Unspeakably more depends on *what things are called* than on what they are[1]

As coisas dependem mais do seu nome do que daquilo que são

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ABSTRACT: This article examines a particular relationship between names and things. Initially examines the tradition that treats this issue in the history of philosophy especially those who criticize the universalist that tries to put human beings into a nature. Finally tries to demonstrate the intimate relationship of dependency that there may be among the names and the things that captures the names and the influence of the names on things that we can draw as dynamic nominalism.

Keywords: dynamic nominalism, human nature, language, reality.

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa uma particular relação entre os nomes e as coisas. Inicialmente percorre a tradição que trata esta problemática na historia da filosofia sobretudo os que criticam os universalistas no sentido de querer colocar os seres humanos dentro de uma natureza. Finalmente tentará demonstrar a intima relação de dependência que pode haver entre os nomes e as coisas que recebem esses nomes e a influência dos nomes nas coisas numa dialética que podemos chamar de nominalismo dinâmico.

Palavras-chave: nominalismo dinâmico, natureza humana, linguagem, realidade.

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[1] This text is based on a lecture given in Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos on 23rd March, 2007, the third and last in a series called "Making up people". Most of the material used in the first two lectures is now published as "Kinds of People: Moving Targets" (Hacking, 2006a).
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Human nature

Here in Porto Alegre I have been giving some lectures about making up people, a theme that I have pursued off and on for many years[3]. In my very first publication on the topic, I described my philosophy as "dynamic nominalism". This meant that I am preoccupied by the interactions between names of kinds of people, and people of those kinds. There is a looping effect between classifications of people and the people classified. My instincts are nominalist, but I hold that names are not static; they affect those whom they name, and those who are named can change what is meant by the names. Thus I call my nominalism "dynamic". In the light of these ideas, a member of the audience asked a question that I have been avoiding "What is your idea of a person, who can thus be made up?"

I believe my own attitude to what is often called human nature was unwittingly formed in one of the heroic episodes of philosophy. Philosophy is heroic (in my version of events) when it tries to paint a picture of the *whole* of human nature – and of the place of human beings in nature. Kant was heroic. Aquinas was heroic. Aristotle was heroic. I am the very opposite of heroic, not exactly cowardly, but running away from generalities. I am proudly "particularist". I do not think there is a fixed whole of human nature to discuss. Heroes have, nevertheless, had an impact on me, as on everyone else.

One heroic episode in the history of Western thought was post-war existentialism of the sort that stemmed from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1956). Existentialism is paradoxical because it offered a vision – highly intellectualized but nonetheless a vision – of the whole of human nature, while denying, in a sense, that human beings have a nature at all. It is in the nature of a human being to have no intrinsic nature, but to live one's life constantly choosing who one is, and being responsible for the person one chooses to be. Both virtue and authenticity consist in being well aware that one is choosing who to be, and in being responsible for those self-conscious choices. It happens that *Being and Nothingness* was the first thick book of philosophy that I read in my entire life. (I was working my way through college finding oil in Northern Alberta at the time, in the mid 1950s.) This youthful reading left more of a mark than you might expect from my published work.

An existentialist attitude

Let us set the stage with the most banal expression of existentialism. Existence precedes essence. Many years ago, adolescents, of whom I was one, used to exclaim that sort of thing without having much idea what it might mean. It was code for the idea that one was young and rebellious, and that nothing was as fixed as it seemed. In particular, the sexual conventions of the day could be thwarted by free acts of choice.

Nevertheless, it was part of being a teenager that one did read, aside from novels, the work of people who were said to be existentialist philosophers. Some of them seemed very deep, very spiritual, and quite hard to understand. Kierkegaard comes to mind. Others were much more user-friendly, and there Sartre was tops. I confess that it is impossible for me to reread Sartre without being infused once again with rosy adolescent sloppiness. Hence these introductory words of stage-setting do not profess scholarship. Just a certain cheerful conviction about what

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[3] Beginning with "Making Up People" (Hacking, 1986).

one part of existentialism was all about. That part almost completely ignores two of the most important aspects of post-war existentialism. First, the strong vein of phenomenology that Sartre and others imported from Husserl. Second, the powerful connection between existentialism and political commitment.

"Existence precedes essence". That meant to us that who you are is determined by your own actions and choices. Yes, you do have an essence, and you do have a character, unless you are very disturbed in body or mind. Most of the time, you act in definite and predictable ways. Characters are often at least as determinate as stone – as Hume observed, the prisoner thinks he has a better chance of chiselling his way through the floor of his jail, than trying to cajole or bribe the warden into allowing an escape. So much is true even of those who are quite miserable candidates for being whole human beings. But your essence, your character, your consistent and self-revealing patterns of behaviour, are not something you were born with. You acquired them as you grew up, acted, behaved, and sometimes as you made choices of what to do. Occasionally when you decided what to be, who to be. It was of course a Sartrian edict, that more of your behaviour and action should be a matter of deliberate and responsible choice than it is usually is.

Choice

I prefer to say, not that essence is the result of choice, but that it is the resultant of choices. In elementary mechanics, a "resultant" is the net effect of a number of conflicting forces acting with different magnitudes and in different directions. One's personal essence is like that, a resultant of diverse choices. Of course personal essence is a quite different idea from the scholastic notion of individual essence, which Saul Kripke valiantly and to my mind pointlessly tried to rehabilitate.

To say that personal essence is the resultant of choices is not to say, in any ordinary sense, that you are unconstrained, or were free of constraint when you made the choices that led to your being you. There are endless blind or meaningless limitations on your activities. There are all sorts things that have just happened to you and which shut down some possibilities and which opened up others in altogether unexpected ways. We push our lives through a thicket in which the stern trunks of determinism are entangled in the twisting vines of chance.

Less metaphorically, you choose what you can do, under the circumstances, even when the opportunities are severely constrained, even when the options are miserable. The choices that you make, situated in the thicket, are what formed you and continue to form you. Responsibility is in part taking responsibility for the being that you become, as a consequence of choosing. Those of us who have the richer register of options have the greater responsibility for what we have become.

It is by no means simply a question of deciding what to do, but also of one of choosing whom to associate with. Essences, as Pascal taught us when he wrote about his wager, *infini-rien* – stakes of infinity to nothing – are infectious. To some extent you catch aspects of essence and character from those whom you have chosen to make your fellows. Keeping good company is good for you, and helps make you good; bad is bad.

Constraints

Such a moralizing story need not deny obvious facts. We are born with a great many essential characteristics that we cannot change. Most of us can change how fat or thin, how trim or flabby our bodies are. But we can make only the most miniscule alterations to our height. A very great many physical characteristics appear to be fixed

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at the moment of conception, and many more are determined before the fœtus sees the light. We do not yet have the genetic technology to change that, even if it were desirable. Neurologists and cognitive scientists teach us the same about the brain – that a great many of our potential thoughts and thought processes are innate, and that many more mental traits are part of our biological constitution.

Many of the possibilities available to us, and many of the constraints imposed upon us, were dealt us at birth. At most we can choose what to do with what is there, although we know little except the most obvious facts about what is "in our genes" and what is the result of other developmental processes. The chances of birth, of family, of war, of hunger, of social station, of the supports and the oppression that can result from religion or caste – the chances of wanton cruelty or high rates of unemployment – once you start listing everything, there does not seem to be much room for choice at all. But of course there is. All that stuff is the framework within which we can decide who to be.

Choice is for the lucky. In a quite well known paper published in 1981, Bernard Williams taught us about *moral luck*, which has since become a much-discussed topic. That concept applies to those of us who have seldom been faced with truly hard choices. Throughout my own life, my modest circumstances look like immense prosperity to the vast proportion of people on earth. I have been blessed by opportunity. I have been too young or to old to make the real choices of a pacifist philosophy, so I can say I am pretty much of a pacifist, without having to pay the price that others do in more difficult places and times. We might say that moral luck is especially lucky for those who are able to heed Aristotle or Kant – or Sartre – and to reflect on the extent of their own freedom. They have the fortune to realize that they can choose not only what to do, but also to choose what kind of person to be.

Gloomy Freud

We should not forget that great existential pessimist of the early twentieth century, namely Sigmund Freud. What, or who, is the judge (Kant used to ask). Freud asked not who judges, but, who chooses? The pitiless invisible superego may judge you, even if the *you* being judged was not the you that did the choosing, but some less conscious part of your soul. Know thyself – in order that thou canst choose and choose who thou shalt be? In the nastiest version of Freud's vision, there are too many battling selves of which no one can be conscious, for there to be a single self who is choosing and judging.

Or so Freud seemed to teach. It is strange that he was so admired by the Parisian existentialists, for he perverted the possibility of existentialism in advance. Taken in one way, psychoanalysis calls in question, for individuals who have absorbed the concept of the choosing self that continually makes and remakes itself, the very idea of the self. There is no Freudian unitary subject who chooses. The optimist behind this gloomy Freud proposed yet another scheme of self-improvement. We should get to know ourselves better by taking guided talking tours of our souls. Endless hours reclining on a couch, with only mental landscapes in sight. That may be more comfortable for the body than wearing haircloth for the confessor, but it has a tendency to make the mind more distraught.

I confess my kind of existentialism is distinctly pre- or post- psychoanalytic.

Kinds of constraint

On rereading Sartre, one finds that he took great pains to examine many kinds of constraints under which we rightly judge that our freedom is limited. You

will find even in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1956) every one of the constraints I have mentioned – the genetic and the circumstantial, the deterministic and the fortuitous – and a good many more. He took Freud and analysis so seriously that he and his associates proposed but did not much practice an existentialist form of analysis of the psyche. It was undercover way of shedding Freud's gloom.

He certainly saw clearly that at a given place and time, only some possibilities are intelligible. That is, some possibilities are shut off from us, not because of constraints or limitations, but because they do not, in our place and time, make sense. They do not enter into what Quine might have called the "conceptual scheme" of intelligible courses of action or thinkable states of being. Sartre introduced this fact in a user-friendly way, in connection with artefacts as yet unimagined. Here is a passage already quoted in my very first reflections on making up people:

> Of course a contemporary of Duns Scotus is ignorant of the use of the automobile or the aeroplane. […] For one who has no relation of any kind to these objects and the techniques that refer to them, there is a kind of absolute, unthinkable, and undecipherable nothingness. Such a nothing can in no way limit the For-itself that is choosing itself; it cannot be apprehended as a lack no matter how we consider it (Sartre, 1956, p. 522).

That phrase, "a kind of absolute, unthinkable, and undecipherable nothingness" is a wonderful way to capture possibilities that may not exist at a place and time, and which do exist at another place and time.

Possibilities for an agent exist only within a scheme of classifications of actions. Add to that the fact that all classifications that "stick" exist only within practices and institutions. Hence in my previous lectures (Hacking, 2006a, 2006b), when I asked about interactions between classifications and people classified, there was implicit reference to more than mere naming – I turned at once to knowledge, experts, and institutions. That stated, one may propose that the introduction of new classifications can open up new possibilities of what to do and to be.

Does one feel different, has one a different experience of oneself, if one is led to see oneself as a certain type of person? Does the availability of a classification, a label, a word or phrase, open certain possibilities, or perhaps close off others? It was that question that most exercised me when I began thinking about making up people. It seemed to me that a new way of describing people does not only create new ways to be, but also new ways to choose. In the existentialist philosophy, that means new ways to choose who one is.

I favour an existentialist vision of the human condition over an essentialist one. Such a vision should never be romantic or encourage fantasy: it must always be consistent with good common sense about what choices are really open to us. We take for granted that each of us is precluded from a lot of choices for the most mundane of physiological or social reasons. *Social*: as a young man growing up in Vancouver, on the West coast of Canada, I could not have chosen to be an officer in the Soviet Navy. *Physiological*: my father thought I should spend my first two university years at a college that trains officers for the Royal Canadian Navy, because tuition was free, I would get free room and board, and it would make a man of me. My father saw it as a good step towards upward social (and moral!) mobility. Happily my eyesight was not good enough for me to be accepted. So I had the moral luck not to have to make a choice between a fight with my family and enrolling in the naval college.

In recent years, we have been won over to a great deal of folk-genetics. Yes, we have an essence, and it is in our genes! The book *Not in our Genes*, by Richard Lewontin *et al.* (1984), is a good antidote to a lot of folk-genetics. Certainly some

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things are in our genes. My moral luck about the navy, a consequence of being myopic, was a consequence of a trait inherited from my father. I have passed it on to two of my children; I do not think it will contribute to the moral luck of either of them.

Happily there is a great deal of disagreement over the proportion of 'me' that I owe to my genes: eyesight yes, but what else? It is hardly a new debate. For well over a century we have explicitly debated the proportion between nature and nurture, between the innate and the acquired. It is an odd fact that each of these, in whatever proportion, tends to a kind of essentialist determinism. Part of a person is determined by his neurological and physiological inheritance. Another part is determined by social circumstances, nourishment, education, youthful encounters, and, some say, by fœtal experiences. Certainly by fœtal deprivations or poisonings (fœtal alcohol syndrome), which takes us back to the physiological and the neurological. I have no interest in debating the innate versus the acquired, for they reinforce each other all the time. The important thing is not to be overwhelmed by a sense of determinism. Rather we need, in the present cultural climate of genetic determinism, to emphasize the extent to which we make real choices all the time.

When we are led by philosophers to discuss choice, especially in the "existential" mode, we too often think of rather exalted examples. We need instead to be ordinary. Neurologists teach that our taste for sweets is innate, while the taste for cream is acquired. We can, nevertheless, resist the temptation to eat a sweet chocolate, just as we can resist the temptation to pour thick cream over a fruit pie. I experience no difference between the *innate* temptation and the *acquired* one. And it is a choice to resist both, or to resist only one, or to enjoy both the sweet and the creamy. Such is the banality of daily choice.

Now take more difficult examples. Mothers love their children. Evolutionary psychology teaches that mothers have been selected to bond with their infants at birth and to be tending and loving. That is useful both for conserving the species and for the mother to transmit her genes to her offspring. Nurturing mothers are strongly reinforced in all societies: the social and the genetic are once again relentless allies. But infanticide is not unknown, and is probably far more common among us than is usually acknowledged. Dysfunctional mothers are all too well known to social workers: mothers who are indifferent, who neglect their babies, who batter them, who sexually abuse them. That is a sad reality that is *not* determined either by genes or by environment. I do not suggest that these unhappy mothers have somehow chosen to be cruel. Not at all, except in the rare case of monstrous parents. But the women have made little choices, day after day, which end in these tragedies. The little choices are often made in unbearable circumstances of poverty, abusive husbands, or post-birth depression. But they are choices all the same.

Other mothers make different choices. Jane Frances de Chantal (1572-1641, canonized in 1767) was a devoted mother of six children. When the youngest son was seven she decided to take up a religious form of life, and founded a nunnery close to the monastery of her intimate friend Francis de Sales (1567-1622, canonized in 1665). Her youngest boy lay down across the threshold of the house begging his mother not to leave. To which she replied to this effect: "I have fulfilled my duties to my family and now I am going to found a convent close to but a decent distance from the monastery of my counsellor and friend". (Or so says a sound but old hagiography, which ends by reminding us that she is more for our admiration, than our emulation.) There is an act that can be presented as a big decision, but, like the decisions of the sorry delinquent mothers, it is only one in a chain of little choices. Some may celebrate Jane Frances as a saint or as the grandmother of that greatest of letter writers, Madame de Sévigné, but her extraordinary choices are just choices among innumerable choices we all, saints and sinners, make every day.

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Complementary accounts of "making up people"

The genes of an individual determine the extreme limits of possibilities, they are a genetic envelope. It is however choices that create one's character, one's veritable essence, one's soul. Here is a credo for an existentialism without dogma for our time: Our genetic essence is not our essence: our essence is not in our genes, despite the technological novelties that abound, that come to our attention daily. The possibilities that are open to one, one's character and potentialities, are formed during one's life, even if for many they become petrified at an early age. As Sartre well knew, at any place and time only some possibilities even make sense. So we pass to the next question. *How is the space of possible and actual action determined not just by physical and social barriers and opportunities, but also by the ways in which we conceptualize and realize who we are and what we may be, in this here and now?*

After a previous lecture I was asked a question about the sociologist Erving Goffman. Those two almost exact contemporaries, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Erving Goffman (1922-1982), imply curiously complementary answers to the question just posed. We can think of them as working at opposite poles, Foucault with a notion of discourse in the abstract, and Goffman with face-to-face interaction[4].

Both began with the extreme case, how people are made up in what Goffman called total institutions: prisons, mental hospitals, concentration camps, monasteries, boarding schools, naval vessels. In 1961 these two men published extraordinary works on madness and its institutions (*Asylums* and *Histoire de la folie*), both of which can be regarded, in Foucault's multivalent phrase, as books about the constitution of the subject. This morning I shall not explain how one can combine ideas from both men. It is clear that my first lecture derived far more from Foucault than Goffman. I would be happy to ascribe some sort of sociological nominalism to Goffman, but he never would have liked that label, whereas I quoted Foucault's talk of historical nominalism[5]. Which takes me to the advertised topic of this lecture.

Nietzsche on names

§ 58. *Only as creators*! — There is something that causes me the greatest difficulty, and continues to do so without relief: unspeakably more depends on *what things are called* than on what they are. The reputation, name, and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for — originally almost always wrong and arbitrary, thrown over things like a dress and altogether foreign to their nature and even to their skin — all this grows from generation unto generation, merely because people believe in it, until it gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body: what at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably, the essence and is *effective* as such! Only a fool would think it was enough to point to this misty mantle of illusion in order to destroy the world that counts as essential, so-called '*reality*'! We can destroy only as creators! — But let us not forget this either: it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new 'things' (Nietzsche, 1964, § 58).

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[4] For more on this theme, see "Between Michel Foucault and Erving Goffman: Between discourse in the abstract and face-to-face interaction" (Hacking, 2004).
[5] The reference is to a passage in Michel Foucault's review of John Dover, *Homosexualité grecque*, the translation of *Greek Homosexuality*, in *Libération*, 1 June 1982 (Foucault, 1994, p. 315-316).

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One main point of this aphorism is, as its heading states: only as creators. A sub-theme then must be that we can undo a named idea only by creating some positive concept in its place. Deconstruction for its own sake is self-indulgent play. It is, however, for the other thought that I single out this passage: unspeakably more depends on *what things are called* than on what they are. And: it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create new "things".

Making up people is a special case of Nietzsche's phenomenon, that is, of the way in which so much depends on what things are called. But I am lacking in spirit; I am a feeble thinker indeed, compared to Nietzsche. I cannot believe that "*more* depends on what things are called than on what they are". My sense of reality is too strong to go down the road towards linguistic idealism. Moreover a major theme of my previous lectures was that the relevant interactions involve more than names and things. They involve at the least knowledge, institutions, and experts. I should have added, the family of discourses in which these are embedded, discourses in which both experts and many publics participate. Today such discourses, as was remarked by Sandra Caponi in a question, involve various types of media. A few years ago it was television; now it is the internet. Sometimes the discourses are spearheaded by such media.

To repeat, the interactions that interest us involve far more than names and things. We could speak of *the cardinal vice of philosophers*: putting all the weight on words and things. Think indeed of titles, Quine's *Word and Object*, Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*. In mitigation of the latter, let me say at once that he originally intended this book to be his 'book about signs', and moreover, when he started to analyse his own implicit methodology, in *L'Archéologie du Savoir* (Foucault, 1999), he presented a much richer framework than words and things.

My concern with making up people is far less sweeping than Nietzsche's, but, to mimic his own words, it has caused me the greatest difficulty these twenty years. Some time ago I quoted §58 at length in the paper of mine on autism that is translated into Portuguese (Hacking, 2006b). In that paper, originally written in French several years ago, I was already using autism as a sort of test case for thinking about Nietzsche's remarks. Turning to cases in what matters, which is why I spoke about obesity and autism in my two previous lectures. But here I would like to conclude with some more general reflections on nominalism, and my own version that I call dynamic nominalism.

Advice from Taoism

Philosophers of many traditions have been fascinated by names. I do not have any expertise on Chinese philosophy, but occasionally I read a little. The founder of Taoism was of course Lao Tzu, reputed author of the *Tao Te Ching*; the second most important figure was Chuang Tzu, who probably lived from about 365 to 290 BC. That was during what is called the period of the Warring States, when the Chou dynasty had splintered into several sub-nations constantly at war with each other. Various texts are ascribed to Chuang Tzu, of which the so-called *Inner Chapters* are taken, by scholars, to be really his work, even if modified by his successors in the Taoist tradition. I do not pretend to understand them. I merely take two remarkable translated sentences out of context:

(1) A name is only the guest of reality (Chuang Tzu, 1998, p. 7).[6]

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[6] For the record, Pär Lagerkvist (1891-1974), Nobel Prize for literature 1951, published his autobiographical novel *Guest of Reality* in 1925 (Lagerkvist, 1967). For a discussion of Chuang Tzu even more out of context than mine, see Mark Berkson (1996).

Pause to reflect on this. It is a beautiful saying, quite regardless of what Chuang Tzu meant, or of whether it is a correct translation of a Chinese sentence written 2300 years ago. It is important to the history of Chinese philosophy, to know exactly what Chuang Tzu meant, but whatever he meant, that English sentence is remarkably powerful, all by itself, out of context.

We usually think that misinterpretation is a terrible thing. We ought to find out what the sage really meant! So we should, but we should also welcome innovative misinterpretations that endure. Pierre Hadot (2006, p. 14) has said that "To write the history of thought is sometimes to write the history of series of misinterpretations". He was telling the history of an even older adage attributed to Heraclitus, "Nature likes to hide". Nature herself is said to evolve by fruitful mistranscriptions of genetic code. Misinterpretation can, on occasion, be more creative than merely sound interpretation.

Whatever I say about a name being the guest of reality will probably be a misinterpretation of what is possibly a mistranslation of what is possibly an incorrectly transcribed ancient sentence. That does not bother me. As it stands, (i) is exquisite; it also makes you think. I hear it, first, as a strong commitment to a reality, wholly independent of, and prior to, naming, classification, and any human intellectual activity. Reality is just there, and occasionally it welcomes this or that name as a good fit – but only as a guest.

That idea is not exactly "realism" in any of the usual philosophical senses. We might say that it is truly, deeply, realist, or even mystically realist, expressing a profound *respect* for what is. A few pages on, however, we read another sentence that seems to be a radical expression of nominalism:

(2) Naming things makes them real (Chuang Tzu, 1998, p. 23).

That sounds just like Nietzsche! What follows next, however, immediately changes the tone.

Why real? Real because *real*. Why nonreal? Nonreal because *nonreal*. So the real is originally there in things, and the sufficient is originally there in things. There's nothing that is not real, and nothing that is not sufficient (Chuang Tzu, 1998, p. 23).

I shall take all this to express what I might call "really-real realism", or, better, "really-realism". Unlike scholastic realism, which expresses a commitment to the "reality" of universals, concepts, and classes, these aphorisms appear to express a profound respect for a reality that stands complete, no matter what humans do or think.

Perhaps an English-speaking 21ˢᵗ century analytic philosopher can see (1) and (2) as compatible in this way: a complete reality is prior to any conceptualization. When a name is a welcome guest of that reality, it picks out a thing, or a kind of thing, which is thereby real because it is a guest of that complete reality. The same philosopher may suggest that the ancient sage thinks of the complete reality as the ground of what we say and know about things, but at the same time rejects the European Enlightenment bid to provide foundations for knowledge in "reality" or by "reference" to reality. This brings Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche surprisingly close together.

John Stuart Mill: name-ism

Nothing could be much further from the Tao than John Stuart Mill, the Victorian reformer and philosopher of liberalism. But he has a view about naming that can

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be interpreted or misinterpreted as a helpful interpretation or misinterpretation of Chuang Tzu. Early in his *System of Logic* he wrote that the differences among things,

> are made by nature [...] while the recognition of those differences as grounds for classification and of naming, is [...] the act of man (Mill, 1843, section I.vii.4).

Mill is altogether realist about differences between things. But he is thoroughly nominalist about things that are classed according to their differences. In fact I call him a name-ist. Classes do not exist, in Mill's philosophy, until they are named.

Chuang Tzu and Mill ride well together, if only by wilful misinterpretation of both. The former teaches,

> (3) Naming things makes them real (Chuang Tzu, 1998. p. 23).

Let us hear this as the idea that giving a name to some kind, makes that kind real, at least in the discourse that is being used. Then Mill would express this idea by the thought that naming classes brings those classes into being.

On the other hand consider the other side of Chuang Tzu's paradox,

> (4) A name is only the guest of reality.

Mill might gloss this as saying that differences among things are what is real, what is outside us, what, in our myths about reality, is the given. When we human beings recognize differences as grounds for classification and naming, we are guests of that reality. Our acts of recognition and naming are ephemeral, the "act of man", or rather I would prefer to say, the work of human beings.

Mill's nominalism about classes

Differences are real, but the recognition of differences as grounds for classification and naming is the act of human beings. For Mill, that is a strong statement of nominalism *about classes*. Classes do not exist (in nature or anywhere else) on their own; they are mere guests of reality. Mill is a name-ist about classes: only after classes are named, is there any sense in which they exist. Mill was in this matter at one with Bertrand Russell. The differences, in terms of which classes may be defined, do exist, but the classes, as Russell was later to conceptualize it, are logical constructions to which we annex names.

Quine and Goodman were more radical, more profoundly nominal than Mill and Russell: "We do not believe in abstract entities. No one supposes that abstract entities – classes, relations, properties, etc. – exist in space-time, but we mean more than this. We renounce them altogether" (Goodman and Quine, 1947, p. 105). That was in 1947; Quine later recanted. They called their joint paper, "Steps toward a constructive nominalism". It is more "nominal", as one might put it, than Mill or Russell, because it renounces properties. Goodman, and Quine in 1947, would probably have counted what Mill calls differences between things, as the possession of different properties between things, and so they would have renounced Mill's "differences" too.

Not classical ontology – for me

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There is no great agreement on exactly which philosophical doctrines are referred to by the names "nominalism" and "realism". The very term "nominalism"

is not an ancient one; it appears to have been first used by Spanish scholastics in a text of 1492, the very year that Spanish sailors first encountered the New World. We can cheerfully report that William of Ockham was a nominalist, even though he died 150 years before the label "nominalist" was invented. Nevertheless scholars today debate exactly what Okham's doctrine was. A brief dictionary entry says that he "rejected the reality of universal concepts". You could spend the rest of your life trying to figure out exactly what that means. But clearly there is some attitude in common between the views attributed to Ockham and those that I read in, or into, Mill, Russell, Quine, and Goodman. They all want to reject the reality of something, at some level, and the something to be renounced is different from individual things.

In my opinion we should think of nominalism more as an attitude, a state of mind, than as a specific doctrine. Assuredly mediaeval Paris was full of nominalists, as were the Spanish centres of learning where the very name was invented. Nevertheless, there is some truth in saying that nominalist attitudes seem curiously to have flourished in the British Isles, and thus we have a tradition of British nominalists such as Ockham, Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Russell, and Austin. A tradition nobly continued, of course, by their American successors, such as Quine and Goodman.

We could say that ontology, understood in a classical way, has to do with what very general kinds of things are real. Nominalists are those who have no problem in general with the reality of individual things, but who want to reject or renounce the free-standing reality of items that they find more abstract, less directly tied to individual things. In such a manner, Mill thought that classes have no reality over and above their recognition and naming by people. Russell thought that classes are logical constructions.

If we were to take renunciation as the mark of nominalism, it would be misleading to call myself what I have long called myself, a "dynamic nominalist". I do not want to renounce anything. Indeed since I do not even grasp the concept of "reality" in any general philosophical sense, there is no class of objects of which I want to "reject the reality". Renunciation is for sterner minds than the likes of mine.

There is another sense of the words, in which I am not misleading when I call myself a dynamic nominalist. I share the nominalist attitude that names have effects, and are not mere labels for pre-existing entities. For example: there are differences among the ways in which children develop. In 1943 Leo Kanner recognized a particularly unusual and uncomfortable group of such differences, and took them to be grounds for a new classification and naming, that is, what he called infantile autism. But Mill would have stopped there. His nominalism, like all standard nominalism, was static, ahistorical, out of time. I have suggested in my previous lectures, and in my earlier paper in Portuguese, that the classification of autists has had a remarkable dialectical history, so that whereas autism was once rare in children it is now announced to be "common", and thus paraded in the media. I have also suggested that this process has been a dialectic involving (a) the name "autism" or at any rate the concept of autism, which has been stretched to form the autistic spectrum; (b) autistic individuals; (c) knowledge about autism and autists; (d) experts who acquire and develop such knowledge; and (e) the institutions within which the experts have authority, and also the institutions that try to bring autistic children closer to "normality". Perhaps you can also at once see why I am not disturbed when someone says, "You are not some kind of nominalist but some kind of realist, you are a dialectical realist".

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