Why are there names?

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In this talk I will take familiar observations about the "directness" of the reference of names – which have become something of an orthodoxy in philosophy today – for granted. In other words, for the purposes of this talk, I will simply assume that a name with a descriptive content simply would not be a name. Even though it may look like a name phonetically, it will hide a quantificational structure underneath, in the mental representations underlying it on the relevant occasion of use. What then is the answer to my title question? One answer appeals to pragmatic utility in communication. However, even if the observations leading to this intuitive claim are right, it is clear that names may be useful, without their utility being the cause of their existence. In fact, I argue, that would be rather expected. The existence of names over and above descriptions is a universal design feature of human languages, apparently, and it is not likely independent of their structural make-up. The latter however is not standardly assumed to have a rationale in functional utility. While communicative efficiency may well be the reason for why human languages spread so rapidly once they existed, it is not likely the rationale of their existence (Carstairs-McCarthy 1999, Uriagereka 1998). More generally, in these post-Lamarckian times we have come to expect that organisms do not adapt to their environment and its selective pressures by growing appropriate traits. Adaptation is the *indirect* effect of crucially *undirected* mutations, on the one hand, and natural selection, on the other.

I argue that names have a solely *internalist* rationale in the structures that human syntax, whatever the latter's origins, provide. This is to say that purely structural features of the mental representations underlying ordinary language use are responsible for there being names over and above descriptions. Concretely, we have to look at the structure of the determiner phrase, and we see that human syntax of itself provides the options necessary for certain modes of reference to exist.

The argument centrally uses Longobardi's (1994) study of the syntax of proper names, which departs from the basic generalization that nominals in argument position need to be introduced by a determiner (D). This generalizations is as such false for most languages, in particular it is false for bare nominals such as bare plurals, mass nouns, and proper names (when occurring determinerless). Hence there is a question of why these three constructions should be allowed to occur determinerless. This is particularly surprising in the light of the fact that bare plurals and mass nouns plausibly contain a hidden D that arguably receives a *default existential* interpretation. Such a hidden D, with that interpretation, is not what we need in the case of proper names, on the other hand, which differ in other respects, too, for example scope respects. Some writers, such as Burge in early work and more recently Elugardo (2002), have argued that the determinerlessness of names is perhaps a mere surface phenomenon, in the sense that all bare names contain a *hidden* determiner. But I argue that this cannot be right, as names together with determiners typically give rise to contrastive readings, as in *This Tyson strikes me as a sad memory of his former self*, in which case the directness effect is gone (the latter is crucially not

created, it seems, by the presence of a demonstrative as Burge thought). The directness effect, to the extent that we have evidence for it, thus speaks against the presence of hidden determiners, and there are other considerations too.

An interesting complication for this conclusion are "affective" demonstratives, as in *That Thatcher was a pain for England*, which need not be read contrastively, or descriptively. While that complication has to be taken care of separately, I follow Longobardi in explaining the directness effect on the basis of his theory of a forced movement of names in N to D. If the name vacates N in logical form, rather than providing a domain for a variable bound by a quantifier in D to range over, reference is not determined by means of an operator-variable structure, but directly, in D itself. This is to assume, with Chomsky (1995) that D is the locus of reference, a suggestion that in the minimalist framework comes to the suggestion that there is a REF-feature in D that needs to be eventually "checked" by means of a transformation in the course of the derivation. If Longobardi is right, it can be checked in the two ways just mentioned (by an operator, or by the N itself through a move), and the two ways correspond to two different semantic modes of reference. In particular, if there is no place for a quantifier to bind a variable, the name itself being in D, direct reference falls out as a consequence from a syntactic operations. So does rigidity. For if the syntactic form has no room for descriptive concepts in terms of which the human mind analyzes its object of reference on an occasion according to various parts or properties that it has, there is nothing in the mental representations underlying the name that could vary as we move from world to world.

This gives a concrete empirical content to the claim that names have an internalist rationale in N-to-D movement. While Longobardi points out that his theory "supports the causal theory of reference" deriving from the work of Kripke, I cannot read but his theory as suggesting that causation actually plays *no role* in explaining the specific referential modality of names.

I discuss Longobardi's theory in view of these implications, extend it tentatively to pronouns, and defend it against recent objections by Segal (2002), who, I argue, refutes Longobardi (and Burge) for the wrong reasons. Methodologically, my conclusion suggests that reference is no lexical matter at all (words in the technical sense of lexical items to which syntactic operations have not yet applied, do not as such refer). Indeed, there are *many* referential modalities that a name like *Goethe* can on an occasion have, and each of these depend on specific syntactic configurations. In particular, *Goethe* can refer to a mass, as in *Es gibt noch viel Goethe zu entdecken*, or to a Goethe-stage, as in *The early Goethe is more popular than the rest*. The option of direct reference, as in *Goethe is the greatest German writer ever*, is just one among many.

This will raise the objection in all these occurrences, the name *Goethe* as such, no matter its syntactic environment, still always refers to the same thing. The Goethe-stage, say, is still a stage of Goethe. But while all agree that *Goethe* refers to Goethe, the question now is what this thing *is* (supposing it is an external physical object, as standardly assumed). An answer might be: the referent is an assembly of matter persisting in its rough mode of organization during such-and-such a space-time continuum, disregarding substantive changes. But it might also be that the referent is a memory that living people today have. Still other native speakers intuit that the needed referent is a history of exgesis, together with historical texts. It is interesting that ordinary speakers diverge radically on the putative worldly referents of the words they unproblematically use, a fact that suggests that the meaning of names has actually little to do with the *actual physical* nature of their objects of reference (a point that Chomsky 2000 emphasizes). Thus if it

turned out in an experiment that *Bill Gates* was nothing but a visual illusion, we would read in the papers that *Bill Gates proved a visual illusion*, in which, I take it, the name *Bill Gates* is used exactly as it was before, and with the same meaning (*he* has acquired this novel and striking property). It thus seems that over and above the technical arguments above, the prospects for a causal-externalist theory of names look rather grim – crucially with no such implication as that there is no such thing as the directness effect. For the latter has the internalist rationale described above.

As long as we assume that a measure for semantic complexity is *syntactic* complexity, it is plausible to suggest that in human languages reference *starts* where the mental representations underlying the use of the name is *least* complex: the name is inserted in N, stays there, and has a hidden determiner. The second stage is where the determiner becomes overt, and the user has now the resources to mentally configure an object of reference that is not an indefinite amount of Goethe-mass, but a specific Goethe, as in *the early Goethe*. We encounter the same transition when moving from talking about *chicken* to *a chicken* or *chickens*, the latter two expressions also being linguistically more complex from the former. The stage, finally, where we have direct reference is in this hierarchy the last and most complex, as it has to be configured through a syntactic transformation. If we read the "hierarchy of reference" in this way off the syntactic form and how it gradually complexifies, this shows that we must rethink our intuition that somehow *a chicken* – an individual object – is semantically more basic than the stuff it is made of, namely chicken. Similarly, we must rethink our intuition that the direct referent of Goethe, whatever it is, is more basic than the Goethe-mass. *Linguistically*, individual-specific reference is *more* complex than a generic or mass-reference.

We should not be surprised about such a conclusion, though, as the intuition about the priority of "substances" or individual objects may simply derive from an instinctive empiricism that we should have become suspicious about long since. Only for the empiricist should external individual objects that we encounter with our sensorium and that we stand in causal relations with, be the source of the meaning of names. For the rationalist, it is simply not surprising that what kind of thing something like *Goethe* refers to on an occasion, after being selected from the mental lexicon, cannot be understood but from the workings of the mind itself.

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