

The Pragmatics and Cognition of Naming

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By

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To the memory of Curzio Chiesa;
teacher, friend, and constant inspiration.

Sine nomine persona non est.
(Roman proverb)

What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.
(Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*)

Languages do not seem to have a category of pure names, in the logician's sense. Rather there are personal names, place names, color names, and so on.

(Noam Chomsky, *Reflections on Language*)

I do not blame him cause he run and hid. But the meanest thing that he ever did was before he left, he went and named me 'Sue'. [...]

I tell ya, life ain't easy for a boy named 'Sue'.
(Johnny Cash, "A Boy Named 'Sue'")

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PREFACE

On November 20 1989, the General Assembly of the United Nations recognized that, among the rights of a child, is the right to have a name: “The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name” (Article 7-1). Why is it a right to have a name? The Roman dictum *Sine nomine persona non est* [without a name a person is not] may give us some hints. To have a name is to be bestowed with *individuality* and *recognition*. It is to enter humankind as a member, to become *one of us*. A child is not a commodity one can sell or buy as one can so easily do when trading second-hand goods or animals. To bestow a name on someone plays a role in that. If language is also understood as a tool that enhances our social connections, these features of a name must be taken into consideration.

Another interpretation of the right to have a name is that a name gives us a way to keep track of and possibly to monitor in some way, if not explicitly control, our conspecifics. In that respect being *proper* seems to be an important feature of names. We also use names for many other things: pets, towns, rivers, books, paintings, planets, buildings, boats, etc. Geographical names, for instance, help us to individuate and distinguish various places, regions, mountains, countries, etc. How could we design a map, plan a vacation, without using names for cities, streets, rivers, mountain, countries, and so on? Names play an important role in the building of various recognition maps of the world and the universe. As such, names are instrumental in the fulfillment of various aims and plans.

From a psychological and sociological perspective names are among the most important public and social tools that we have. They enter birth and death certificates, passports and driving licenses, legal agreements, telephone books, signposts, etc. How could the postal service sort letters and packages if they did not have names of people, streets, and cities to guide their actions? To be a useful tool a proper name must single out its bearer. The way a name relates to its bearer is not an easy question and a lot has been said, mainly by philosophers of language, on this specific issue. To be useful a proper name must also be a *stable* label. It cannot change its designation on a daily basis. How could a name be a useful instrument in social and cognitive maps if it did not have a fixed, unchanging designation? How could we plan a simple trip and buy a train or airplane ticket if the names of the stations or airports were constantly changing? *Qua* useful tools, names must also help us to cumulate, organize, store, and pass along information on *specific* individuals. They must have an individuating power. This is far from an easy question as well. Cognitive scientists and psychologists, among others, have produced many interesting studies on these aspects.

It seems, therefore, that a study on naming must take into consideration variegated aspects surrounding the importance of names both in our social interactions and in our cognitive life.

The production of a fully satisfactory picture concerning all the variegated aspects and features of proper names and naming in general is outside the scope of this book. I hope, though, to be able to highlight a few aspects surrounding the way we exploit and use proper names. If nothing else, I hope to show and stress their multi-faceted traits and illustrate how they can be exploited in what Wittgenstein characterized as language games. Thus, although the main perspective I adopt in my inquiry pertains

to the philosophy of language and mind, I will free myself to take quite a few detours. Studies from various disciplines will come into the forum to illuminate the way proper names work in our communicative, social, intentional, and cognitive life.

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All the remaining mistakes and misunderstandings are, as usual, down to me.

A shortened version of chapter 3 was published in the volume *Reference and Representation in Thought and Language* (for which a full reference is available in the Bibliography). I am grateful for the permission to reproduce that material here.

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INTRODUCTION

This book deals with proper names, their importance, their use, how they designate, the way they are cognized, and other related issues. Under the category of ‘names’ I will subsume what sometimes have been characterized as proper names, proper nouns, and complex names, among other things. When I use the label ‘name’ it should read as ‘proper name’.

The online *Oxford English Dictionary*¹ states that ‘name’ *qua* noun is: “A word or set of words by which a person or thing is known, addressed, or referred to”. In its attributive use, ‘proper’ means: “Denoting something that is truly what it is said or regarded to be; genuine”. ‘Proper to’, however, means: “Belonging or relating exclusively or distinctively to; particular to”. The origins of ‘proper’ come from “Middle English: from Old French ‘propre’, from Latin ‘proprius’ (‘one’s own, special’)”. These definitions come close to the view of proper names I assume in this essay.

Some of the questions we will face sound trivial. Which linguistic expressions count as proper names? Why do we need names to begin with? How do they work within natural languages? What role do they play within a linguistic community? How do they relate to their bearers? How do they combine with other linguistic categories in building well-formed sentences? How do they differ from other linguistic terms? How do we cognitively process them? The answer to some of these “basic” questions guides, I wish to show, which theory of proper names and naming one is

¹ See: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>.

keen to subscribe to and bring into one's semantic, pragmatics and cognitive toolbox.

In the chapters to follow, I will address some of these questions and attempt to discuss various aspects concerning proper names. In particular, I will focus on the way we cognize proper names, on how they help us to entertain singular thoughts about specific individuals, and how they pragmatically convey relevant information. Thus, in my inquiry I will mainly focus on the *use* of names both in our thoughts (thus as devices that allow us to entertain singular or *de re* thoughts) and communicative interchanges (as tools we use to single out objects of discourse and convey information about them). This, I conjecture, should be the starting point for a story about proper names in particular, and a theory of communication in general. Thus, one of the main questions should be: how does a given vocable earn the right to be a proper name? And, once a vocable assumes this role, how does it behave in our thinking and communicative episodes?

Many philosophical studies often start from the premise that we have proper names and then go on to discuss their functioning in the language we use. Philosophers have often neglected the basic question concerning *what is* a proper name. Let's call it the *what* question. The guiding intuitive idea is that in its primary function or proper function (i.e. when it appears in argument position in the utterance of a simple sentence like 'Socrates' in "Socrates is snub-nosed") a proper name is a device used to pick up an individual while the predicate is used to say something about it. In uttering "Socrates is snub-nosed" one designates Socrates and attributes to him the property of being snub-nosed. What one says is true if Socrates instantiates that property. It is false otherwise.

Indexicals and proper names are, I assume, different tools of direct reference contributing the denoted individual into the proposition expressed,

roughly, into what is said. In short, I will defend the following ideas: in their paradigmatic uses indexicals and proper names are *distinct* tools we use to pick out objects of discourse and thoughts. They constitute different ways we can entertain and transmit singular or *de re* thoughts, *viz.* they are distinct tools we use to pass to our audience the individual we have in mind. They also play different roles in the organization of our mental life. As Kaplan aptly puts it: “proper name words are unique. They have the direct reference of indexicals, but they are not context sensitive. Proper name words are like indexicals that you can carry away from their original context without affecting their content” (Kaplan 1977: 562).

CHAPTER 1

THE DUAL FUNCTION OF NAMES

In this chapter I assume that names are tools of direct reference, i.e., devices used to pick up objects of discourse, *and* tools that allow us to entertain and express *de re* thoughts, i.e., thoughts focused on and representing the individuals the names stand for. In this respect a name is both a linguistic *and* a mental tool. In what follows I will mainly focus on how proper names can be characterized as tools of singular, object-dependent, *de re* thoughts. Before that, though, I shall sketch how names relate *via* a communicative and thinking network to their bearer.

1.1. The Name-Notion Network

The notion of having an individual in mind takes center stage when dealing with problems pertaining to cognitive significance, communication, explanation of behavior, etc.² Thus, a theory of meaning aiming to account for communication and understanding must be, to borrow Korta & Perry's (2011) terminology, utterance-bound and ought to

² The notion of cognitive significance I have in mind is the one we inherited from Frege (1892) when he claimed that a statement of the forms $a=a$ and $a=b$ differ in cognitive significance. Hence, "Hesperus is Phosphorus" may help us to expand our knowledge, while a statement like "Hesperus is Hesperus" is trivial. The two statements differ in cognitive significance, as do the statements "Hesperus is a star" and "Phosphorus is a star".

consider the variegated ways a subject can have someone/thing in mind. Besides, there can be distinct ways one can have the very same object in mind even in the case of direct perception (acquaintance-based) relation to it (see, e.g., Kripke's 1979 well-known Peter-Paderewski case when he states a famous puzzle about beliefs).³ The having in mind relation is, particularly in the case of perspectivally driven perception, what anchors one's thought to the external world. Here we can follow Perry when he writes:

When I say 'I' I refer to myself without relying on a network. Even an amnesiac, who has forgotten her own name, can refer to herself with 'I'. But when I say, 'John Perry', I also refer to myself. In this case I exploit a name-network that began before I learned language; it existed mainly in the heads and conversations of my parents, brother and other relatives ... until I began to refer to myself, and in time, learned to exploit this network, and my own name, to learn things about myself. In all of these cases, my reference to a particular object, whether Aristotle or Descartes or Kepa, or myself, *depends on a role that object plays in my life*—a role even a long dead philosopher can play, in the case of the first two—at the time of utterance. (Perry 2014: 6; *italics mine*)

Perry's roles play a key part when we come to characterize an agent's cognitive life. Since the very same object can be apprehended (and thus

³ The puzzle runs as follows: Peter meets the same person named 'Paderewski' in two different circumstances without recognizing that the person he saw is the same one. He took Paderewski to be a politician and later on to be a musician without realizing that he is the very same individual. Peter took him to be two different fellows who happened to share the same name. Hence, Peter does not come to believe that Paderewski is both a politician *and* a musician.

represented) in different ways, the referent can affect the cognizer's mind in variegated ways. An agent can come to have the referent in mind in different ways. And it is *how* the agent comes to have an object in mind that helps in dealing with puzzles pertaining to cognitive significance. Roles are also what help in explaining someone's behavior, *viz.* what guides an agent's actions. Perry's roles are central in such an explanation and, in particular, when we come to classify what goes on in an agent's mind and guides her linguistic behavior:

A role, as I shall use the term, is a partial function whose value is an Object ... I argue that roles help us understand the nature of mental representation in perception, thought and action, and so the function of the concept of content. (Perry 2014: 6)

Perry distinguishes between “SO-roles”, i.e., Subject-Object roles, and “ES-roles”, i.e., roles that take the Episodes of speech or thought themselves as arguments, and deliver the Subject, as well as the time and the place of the Episode, as values. Furthermore, ES-roles help in classifying the representations involved. Different roles help to characterize different aspects and properties of the utterance. A role can put conditions on the subject matter, the proposition expressed (or Kaplanian content). A different role can put conditions on the utterance itself and the agent of it. It is this role that helps in classifying the speaker's cognitive life involved in her utterance of the sentence. It is, therefore, the latter that helps us in dealing with Frege-inspired problems pertaining to cognitive significance.⁴

⁴ For a detailed discussion on this, see Corazza 2018.

I would now like to focus on the notion of transmission of information and what Perry (2014) and Korta & Perry (2011) characterize as *the name-notion network*. On the one hand, Perry seems to subscribe to the view that his use of ‘Aristotle’ is linked to the Greek philosopher because, through a network of communication, it is causally related to the referent. To the best of my knowledge the first philosopher who proposed the so-called causal theory of reference (or causal chain) is Geach⁵:

I do indeed think that for the use of a word as a proper name there must in the first instance be someone acquainted with the object named. But language is an institution, a tradition; and the use of a given name for a given object, like other features of language, can be handed on from one generation to another; the acquaintance required for the use of a proper name may be mediate, not immediate. Plato knew Socrates, and Aristotle knew Plato, and Theophrastus knew Aristotle, and so on in apostolic succession down to our own times; that is why we can legitimately use ‘Socrates’ as a name the way we do. It is not our knowledge of this chain that validates our use, but the existence of such a chain; just as according to Catholic doctrine a man is a true bishop if there is in fact a chain of consecrations going back to the Apostles, not if we know that there is. (Geach 1969/72: 155)

On the other hand, Perry also emphasizes information transmission and how we come to have notions stored in our mind (see Perry’s conception

⁵ See also Donnellan (1970), Evans (1973), and Kripke (1980). As Devitt puts it: “[O]ur present uses of a name, say ‘Aristotle’, designate the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle, *not* in virtue of the various things we (rightly) believe true of him, but in virtue of a causal network stretching back from our uses to the first uses of the name to designate Aristotle” (Devitt 1981: 25).

of mental file; more on this in the next section and following chapters).⁶ We thus think about Aristotle because we have a notion of him in our mind. One way to understand Perry here is that the SO (Subject-Object) role and the ES (Episode-Subject) role, being two sides of the same coin, cannot be severed. This amounts to saying that the name-network and the notion-network are both crucially important when we come to characterize *what* a speaker said and *how* she said it. The *what* and the *how* cannot be split. It is the latter, the ES role, that helps us deal with problems relating to cognitive significance. It is the latter that helps us to classify what goes on in a cognizer's mind that contributes in guiding her behavior. It is the latter that characterizes what Frege called modes of presentation, *viz.* the way the objects are given and apprehended.

My Perry-inspired view can be understood as follows. The *name*-network and the *notion*-network need not be mutually exclusive; they work in tandem and tend to proceed hand in hand. Depending on the speaker/thinker cognitive situation, sometimes it is the notion-network that guides the referential link, while other times it is the name-network. On the other hand, the notion-network, characterized by Perry's ES role, is what delivers how the speaker gets the relevant referent in mind.

⁶ "I can think of and talk about Aristotle because of a network involving notions, names, and other references to Aristotle that have been going on since he was born. My use of 'Aristotle' is supported by this network. Aristotle is the origin of the network ... Once we recognize the importance of network we can introduce a level of content, network content ... The network is a public object, that exists independently of any particular utterance that exploits it. It is these networks, I claim, that provide the structure that allows us to speak of beliefs that are directed at the same object, even when there is no object at which they are directed" (Perry 2001/2012: 14-5).

Furthermore, it is the notion-network that allows a speaker to cumulate and pass on information concerning a given referent. Most of the time we face no problems. The object one has in mind is the object that one, through the name-network, refers to. The name-network and the notion-network work in parallel. It can happen, though, that the object one has in mind through the notion-network and the one she has in mind through the name-network differ. In some cases, people can pass on information (and the individual they have in mind) without having the name of that individual in their idiolects. Thus, the passing of information from one speaker to the other, the passing of whom they have in mind, can be sustained by a notion-network without having to appeal to a name-network. The name-network and the notion-network, in some awkward cases, can run in different directions. As would be the case, for instance, if one looking at Mr. Smith utters “Mr. Black looks happy” and, thus misrepresents Mr. Smith as being Mr. Black. In such cases we would, no doubt, face a situation of misplaced information and some misunderstanding is likely to arise. An attentive audience can easily correct the speaker by pointing out her mistake. In such a case the speaker, if rational and recognizing her misidentification, would revise her original utterance.

1.2. Names and Singular Thoughts

On top of singling out an object of discourse, as a mental tool a name is also a tag or label for an idea or notion one entertains about the name’s referent. Actually, names are what help us to store information about the objects that names name and to retrieve the information stored under these names/labels. Actually, to be functional, a system of information storage needs a system of information retrieval. As an analogy we can think of the way we save files in our computers. We name the file and when retrieving

that file we use the name we created for that particular file. The file-name is thus what helps us to store information and to retrieve it. Names play a key role in that. Roughly, the main idea can be summarized as follows: a tokened name relies on both the name-network, i.e., the so-called causal link that relates the name with its bearer, and the name-notion connection, i.e., the way the name *qua* mental tool helps in storing and retrieving information about the name's bearer. While the former is what fixes the reference of the tokened name, the latter is what contributes to the cognitive significance (or cognitive organization) associated with the tokened name.

My idea of Plato, my *Plato-idea*, is about Plato because 'Plato' stands for Plato—or, more precisely, because my *Plato-idea* bears a mental name (or label) corresponding to the natural language name 'Plato'. For simplicity's sake, I henceforth will not distinguish between current (natural language) names and mental names. If one is keen on Mentalese one can consider a mental name as a token in Mentalese translating a natural language name. Furthermore, I do not want to commit myself to the view that one cannot think of Plato if one does not have the label 'Plato' in her idiolect and mind. As reported by Kaplan, Donnellan once suggested that people can have in mind, refer and pass to others a specific individual they think about even if they do not have and know the name of the relevant individual:

Donnellan once said to me that he could imagine the name 'Aristotle' having been first introduced in the Middle Ages by scholars who previously had used only definite descriptions to write and speak about Aristotle. According to Donnellan, these scholars may well have had Aristotle in mind, and through their conversations, through the referential

use of definite descriptions and other devices, passed the epistemic state of having Aristotle in mind from one to another. Thus they were properly situated from an epistemic point of view to be able to introduce a proper name. (Kaplan 2012: 142)

Donnellan's example of the medieval scholars points out that people can have Aristotle in mind and, thus, entertain singular thoughts about him. In other words, the scholars pass to each other, generation after generation, the individual they have in mind (*via* notion networks) and only later tag the individual they have been cumulating information about with the introduction of the name 'Aristotle'. In so doing they initiate a name network. In short, one can entertain a singular, *de re*, thought about an individual *via* a notion or idea of that individual she has in mind without having a specific label for that very individual in her idiolect. To put it in a nutshell, people can pass to each other generation after generation the individual they have in mind without having a name for that individual.

The important point to bear in mind is that in hearing a name the audience calls to mind an idea or notion corresponding to that name. How does this work? A useful and powerful metaphor coming from Grice (1969) and subsequently refined by Perry (1980) is the one of mental files.⁷ Think of our mind as being (partly) organized like a file cabinet. In

⁷ Bach (1987), Castañeda (1989), Recanati (1993, 2012), and Jeshion (2009), among others, also appeal to mental files when discussing the cognitive impact and importance of proper names. As Castañeda aptly puts it: "The role is twofold. On the one hand, proper names have a *doxastic*, or (since we aim at gaining knowledge) *epistemic* role: They function as devices by means of which we *organize* our beliefs, that is, the information we possess as belief. To acquire a proper name in one's idiolect is to open a file for the storage of information ... On

our cabinet we keep various files about different individuals (be they persons, places, events, etc.). Our files bear different names: the latter are what link the files to the individuals so named.⁸ In other words, the aboutness of the file often depends on the name it bears. It does not rest on the information stored in the file. Yet, as in Donnellan's example of the medieval scholars introducing the name 'Aristotle' as the label of the individual they had in mind, a file may be related to its origin (individual) *via* relevant information transmitted through the notion network. The name we saw is a (very) useful, but inessential, feature relating a file to the objects it is about. After all, we have many individuals in mind we can recognize, ascribe properties to, and so on, without being able to name them. I know the waitress in my local bar quite well. I recognize her and salute her when I meet her out of the bar. Yet, I do not know her name. I

the other hand, proper names have a *retrieval* or *causal* role. They are keys that open the information file for the retrieval of particular pieces of information." (Castañeda 1989: 41)

⁸ If one is disposed (as, e.g., Carruthers 1998) to think that in our conscious conceptual thinking, unlike in our visio-spatial thinking, we operate using natural language, then a natural language name works both ways, i.e., as a referential tag and as the name of the file. On the other hand, if one is more sympathetic with a Fodorian notion of Mentalese (see, e.g., Fodor 2001), one is likely to hold the view that the natural language name translates a symbol in Mentalese. This debate, as interesting as it may be, transcends the scope of this study. For the safety of my argument it suffices to stress that a name plays two distinct roles, i.e., as a referential tag and as the name (or translation of) the file so labelled. It goes without saying, though, that we can have files about individuals without having a name (or knowing the name) of the relevant individual the file is about. We can also have files of fictional, non-existent, characters.

can talk using various descriptions of her with my colleagues, family and friends and, in so doing, I can pass my having her in mind to them. She may become a central figure in our talks. One of us may start to call her ‘Sue Bar’. We can all adopt this name when referring to her. So ‘Sue Bar’ enters our idiolects and becomes our name for her. Although we are not in a position to alter her passport’s entry or her birth certificate, she may become famous in the wider community so that ‘Sue Bar’ begins to spread around, like a virus, in the linguistic community. A convention enabling speakers to token ‘Sue Bar’ to refer to our waitress has been created. As Chastain puts it: “The simplest way to introduce a proper name is just to start using it” (Chastain 1975: 217). We will have a mental file concerning her that we can now label ‘Sue Bar’. If people later discover that Sue Bar’s “real” name is ‘Mary White’ a Frege-like puzzle may arise and an utterance like “Sue Bar is Mary White” can become informative, just as “Hesperus is Phosphorus” became informative with the Babylonian astronomers when they came to discover that the star rising in the morning was the same as the one disappearing at night.

A file is useful insofar as it is a good place to store information about the individual that we can later retrieve. Files may be generated in many ways. One may form a file in one’s mind when hearing a proper name and start storing some information into the file so named. One may come to form a mental file on perceiving an individual, collect some information on the perceived individual, and only later come to label the file (e.g., when learning the name of the perceived individual). Furthermore, one may have files with lots of information labelled with vacuous names (e.g.: ‘Peter Pan’, ‘Santa Claus’, ‘Robin Hood’, ‘Vulcan’, ‘William Tell’, etc.). It is likely that when Urbain Le Verrier came to stipulate the existence of a

planet disturbing the orbit of Mercury, he created a file that he then named ‘Vulcan’.⁹

Some, or even most, of the information stored in a file could be incorrect. This, though, *pace* Frege, does not make the file stand for another individual that would eventually satisfy the information contained in the file. Our Einstein-file is about Einstein even if we find out that Einstein did not discover the theory of relativity. In hearing ‘Dartmouth’ one may store into one’s file under the label ‘Dartmouth’ that it is a town or a city standing on the mouth of the Dart. Yet this information, as useful as it can be, does not play any role in linking ‘Dartmouth’ to Dartmouth. The stored information, though, plays an important cognitive role in guiding our actions. When searching for Dartmouth on a geographical map one may first look at the mouth of the Dart. One can give Mary Smith a present or invite her out for dinner on her birthday because one has stored her birth date into one’s file. Yet Mary’s birth date does not contribute in determining the referent of ‘Mary’ and, thus, what the mental file stands for. There may have been an error in the creation of Mary Smith’s birth certificate and, thus, that her passport registers the wrong birth date, and so on and so forth. A friend of mine—lucky him—celebrates two birthdays: the one when he was actually born and the one registered two days later on his birth certificate (and, later on, on his passport and driving license). In short, from a cognitive perspective, a name is what helps us to store and retrieve information from the relevant file. Names (just like other nouns) play thus a pivotal role when storing and organizing information

⁹ For a detailed discussion on the formation of files, their possible origins and the way they belong to an intersubjective network allowing us to share and transmit information, see Perry (2001/2012: 196ff.)

concerning a particular (someone or something) under a given label within our long-term biological memory.¹⁰ When hearing or using a name, *viz.* when a name comes to mind, we activate the so-named notion or idea: we open, so to speak, the file so-named and we can thus retrieve and/or store information from and/or in our file. We open, we could say, a channel of information.

1.3. Names and Information

We also use names when storing information into our phones, notebooks and laptops. And we do so pretty much the same way we store information into our biological memory. Our phone can be regarded as an extension of our biological memory. Some scholars, advocates of the extended-mind conception, go as far as to claim that there is no principled difference between our biological memory and our phone memory. Clark & Chalmers (1989), for instance, suggest that there is no basic difference between information and beliefs stored in memory and information and beliefs stored in one's notebook. Someone may reliably believe that a meeting starts at 4:30 pm on Wednesday July 6, 2015 because they registered it in their notebook.¹¹ I know Mary Smith's phone number and birth date because they are stored in my iPhone under the label 'Mary Smith'. I know what she looks like because I registered an image of her in

¹⁰ While names tag ideas of specific individuals, nouns tag ideas of classes of individuals. 'Jane Smith' tags an idea of Jane Smith while 'woman' tags an idea of which women are the extension.

¹¹ See Clark & Chalmers' (1989) case of Otto who, suffering from Alzheimer's, cannot store in his biological memory relevant information and, as a consequence, reliably stores it and successfully retrieves it from his notebook.

my iPhone. People with a better memory than mine may know Mary's birth date, address and phone number because they stored it in their biological memory. Whether my iPhone is part of my mind or not is an open question. Yet we cannot deny that there is a similarity between storing information on our phones and storing it in our biological memory under a given name. The practice of storing information in our notebooks is what allows us to lower the cognitive cost of having to stock information in our biological memory. Like other organisms, we tend to stock information in our surroundings that we can then reliably retrieve. Actually, not only humans but organisms of a great many species use the strategy of exploiting or even generating structures in their environment to lower cognitive complexity. Examples in other species include pheromones, markers, and color codes, amongst other things. In our own species, examples range from academic books and journals to appointment books and signs in hallways.¹²

Curiously enough, this is what Mill himself (whose famous lesson is that names are the only linguistic signs that do not connote)¹³ seems to

¹² “[E]volved creatures will neither store nor process information in costly ways when they can use the structure of the environment and their operations upon it as a convenient stand-in for the information-processing operations concerned” (A. Clark 1989: 64). This phenomenon is, for instance, nicely illustrated in the Brothers Grimm's fairy tales on Hansel and Gretel. In the tale the siblings are abandoned in the forest. To mark their way back Hansel takes a slice of bread and leaves a trail of bread crumbs to mark the path to follow on their return home.

¹³ The following quote is possibly the main source inspiring the so-called Millian theory of naming or, simply, Millianism:

Proper names are not connotative: they denote the individuals who are called by them; but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as