by means of distinctive sounds—is discerned in its purest form, and our attention is drawn to the distinctive sound or writing (which is merely sound translated into another medium) more urgently in the case of a rare word than in that of a common one.

[1] Vendryes, *Le Langage*, Paris, 1921, p. 222.

None the less I think a good case may be made out for regarding the scientific Latin names of birds and plants as more of proper names than their common English equivalents.[1] The name *Brassica rapa* easily evokes the thought of a botanist classifying a number of specimens which to the lay mind are much alike, and to one of which he gives the name *Brassica rapa*, just as a parent names his baby. We have no such thought about the word *turnip*, and *Brassica rapa* is simply the scientific name for the ordinary turnip. We may find confirmatory support for regarding *Brassica rapa* as a proper name, or at least as much more of a proper name than *turnip*, in the fact that we do not say *This is a Brassica rapa* or *These are Brassica rapas*, though we might say *These are fine specimens of Brassica rapa*. In so saying we appeal to the name of any single example of the type, whereas in speaking of a certain vegetable as a *turnip* we appeal to the similarity of that vegetable to others of its kind. The difference of linguistic attitude is a mere nuance, but it is a real one. In the one instance the sound of the name, what we usually describe as 'the name itself', is more in the foreground than in the other instance.

XX

Whether or no we classify the Latin names of plants and animals as proper names—admittedly they are borderline cases—it is undeniable that in fact those names refer to things existent in great number. If the contention of the last paragraph be deemed worthy of consideration,

[1] Prof. Brøndal (see below p. 69) is the philologist who has most clearly taken this view.

it is inevitable that the debate should be extended to new ground. The question whether the names of the months and of the days of the week should be regarded as proper names is one of much interest, since different languages take different lines about it. Whether a language uses capital letters or not is no proof, though it is a symptom that may be employed as evidence, if care be taken not to attach overmuch importance to it. The French write *jeudi* and *janvier* where we write *Thursday* and *January*, and I believe I am right in saying that most French grammarians would not admit month-names and day-names as proper names. That at all events these names are also general names[1] is clear from the facility and lack of strain felt in *tous les jeudis* (note the article and the plural ending) and in *Mrs. Brown is at home on Thursdays*. Nevertheless, there are details of usage, e.g. *jeudi le 15 mars*, which seem to place these names on a different footing from other common nouns. If the problem be stated in another way, it seems likely that the same answer would be obtained from both Frenchmen and Englishmen. If we were to ask: 'Which of the two words *hiver* (*winter*) and *décembre* (*December*) is more of a proper name than the other?' it would probably be admitted that the latter should have the preference. The reason is both obvious and interesting. The stretches of time indicated by the names of the seasons are felt to be more contrasted in their nature than those indicated by the month-names. Contiguous months may be much of a muchness, but there is an unmistakable difference between the seasons. Consequently in the names of the

[1] Here I avoid the term 'common nouns', since personally I should classify them, not as such, but as 'common proper names', see p. 19.

seasons the meaning plays a greater part in marking the distinction than is played by the meaning attaching to the month-names, and in the latter correspondingly the distinctive name, i.e. the distinctive word-sound, exercises a more important role in indicating the period meant. The month-name is for that reason more of a proper name than the name of the season.

It is a peculiarity of the months and the days of the week that a fixed order belongs to their meaning. It is undeniable that Wednesday implies the day after Tuesday and that before Thursday. Still that modicum of constant meaning does not compensate for the fact that the other characters of the day designated by the name *Wednesday* are variable and intangible and differ from person to person, so that the name itself is the only thing which we can cling to in order to uphold the distinction between one day and another.

It is superfluous to discuss feast days like Easter, Whitsunday, Lupercalia. To the Englishman at all events the names of these are proper names, though on account of their recurring every year they must join the ranks of the 'common proper names'.

XXI

There must be a limit to every discussion, and I shall not linger over the names of patent medicines, trade products, and the like,[1] but shall turn to some aspects of the problem that have thus far been accorded but scanty notice.

[1] To K. Sisam I owe the interesting remark that 'curious examples of trade names becoming common occur and create legal difficulties. *Vaseline* is a case in point, which led to a long quarrel between the company concerned and the editors of our *Oxford English Dictionary*'.

In explaining the distinction between a word and a name I committed myself to the statement that 'when we speak of a name we imply that there exists something to which a certain sound-sign corresponds' (p. 7). Of what kind is this existence implied whenever we admit the existence of a name (an embodied proper name, p. 8) as an item belonging to our accepted vocabulary? With the exception of *Scylla* and *Charybdis* mentioned in the opening paragraph I have been careful to draw all my examples from the material world, but they might in many cases have been equally well taken from mythology or fiction. The fact is, as I maintained in my book on *Speech and Language* (p. 296): 'Speech refers to actual and imaginary things with strict impartiality. Language has created no forms to distinguish the real from the unreal.' The context of that quotation shows that the reality I had there in mind was 'conformity with the facts of the (external) universe', and that 'the unreal' was taken as synonymous with 'existence only in the imagination'. It would not be helpful to become entangled in an ontological argument, and I must ask my readers not to interpret my contention in this essay as signifying more than that, if we admit the possession of a name in our vocabularies, we simultaneously imply the possession in our minds of something whereof it is the name. It is true that the something in question may be as unsubstantial as a soap-bubble. Such a nameable thing is already there when, with no further details in our heads, we start a limerick with *There was an old fellow called Brown*. In this case we build up, or discover, if you prefer it, Brown's personality as we go along. The characters in a novel have naturally received much of their substance before pen is put to paper. It must be realized that a proper name is not one whit less

of a thoroughbred proper name if its subject[1] is unsubstantial. If I think of an imaginary mountain and choose to call it by the utterly meaningless name *Karimankow*, this name will be every bit as good a proper name as *Popocatepetl*.

The world of the imagination is a replica of the world of experience, and the proper names of the former belong to much the same classes as those of the latter. But Fancy climbs to higher altitudes, and populates its universe with the gods of Olympus as well as with human beings. In the realm of myth fantastic creatures like the Minotaur and the Centaurs call for names of their own. Thus far the world created by the imagination might seem richer than that of reality. However, not every type of real entity that receives a proper name can be paralleled in fiction. One might be hard put to it to cite the name of an imaginary planet, though among birds we have the Phoenix and there is a mythical ship called the Argo. Taking a wider perspective than hitherto, where shall we seek the ultimate source of proper names? My answer is imperfect and provisional: that source derives from the very nature of our universe. For good or evil the things of the universe, and more especially its living things, manifest themselves in localized individual form, each deeply rooted in its own environment, but less and less concerned with alien environments in proportion to the distance. Man alone has the power and the desire to talk about the individual things he possesses, and his interests being self-centred, it is not of other men's property that he is so likely to

[1] In other parts of this essay I have used 'object' in the same sense, since it seemed the more easily comprehensible term. Here for once I write 'subject' having in mind that, in speaking of a word as a 'name' the direction of thought is from the thing to its sound-sign, not vice versa.

speak. To do him justice, the limitations of time and space prevent him from even knowing most of the things vital to his fellows farther afield. The proprietary instinct is the seed-ground of proper names. Every man has his own home and family, his own goods and chattels, his own neighbours and town, his own country. According as these are dear to him, and according as they are too individually distinct to be grouped in a mere class, he gives them names which enables him to foist them upon the attention of the linguistic community at large.

This brief statement endeavours to explain why proper names adhere most of all to individual things. Let it be emphasized, however, that it is only a very tiny fraction of the individual things in the world which are ever accorded names of their own. Hence the notion that not merely all individual things, but also their momentarily perceived parts, are the pre-ordained subjects of proper names, seems a stupendous illusion. For most individual things the proper mode of reference is description, the general nature of which I have attempted roughly to summarize above (p. 44); and there is no thing however small or unimportant that cannot be reached by description.[1] But these generalizations bring me to the final topic of my inquiry.

XXII

Assuredly the most fantastic theory of proper names that has ever come to birth is that propounded by Bertrand Russell in a set of lectures subsequently published in a

[1] In my book on *Speech and Language*, p. 33, I have compared the method of Language to the game of animal, vegetable, or mineral. This, *mutatis mutandis*, or rather *additis addendis*, is perhaps as good a way of describing description as could be briefly attained.

periodical. There it might appropriately have been left to slumber undisturbed but for its having received wide publicity, though in much modified form, in Prof. Stebbing's well-known *Modern Introduction to Logic*, second edition, London, 1933, pp. 23–6. Since Prof. Stebbing explicitly admits her dependence on Russell, it seems fairer, in offering criticism, to go back to the fountain-head. I start with a quotation:[1]

'The only kind of word that is theoretically capable of standing for a particular is a *proper name*, and the whole matter of proper names is rather curious.

Proper Names = words for particulars.

Definition.

'I have put that down although, so far as common language goes, it is obviously false. It is true that if you try to think how you are to talk about particulars, you will see that you cannot ever talk about a particular particular except by means of a proper name. You cannot use general words except by way of description. How are you to express in words an atomic proposition? An atomic proposition is one which does mention actual particulars, not merely describe them but actually name them, and you can only name them by means of names. You can see at once for yourself, therefore, that every other part of speech except proper names is obviously quite incapable of standing for a particular. Yet it does seem a little odd, if, having made a dot on the blackboard, I call it "John". You would be surprised, and yet how are you to know otherwise what it is that I am speaking of? If I say, "The dot that is on the right-hand side is white" that is a proposition. If I say "This is white" that is quite a different proposition. "This" will do very well while we are all here and can see it, but if I wanted to talk about it tomorrow it would be

[1] Betrand Russell, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', in *The Monist*, 1918, pp. 523–5.

convenient to have christened it and called it "John". There is no other way in which you can mention it. You cannot really mention *it* itself except by means of a name.

'What pass for names in language, like "Socrates", "Plato", and so forth, were originally intended to fulfil this function of standing for particulars, and we do accept, in ordinary daily life, as particulars all sorts of things that really are not so. The names that we commonly use, like "Socrates", are really abbreviations for descriptions; not only that, but what they describe are not particulars but complicated systems of classes or series. A name, in the narrow logical sense of a word whose meaning is a particular, can only be applied to a particular with which the speaker is acquainted, because you cannot name anything you are not acquainted with. You remember, when Adam named the beasts, they came before him one by one, and he became acquainted with them and named them. We are not acquainted with Socrates, and therefore cannot name him. When we use the word "Socrates", we are really using a description. Our thought may be rendered by some such phrase as "The Master of Plato", or "The philosopher who drank the hemlock", or "The person whom logicians assert to be mortal", but we certainly do not use the name as a name in the proper sense of the word.

'That makes it very difficult to get any instance of a name at all in the proper strict logical sense of the word. The only words one does use as names in the logical sense are words like "this" or "that". One can use "this" as a name to stand for a particular with which one is acquainted at the moment. We say "This is white". If you agree that "This is white", meaning the "this" that you see, you are using "this" as a proper name. But if you try to apprehend the proposition that I am expressing when I say "This is white", you cannot do it. If you mean this piece of chalk as a physical object, then you are not using a proper name. It is only when you use "this" quite strictly, to stand for an actual object of sense, that it is really a proper name. And in that it has a very odd property

for a proper name, namely that it seldom means the same thing two moments running and does not mean the same thing to the speaker and to the hearer. It is an *ambiguous* proper name, but it is really a proper name all the same, and it is almost the only thing I can think of that is used properly and logically in the sense that I was talking of for a proper name.'

Russell's approach to the topic of proper names is philosophical, not philological, and he insists with almost painful iteration that he is speaking of them only from the logical point of view. However, close examination of the above passage, with others in the same series of lectures, shows him to be at least as much interested in verbal symbolization as in the things symbolized, and his whole discourse is about words and names, naming and description. The fact is that logic and linguistic theory hold a large tract of country in common, and within that tract it is impossible to deal with the one without the other. In all that Russell says about *John*, *Socrates*, and *this* he is, despite his implicit disclaimer, talking linguistic theory, and my aim here is to show that his linguistic theory is unsound. Let us admit there could be no objection, if it took our fancy, to employing a proper name in order to indicate a perceived entity such as a dot chalked on a blackboard. This was Russell's own example of a particular, chosen because he was able to demonstrate it to the actual eyes of his audience. He would have been within his rights had he merely stated that, for the purpose of his logic, he had decided to use proper names in no other way. But when he goes further and defines proper names as words for particulars, he commits himself to an evident *suggestio falsi* to the effect that no word for what is not a particular is a proper name, and that proper names that

are words for particulars are different from all other words, including such apparent proper names as *Socrates*. Now this is a philological contention, and it would be idle for Russell to reply that he has not been writing about words at all.

When Russell's statements are scrutinized in detail they will be found lamentably confused. He thinks it would have been useful to christen his dot on the blackboard *John*, but decides not to do so on the ground that it would be a little odd. In view of the extreme oddity of Russell's definition of proper names, it seems strange that such a consideration should have deterred him. The name *John* would, he pointed out, have the advantage of enabling him to speak of his dot tomorrow. Meanwhile he has succeeded perfectly in speaking about it to his readers much later than tomorrow, and in the absence of the dot itself their picture of it would not have been evoked one whit more clearly had he used a prearranged name like *John*. The fact is that Russell, obsessed on mathematical grounds by his desire for verbal symbolization, has failed to realize that the function of Language is purely instrumental, and that provided words can be found to make a listener think of something to which the speaker wishes to make reference it matters not whether a proper name is used or a description comprising several words. The words are mere scaffolding, to be removed when its purpose is fulfilled.

Moreover, it is rather difficult to understand why, if proper names are defined as words for particulars, the words *the dot on the blackboard* should not be accepted as a proper name, since in their context it cannot be denied that they indicate the particular in question. But perhaps Russell has been careless in formulating his definition;

perhaps what he intended to say is that a proper name must be a single word. Having rejected *John* as too odd for his purpose, he falls back on *this*, which he declares to be a proper name in spite of its 'ambiguity', a term here taken in the sense that '*this* seldom means the same thing two moments running'. Philologists will be amazed to find *this* parading as a proper name, since one has only to place *John* and *this* alongside one another to realize that they are words of entirely different calibre. Nevertheless, since Russell insists that *this* is 'really a proper name', albeit an ambiguous one, we must try to grasp why he considers it such. The only reasons I can think of are, firstly because it is a single word, and secondly because it indicates with some degree of sureness a particular immediately presented, especially if accompanied by a demonstrative gesture. On the other hand, since *this*, when uttered tomorrow and in the absence of the particular in question, will fail to indicate it, clearly Russell has now abandoned his quest for a proper name which will perform that useful function. The proper name he is left with in *this* appears a pretty useless word, for it will only work when the particular is actually present, and consequently resembles a shilling in the pocket that may only be spent on a cake one is already eating.

The whole tenor of Russell's remarks shows that he regards description and naming as directly antithetical, and that he would not consider a word really a proper name if it merely stated the kind to which an entity belongs or a relationship in which it stands. But the latter is precisely what *this* does, and I am at a loss, therefore, to understand how Russell can regard it as a proper name. If *this* be not descriptive, how comes it that, as Russell admits, *this* indicates different objects on different

occasions of its use? For that to be possible, surely—though the expression is unusual—there must be a 'thisness' common to all the objects designated by *this* such as to vindicate each separate successful application. What that 'thisness' is any schoolboy could explain. 'Thisness' is relative nearness to the speaker, just as 'thatness', its contrary, is relative remoteness from him. It is not maintained that *this* is quite on the same footing as an ordinary common noun. Among other differences, the extreme generality of *this* is responsible for the infrequency of its use as a grammatical predicate. On the whole, however, its functioning is similar to that of a substantive or adjective. In employing *this* as grammatical subject the speaker implicitly says to the listener 'Look out for something near me', just as the Roman using *urbs* in the same syntactical position implicitly said 'Look out for some place that is a city.' Thus the descriptive intention of *this* is very apparent. Professor Stebbing, who has taken over and systematized most of Russell's views on proper names, states that *this* is equivalent to a demonstrative gesture.[1] *This* and a demonstrative gesture are not equivalent but complementary. Such is the vagueness of both that in reference to things physically present they are usually employed together, two clues being better than one. The demonstrative gesture has a meaning different from *this*, since it indicates direction. The gesture says 'Look out for something in the direction of my pointing finger or my nodded head.' The gesture gives the line, *this* the relative distance along it.

Russell is right, of course, in regarding naming and description as antithetical, but his peculiar view of proper names beguiles him into drawing strange conclusions

[1] Op. cit., p. 25.

from the antithesis. He refuses (doubtless with good reason) to consider persons as particulars, and accordingly will not allow that words for persons are proper names. If Russell prefers to restrict his own use of proper names to particulars that is his concern, though it is rather a burlesque situation that, when he comes to look for proper names of the kind he requires, he finds none and has to fall back upon a word that obviously is not a proper name. Russell's decision not to regard *Socrates* as a proper name apparently leaves him with a bad conscience, for he feels impelled to tell us what kind of a word *Socrates* really is. Naturally he jumps to the conclusion that it must be a description, and he tells us that our thought may be rendered by some such phrase as 'The Master of Plato', or 'The philosopher who drank the hemlock', or 'The person whom logicians assert to be mortal'. Nothing of the kind! All that the word *Socrates* tells us when it is pronounced is that reference is being made to a certain entity called *Socrates*. To apply the term 'description' to a word which may indeed awaken the memory of sundry bits of information, but which does not itself point to any one of them, is a strange abuse of terms. The word *Socrates* is a mere sound-label, and as such is an *alternative* to any description of Socrates complete enough to identify him, but is not a description itself. Whilst discussing the name *Socrates*, I cannot refrain from astonishment that Russell should have chosen as his example of what is not a proper name the very word taken by Dionysius Thrax to illustrate his definition. It is as though a zoologist were to start his treatise by saying that he was going to exclude horses from his programme, since horses were really plants. A specialist no doubt has the right to adapt the meaning of a technical term to his special purpose if he does not

think fit to coin a new one of his own, and his justification is the greater if he believes the customary use to conceal a fallacy. But really it is going beyond the mark to play skittles with a time-honoured term which in its ordinary acceptation has done good service for a couple of thousand years. That is what Russell has done, and his treatment of proper names compares very disadvantageously with the sober and closely reasoned account given by Mill.

So unfamiliar to me is the philosophic plane upon which Bertrand Russell moves that I am a little nervous about dogmatizing upon the basis of his thought. The impression I have, however, is that he desires to deny the reality of everything with which one is not 'acquainted', acquaintance apparently being taken as identical with direct sense-perception. Russell asserts that one cannot name anything with which one is not acquainted; the animals came before Adam, and so he was able to name them. In another passage[1] he asserts that *Romulus* is not a name but a sort of truncated description 'because a name has got to name something or it is not a name, and if there is no such person as *Romulus* there cannot be a name for that person who is not there'. Here, unless Russell is simply repeating himself, Romulus is invoked, not as a second example of the same type as Socrates, but as a purely fictional character. It is difficult to grapple with a theory which in one breath maintains that you cannot name what is fictional, but that you can describe it. Or can descriptions exist without describing anything? The truth is that, whether you name or whether you describe, what is named or described has to be present to the mind. That is all that is needed for a name or a

[1] Op. cit., 1919, p. 208.

description to be possible, and for Language it is a matter of complete indifference whether the thing named or described has or once had external existence, or rather, to meet Russell on his own ground, whether or not it has ever 'come before' its namer or describer. But why waste words? To refute Russell's view that you cannot name a person who is not there, it is necessary only to quote *Romulus* as evidence that you can. And the thousands of names of fictional or mythological characters which we may remember will not improve upon that answer.

XXIII

It is with some dismay that I look back upon the length of this essay, and wonder what verdict will be passed upon it by those critics who censured for its prolixity my really very concise book on *Speech and Language*. I will conclude by stating in few words the main points in which I believe my theory to differ from that of Mill and the logicians who with minor modifications have concurred in his view. In the first place, I hold that the quality of a proper name is nothing absolute, but that the term merely segregates and puts in a class by themselves those words in which the power of distinctive word-sounds to identify distinct things is exhibited in a pure or nearly pure state, without that power being assisted to any great degree by such meaning as may attach to the word. Stated in a more general way, my thesis is that the term refers to the *modus operandi* of the words included in this category, and that though the ability to mark distinctions depends in all words upon their distinctive sounds, in proper names it depends on that alone, or nearly alone. In the second

place, I utterly reject the view that a proper name is necessarily a singular name. And lastly, I maintain that the operative power of proper names is reflected in, and facilitated by, our recognition of them as such. That recognition instructs us concerning the way in which such words are to be taken. This final point is one in which, unless I am mistaken, the purely logical view of words is seriously at fault. As I tried to make clear in my book on *Speech and Language*, the form of words is fundamentally an overtone of meaning which has evolved out of long experience of their functions and which has brought about amongst them differentiations of kind. Just as a noun is not merely a word that denotes a thing, but is one that views a thing *as* a thing, so too a proper name is a word that *is recognized* as identifying its object by virtue of the distinctive sound exclusively.

APPENDIX

SOME OTHER DEFINITIONS

AMONG the definitions of a Proper Name propounded by others, there are some which at first sight appear to bear close resemblance to my own, but which on careful examination will be found to possess deficiencies of one kind or another. I select for criticism the views of four writers.

1. Keynes, *Formal Logic*, 4th ed., London, 1928, p. 13. 'A proper name is a name assigned as a mark to distinguish an individual person or thing from others, without implying in its signification the possession of any special attributes.' Keynes himself subsequently contradicts parts of this, for he tells us on the same page that many proper names 'are as a matter of fact assigned to more than one individual', and he instances *John* and *Victoria*. On the next page (n. 2) he quotes Dr. Venn as pointing out 'that certain proper names may be regarded as collective, though such names are not common', the instance given being 'the Seychelles'. [Note the misuse of the word 'collective', which ought never to be applied to a plural.] On p. 42, n. 3, he admits that a proper name may have suggestive force, e.g. may imply human being and male. On p. 44 he tells us that a particular name 'may have been chosen in the first instance for a special reason', e.g. *Smith*; he does not seem, however, to deny that *Smith* is a proper name even when the bearer is still plying his trade as a smith. Lastly, it is not strictly accurate to say that a name is assigned as a mark to 'distinguish'; primarily it only identifies, distinction being merely the consequence of the identification.

2. Bertelsen, *Fællesnavne og Egennavne*, Copenhagen, 1911, p. 14, gives a definition that may be translated as follows: 'A proper name denominates its object without indicating circumstances that are characteristic of that individual or those

individuals of whom the name is used.' This definition seems contradicted by *le Mont Blanc*, and is expressed so negatively that one obtains no inkling how a proper name accomplishes its aim. Nor is it made clear that a proper name is a fact of Language, possessing its quality apart from any context or any special syntactical position. A merit of Bertelsen's brochure is, however, that he stresses the affective interest which plays so large a part in the creation of proper names.

3. Funke, on p. 79 of the article quoted above, p. 38, n. 1. 'Eigennamen sind Individualnamen, die eine Individualvorstellung (sei es eines einzelnen Gegenstandes oder eines individuellen Kollektivs) bedeuten und zu deren Bedeutung weiter die Vorstellung des " so und so Genanntseins" gehört; sie nennen Individuen oder individuelle Kollectiva, die existieren oder als existierend gedacht werden (wurden).' The virtue of the inclusion of the 'so und so Genanntsein' has been admitted above, p. 38, n. 1, but otherwise the definition teems with obscurities and repetitions. I have pointed out that very often a proper name conveys nothing but existence of an entity possesssing the name; what becomes of Funke's 'Individualvorstellung' in such a case? The term 'individuelle Kollektiva' is hopelessly obscure without further explanation; if it excludes plurals like *Seychelles* this is a serious omission, and if it includes them the term 'Kollektiv' is wrongly used. Another regrettable lacuna is the lack of any clear indication how much meaning a proper name may or has to possess.

4. Bröndal, *Ordklasserne*, Copenhagen, 1928, pp. 41–49, criticizes previous theories in detail, but not always rightly. He regards the theories of Mill and Bertelsen with some favour, but finds their standpoints too psychological and too regardless of the language-system as a whole. In my view, on the contrary, the difference between proper names and substantives that are not proper names is almost purely psychological, and depends on the importance attached to the sound of the former by the linguistic community generally. Bröndal's

own constructive explanation (pp. 81–85) is extremely difficult to criticize, largely because it forms part of an abstractly conceived system of parts of speech at variance with all traditional views. He excludes from the category of proper names all compounds, all words that still have significance as names of occupations, &c. (e.g. *Smith*), and even a name like *Venus*, besides separating the category from that of nouns ('Nominer', p. 81). One point which definitely creates a chasm between Brøndal's linguistic theory and my own is that he makes his system of word-classes entirely dependent upon the logical quality of the entities (in the widest sense) designated, whereas I, whilst believing that the word-classes depend to a considerable extent upon the nature of those entities, attach great importance to the way in which human beings, largely for facility of linguistic communication, look upon the said entities, e.g. a substantive is a word referring to a thing viewed *as* a thing. Thus Brøndal's statement that proper names 'obviously correspond to the "eternal objects" of Whitehead's philosophy' seems to me inacceptable. He refrains from any formal definition.

RETROSPECT 1953

THE principal matter here to be discussed is whether, in my definition and elsewhere (pp. 38 foll.), I have done right in laying so much emphasis on the sound of proper names. In a very friendly and scrupulously fair criticism S. Ullmann wrote:[1]

> The second objection is more serious: by emphasizing the relative prominence of distinctive sound in our recognition of proper names, Sir Alan has introduced a psychological element, a subjective and variable factor difficult to verify. He is of course quite right in claiming that 'unless our awareness of the various types and functions of words were an objective reality, the task of the grammarian would be nugatory and his distinctions wholly artificial' (p. 41; cf. also pp. 66 f.);[2] but it may be doubted whether linguists and logicians, even those free from any anti-mentalistic bias, will be satisfied with this criterion.

The operative words here are 'in our recognition of proper names' and I have to admit that my formal definition deliberately used the expression '*recognized*[3] as indicating or tending to indicate the object or objects to which it refers by virtue of its distinctive sound alone . . .'. Previously Ullmann had accepted my answer to the possible objection that the entire mechanism of language is based on distinctive sound-features by means of which we differentiate between words, that answer being that 'it makes a vast amount of difference whether the distinctive

[1] *Archivum Linguisticum*, iv. 1 (1952), 67.

[2] The page-numbers have here been altered to agree with the pagination of the present edition.

[3] My italics.

sound is a self-sufficient means of identification, or whether it has to be assisted, as in general names, by consideration of the meaning'. However, my acute critic has in fact pounced upon a really serious objection, and it will emerge that I am unable to do otherwise than meet it with a considerable measure of agreement.

From the way in which Ullmann has voiced his objection it is clear that he was thinking just as little as myself about what happens in the conversational traffic of daily life. For there the words are mere machinery, and as little present to the minds of the persons concerned as are the goings on of the locomotive to the mind of a traveller by train. It is only when there is a hitch in comprehension, when a word is badly pronounced, when an inappropriate word is used, or in such similar cases, that the spoken word springs into consciousness,[1] and even then, I fancy, it is only seldom that the actual sound comes to mind. Often the listener will be aware merely that something has gone wrong. All this is as true of proper names as of other words, except that with proper names there are certain special occasions like a christening or a formal introduction when the actual sound assumes an importance not brought into the foreground of attention at other times.

Ullmann's criticism and my own definition have been alike concerned rather with the status of proper names as facts of Language, i.e. with their permanent and constitutional nature. And here Ullmann has laid his finger upon a real flaw in my formulation. It is true to say that the linguistic community has an instinctive awareness of the identificatory purpose of proper names,[2] and it is also

[1] *Speech and Language*, § 15, end.
[2] See above, § XII, pp. 39 foll.

true that here the distinctive sound provides the exclusive mechanism. But it was false to declare, as my definition did, that the linguistic community recognized the latter fact, this being the more evident since I myself complained (p. 38, n. 1; p. 40) that even logicians and grammarians had all too often overlooked the importance of the sound-aspect. Thanks to Ullmann I now realize that my formulation has illicitly fused together two propositions each true in itself, but false when thus combined. Loath as I naturally am to tamper with my former carefully framed definition, this appears to be necessary, and I now propose the following revision:

A proper name is a word or group of words which is recognized as having identification as its specific purpose, and which achieves, or tends to achieve, that purpose by means of its distinctive sound alone, without regard to any meaning possessed by that sound from the start, or acquired by it through association with the object or objects thereby identified.

It is relatively easy to pick holes in any definition, and I do not pretend that the above is an exception to a well-nigh universal rule. Nevertheless I believe that my fresh effort approximates to the truth as nearly as is humanly possible. I will, however, recall two possible lines of attack. In speaking of proper names as having so clearly marked an identificatory purpose, I ignore their distinguishing power. But this, as was pointed out p. 34, n. 1, is only secondary and consequential. Secondly, I may find myself reproached for having insisted so one-sidedly on the sound-aspect and for having ignored the written appearance altogether. It would, indeed, have been more accurate to substitute 'its physical (or "sensory") quality'

for 'its distinctive sound', but such a substitution would have tended rather to obscure than to clarify, and I consider this point to have been sufficiently dealt with on my p. 40.

More fruitful, though of equally little intrinsic weight, is the possible objection that my definition is artificial and unreal since it analyses proper names only in isolation and ignores the living situations in which they are actually encountered. But this evokes the obvious retort that my procedure is no less legitimate than that of the entomologist who dissects a dead beetle instead of contenting himself with whatever can be learnt about it whilst it still lives to 'wing its droning flight'. Nevertheless, this possible objection indicates the desirability of studying proper names, not merely as a particular category of Language, but also from the point of view of their utility in actual Speech. Here at the end of my Retrospect only a few rather commonplace observations can be set down. In the first place, it is obvious that the user of a proper name must always know more about the bearer of it than is conveyed by the name itself. In making an introduction a host may perhaps have only little more knowledge of the person he is introducing than that such and such is his name; but always there is at least some knowledge. On many occasions the knowledge is great and intimate; for example, the railway porter who salutes an in-coming train with the cry of *Basingstoke!* will probably be a native of that town and thoroughly familiar with it in all its aspects. The same disparity of knowledge is found in the listeners. One of the passengers may be a foreigner who has never heard of the place before, and who now in the darkness knows only that he has arrived there. Another passenger may be coming home and be as well acquainted

with the town as is the porter himself. A supreme virtue of proper names is that they cater for all degrees of knowledge. Actually they convey none; the sole knowledge that they can confer—and it is more often than not already known—is that something in the situation or revealed by the verbal context bears that name. As I have expressed it above, p. 32, 'ordinary words, among which general names play a prominent part, directly convey information; proper names merely provide the key to information'.

But now observe that the speaker normally has a quite definite notion of the amount of knowledge which he wishes his proper names to communicate to the listener, and his skill in speech, consummate even in the clumsiest of yokels, has gifted him with all kinds of resources for attaining his desire. His communicative purpose is at its smallest when, for example, he says to a friend: *Mrs. Simpson told me the other day.* . . . The personality of Mrs. Simpson is possibly of no interest either to the speaker or to the listener, and the name may have been mentioned only to forestall such an irrelevant question as *Who told you that?* On the other hand, through the tone of voice, the choice of appropriate accompanying words, and the speaker's knowledge of what the listener knows, a proper name may become charged with intense significance, as when an irate brother says: *Isn't that just like Tom?* These few examples suffice to show how intensely useful proper names are, in spite of the fact that by their very nature all they can actually perform is to point to an entity that bears the name. Lastly note that, in theory at least, descriptive words, though possibly only an abundance of them, can always convey exactly the same information as a proper name, except of course the

information that the entity spoken of possesses that name. In practice, however, this alternative may not work, since, if the required verbal description is long, the listener may end by ceasing to tolerate the speaker's prolixity, and may indeed cease to listen. This possibility brings to light what is perhaps the very greatest virtue of proper names: they are the most economical of all words, inasmuch as they make only a very small demand upon the eloquence of the speaker, and an equally small demand upon the attention of the listener.

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PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
OXFORD
BY
CHARLES BATEY
PRINTER
TO THE
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