Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Madeline Jaye Kahn   March 23, 2013

An Exploration of the Name from a Philosophical Perspective

by

Madeline Jaye Kahn

Donald Phillip Verene
Adviser

Donald Phillip Verene

Adviser

Frederick Marcus

Committee Member

David Blumenthal

Committee Member

March 23, 2013

An Exploration of the Name from a Philosophical Perspective

By

Madeline Jaye Kahn

Donald Phillip Verene

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Philosophy

2013

Abstract

An Exploration of the Name from a Philosophical Perspective

By Madeline Jaye Kahn

This thesis will discuss the role of the name in language and the power it holds, through an exploration of the formation of language and the name's connection to religion. Citing two accounts of the history of language development, according to Giambattista Vico and Ernst Cassirer, the name proves to be the first element of articulate, spoken language. It was first uttered in conjunction with identification of a god. This utterance, prompted by a particular thought, was only possible once man was able to escape from an immediate understanding of his environment, and engage in the acts of *reflection* and *recognition*. Through a symbolic understanding of the world, man was able to create a universal language, and assign names to all things. These names would eventually become categories, which allowed for a more particular and advanced understanding of the things in man's experience. The power the name holds is evident in its employment, and is seen most astoundingly within a religious context. Men of different religions across the world recognize the significance of the name, as their accounts of creation, legends of gods, their ability to speak the names of gods, and naming of one another all stemmed from the idea of the power of names and naming. This thesis finds that the name is not only the fundamental building block of language, but once learned is a tool for uses ranging between a greater understanding of the world to the invoking of the spirit of an ancestor. The name is frequently overlooked in the study of language and theology, and it is primarily the connection between the two that highlights its significance.

An Exploration of the Name from a Philosophical Perspective

By

Madeline Jaye Kahn

Donald Phillip Verene

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Department of Philosophy

2013

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

1

Introduction

Spoken language, as a phenomenon of communication, has given man an incredible tool. Over thousands of years, many different languages have developed and evolved to meet the growing cognitive capacities of man. Students studying language today learn how to manipulate words in order to most efficiently convey their ideas. The power of language comes from using it as an instrument to communicate man's ideas and thoughts. However, from a philosophical perspective, the power inherent in spoken language lies throughout this method of communication, down to the word itself. This thesis will discuss how the words of spoken language originally took form, how these forms contributed to human epistemological development, the power inherent in these forms, and how man has utilized these forms to gain power himself.

I claim that the foundation of language lies in the name. The name is the form that allowed human consciousness to reach a higher level. I argue that all words, in that they refer to specific, perceptible things, are names. Both Giambattista Vico's *New Science* and the third volume of Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* offer accounts of the origin of language and its advancement over time. Each author discusses the act of naming, the connection between all words man knows today and names, and the level of consciousness necessary in order for humans to achieve spoken language. Both authors, but Cassirer in particular, discuss the power of names and naming, both in an historical and religious context.

Cassirer and Vico believe that the creation and use of names gave man dominance over his environment. Before names were developed, there was no knowledge of the particular things

in the human experience. Man experienced the world in a state of immediacy. He drew no connections between like or unlike things, and could not make sense of things in his environment. The introduction of names allowed man to make references to things, to draw conclusions, and to make his environment comprehensible.

The link between names and religion is very intriguing as well, and will be explored in the second half of this text. Due to the observable connection between names and the divine, I have included a section on the Maimonidean perspective of names. In Judaism, there is particular protocol regarding the usage of the names of God. In his book, *The Guide of the Perplexed,* Maimonides lists many names of God and explains their use in terms of God's essence and man's perception. He discusses the power of the names of God in terms of human knowledge. Contemplating a selected few of God's names can lead to a greater understanding of the concept of existence. Conversely, some of His names are beyond human comprehension, and are not permissible to know or hear. The discussion of the names of God from a Jewish perspective contributes to an overall understanding of the power of names.

In his book *Language and Myth*, Cassirer collects an extensive list of systems of belief and religions that refer to the concept of the name. Each system attributes power to the name, many include fables of gods who used the name for purposes of creation and power. The name of a god can be used to invoke the god's presence. Furthermore, the names of people serve the same function. Names of ancestors have been used to invoke the deceased's spirits. This power of the name has been considered across cultures in the naming of children.

Theories of names are closely intertwined with theories of knowledge. The ability to engage in linguistic representation, and the function of naming itself, lend insight into human

consciousness. Names have evolved according to the methods through which man perceives the world, and they have allowed man to reach an evolved understanding of the human experience. Their power reaches beyond what is typically considered. Perhaps awareness of the role of names in history of human development and consciousness will allow man to manipulate language to reach a higher level of understand things in his experience in the future.

Animal Language

In this exploration of language, it will first be necessary to establish that language is unique to the human experience. According to both Vico and Cassirer, language is a distinctively human faculty. Aristotle says that man is a rational and social animal. He is also the only animal capable of laughing and imitating. Man is the *animal symbolicum*, according to Cassirer, meaning man's desire for expression leads him to manifest his thoughts. Human language, according to Cassirer, allowed man to remove himself from the conditions of his immediate experience, and to become an active being within his reality.

As this paper will explain, the phenomenon of articulate language of man has allowed him to become dominant over his environment, through the act of naming and the development of categorical understanding. Cassirer explains, "…it would be an error to transfer with any immediacy to the world of animals the schema in which human perception can be applied."[1] Cassirer says that the animal is limited to "particular moments" and "single perceptive situations."[2] The animal is a passive entity that is forced to dwell in the realm of immediacy. It

---

[1] Ernst Cassirer. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, vol. 3,* trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1976), 63. Hereafter cited as *PSF*.

[2] *PSF*, 340.

neither possesses the cognitive capacity to understand its surroundings in abstraction nor in particularity. It does not possess the linguistic capacity to organize its thoughts and expressions. Therefore, the fundamental act of naming, which leads to the development of articulate language, is not found amongst animals. While animals do communicate with one another, the only being who truly possesses language is man.

Cassirer cites the communication method of bees in his discussion of animal consciousness. He explains that bees communicate ideas by "means of distinct signs," physically moving to indicate direction to his fellow bees in search of food.[3] Humans were once limited to the use of gesture, according to Vico, during the age of mute language. However, humans have been able to develop the power of expression to a much more complex level. Both Cassirer and Vico offer a wealth of information on the history of the development of language, which will be germane to the understanding of names and naming across time.

---

[3] Ibid.

1

The Evolution of Language

1.1

Vico's Perspective

According to Vico, man exists within the current stage of a cycle of consciousness that has previously experienced two ages-an age of gods and an age of heroes. Each age is characterized by different manners of thinking and communicating. During the age of gods, man governed himself according to the word of the "auspices" or "oracles." "Aristocratic commonwealths" characterized the age of heroes, and a feeling of "superiority of nature which they [the heroes] held themselves to have over the plebs" contributed to the mindset of the age. In our most recent stage, according to Vico, men view each other as equals in "human nature," and this view has contributed to our current methods of communication.[4]

Those who lived during the age of gods used a language of "mute signs and physical objects" which bore "natural relations" to the idea of the thing to be expressed.[5] This language was almost completely without sound or articulation.[6] One used the physical gesture of pointing

---

[4] Giambattista Vico. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1948), 18.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 134.

to indicate and identify things without the benefit of language with sound.[7] This was the age during which hieroglyphics were used to represent religious ideas.[8]

In the age of heroes, man graduated from gesture to sign as an alternate method of identification and communication of things and ideas. One communicated by means of using "heroic emblems, or similitude's, comparisons, images, metaphors and natural descriptions." The language was a blend of articulate and mute communication.[9] Vico says that these symbols in their abstract nature caused great difficulty in communication amongst humans. The confusion surrounding the different meanings of the term *logos* lessens when one considers that "word" and "idea," as well as "word" and "deed" were once one in the same.[10]

The language of man consists of words upon which all people have agreed, and over which humans are supremely dominant. It is mostly articulate, with a very little amount of mute communication. Vico asserts that, for the purposes of man's consciousness and perception of language, "there are not more things than it [language of man] has words for."[11] Everything early man experienced through his senses, he named. The language of this age is referred to as "vulgar," in that it is the vernacular of the people. From Cassirer's perspective, perhaps Vico's vulgar language would signal the transition from abstract to particular thought.

---

[7] Ibid., 115.

[8] Ibid., 18.

[9] Ibid., 134.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

Vico asserts that the beings of these three ages have the same origin, meaning their ancestry can be traced back to a single point. He refers to the common quality of imagination shared between men of all three ages. Indeed, it was man who used his imagination to form the ideas of gods, and believed man's nature to be a mixture of the divine and the human, forming the heroic.[12] The methods of communication through the ages, then, bear the same origin as well. All language shares a beginning. And, like Cassirer, Vico explains the shift to using articulate language with man's compelling desire for expression.

Man began to use articulate language when he first heard the clap of thunder. Vico describes "wonder" awakening man when he heard the sound for the first time, and was able to identify it as a particular entity in his experience. This sensory perception prompted the first concrete thought in the history of what Vico refers to as the "gentile" world, or the age of man. Man's instinct was to attribute divine nature to the noise. He believed a god embodied of the thunderbolt, itself. Articulate language, then, prompted by the human desire for expression, took shape in the form of onomatopoeia.[13]

Man heard the noise of thunder and imitated it, uttering the interjections "pa!," and "pape!" Vico describes these words as "sounds articulated under the impetus of violent passions." It is from this experience that the name *father* was formed.[14] According to Vico, language developed through a cycle of three ages; and, language began with onomatopoeic expression of a name of the divine. Man gave a name to the first thing he had the desire to

---

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid., 135.

express once he was able to form a concrete idea, man successively named other things in his experience, according to the divine nature of each.

1.2

Cassirer's Perspective

In the third volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer describes the development of language in terms of a transition in man's modes of thinking. Language came about when man ceased to think in abstract terms and began to think in specific terms. He evolved to a state of contemplation of the particular nature of things in his experience. Each thing perceived was no longer considered completely unique in its nature, but was a part of a category of things that shared like qualities and had common essences. However, man was able to express his thoughts on particular things only after the things were named. Things needed names in order to be comprehended. This shift in thinking marked not only a transition in man's cognitive and communicative capacities, but in his perception of reality, as well.

Before beginning to communicate and experience reality in the form we do today, Humans experienced reality in terms of mythical consciousness. From this perspective, "there is [still] no such cleft between the actual reality of perception and the world of mythical fantasy."[15] The world of fantasy to which Cassirer is referring is one in which there is no distinction between an image of a thing and the thing itself.[16] Expressive *perception* limited man to an understanding of phenomena as possessing "character[s]" that do not correspond to a category of

---

[15] *PSF*, 61.

[16] *PSF*, 69.

things, but exist belonging to the thing immediately"[17]A being that exhibited courageous behavior was not simply god-like, but was the actual embodiment of the god of courage. Distinct entities and things apart from gods were only perceptible to man when he escaped the realm of immediacy, and definite classes of things outside the realm of fantasy were able to be established. However, during this time, reality could only be understood and communicated through use of the expressive function, as Vico explained with his account of the naming of thunder.[18]

In reality, Cassirer explains, each thing perceptible to man possesses an "expressive value" or a *daimon*, which is not determined by the subject observing it, but is inherent in the thing itself.[19] These expressive values lie at the root of human consciousness, and are present in mythical thinking. The values can be negative or positive, and exist in the thing itself, and not as godly presentations of happiness, courageousness, fearfulness, etc. Perhaps Cassirer's notion of expressive values relates to Vico's idea of the *Mental Dictionary*, which will be discussed later in this paper. Vico believes that things in themselves possess inherent essences and meanings to which all men, regardless of language, are able to relate in the same manner. Cassirer would agree with Vico, in that he believes in a universal method of interpretation of things in the human experience. Symbols, embedded within human consciousness, are common to all men, and permit categorization of things based on their fundamental significance. While these symbols were a part of mythical thinking, communication of the significance of things was only able to be expressed through language. It was not until man developed the representative function and the

---

[17] *PSF*, 73.

[18] Ibid., 71.

[19] Ibid., 72.

ability to create and use names that man could categorize things and make sense of his environment.

In order to obtain logical understanding of man's surroundings and to be able to communicate ideas, humans were compelled to establish definite linguistic representations to which things and their values correspond. This required man to go beyond mythical consciousness in order to move towards the theoretical.[20] Cassirer says these two worlds are "mutually exclusive: the beginning of one is equivalent to the end of another."[21] The expressive, then, was traded for the representative for the sake of greater understanding of the human experience. The following section will further explicate Cassirer's idea of symbols previously addressed.

---

[20] *PSF.*, 78.

[21] Ibid.

3

The Act of Naming

2.1

Vico's Perspective

Vico continues his discussion of language with an historical account of man's giving of names to things in his surroundings. As it is described from Cassirer's perspective, the development of such names occurred through man's ability to recognize distinctions between things and create categories. Cassirer's notion of the origin of human thought as taking its roots in mythical consciousness coincides with Vico's view on the beginning of thought and speech. Vico says primitive man believed the sky, earth and sea were "animate divinities," existing as gods in themselves.[22] Although Vico does not directly refer to it, it seems he is saying that man engaged in the act of reflection once he was able to attain articulate language, and used this faculty to categorize things in his environment according to their characteristics. Vico says,

> This is the way in which the theological poets apprehended Jove, Cybele or Berecynthia, and Neptune, for examples, and, at first mutely point- ing, explained them as substances of the sky, the earth and the sea, which they imagined to be animate divinities and were therefore true to their senses in believing them to be gods. By means of these three divinities, in accordance with what we have said above concerning poetic characters, they explained every thing appertaining to the sky, the earth and the sea. And similarly by means of the other divinities they signified the other kinds of things appertaining to each, denoting all flowers for instance by Flora, and all fruits by Pomona.[23]

---

[22] Vico, 115.

[23] Ibid.

All things were once associated with divine beings in both thought and name due to the pervasiveness of this mythical perspective. For example, all things related to the sea bore the name of the sea god, as he, in fact, embodied the things themselves. Name came to signify the essence of the god to whom the thing belonged. The names of gods took the forms of categories to which all related things corresponded. The different names of the gods permitted cognitive and linguistic distinction between different kinds of things. Donald Phillip Verene in his commentary on the *New Science* says, "Through *ingegno* this power of the first name is extended throughout experience. As a name the first men are able to find the universal meaning of thunder as Jove in each repetition of thunder. Through their powers of *ingegno* they are able to name all nature in terms of gods, once one feature is named. All nature is put 'into proper arrangement and relationship'."[24] The human faculty of *ingegno,* meaning the human ability to connect the things causing sensations to greater concepts and ideas, grew tremendously with the introduction of names, and subsequently, categories.

Categories serve dual functions. They serve to unify different things that possess similar characteristics, so that man may make distinctions between things of different kinds as well as identify things that are alike. Therefore, the ability to assign names to things would allow man not only to identify things with greater ease, but would also further cognitive capacities, in that he could learn to mentally organize things more efficiently. The influence of names upon cognitive capacities will be explored in the section on theories of knowledge.

---

[24] Donald Phillip Verene. *Vico's Science of Imagination.* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 171.

As focus shifted away from the divine in cognition and speech, names and their functions began to change. Things began to take on meanings in-themselves as well, rather than existing simply as an extension of the divine. Vico describes the meaning of a name and the manner according to which names were given in ancient Greece and Rome. For the Greeks, the words *name*, *character* and *definition* were synonymous.[25] For the Romans, names referred to the house to which a family belonged, as did the father's names for the Greeks.[26] The name, in its ability to represent, became the closest thing, besides the symbol, to the thing itself. Two things that bare the name of a certain category, though they may differ in appearance, would likely be related by possessing a similar essence. Names are associated with essences, which are defining, underlying characteristics of things that indicate the nature of the thing in itself. These essences are only perceptible, according to Cassirer, through the mythical mind.

Vico, however, believes in a natural relation between the name and the thing it represents, which is likely due to universal human insight into the nature of a thing. He refers to a "sacred language" which Adam, the first man, invented, which was created according to the essences of things. Vico says that God granted Adam "divine onomathesia" in order to "give names to things according to the nature of each."[27] Perhaps Vico is suggesting that there are absolute names to which things correspond which more perfectly capture and communicate the essences of them..

---

[25] Vico, 126.

[26] Vico, 134.

[27] Vico, 115.

Vico further addresses the concept of the underlying essences behind names in his concept of the *Mental Dictionary*. He says there exists a *Mental Dictionary* that can be used to interpret all articulate language of any region in the world.[28] In his book *Vico's Science of Imagination*, Verene says this kind of dictionary is possible through the *sensus comunis*, a sense common to all men.[29] Verene cites Vico's claim that, "Common sense is a judgment without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation or the entire human race."[30] This type of judgment comes from the human faculty of *fantasia*.[31] Within the imagination, there exist universal archetypes with which all humans can identify. Vico refers to them as *imaginative universals*. The origin of universal thoughts can be found within the memory of man.

Human thought is organized on a primordial level by *topoi*, mental categories or places, which exist within the memory.[32] Vico says that human memory functions through the repeated perception of causes and effects,[33] a similar concept to Cassirer's notion of recollection. It is represented in "archaic speech" which stirs up images to which men universally relate.[34] The *imaginative universals* existing within the memory and organized by the *topoi* allow for the same judgments to be made between humans across time.

---

[28] Vico., 20.

[29] Verene, 176.

[30] Vico, 57 as cited in Verene, 177.

[31] Verene, 177.

[32] Verene, 187.

[33] Vico 301, 345 as cited in Verene, 187.

[34] Verene, 187.

Vico cites the concept of mythology to illustrate evidence of this consistency across cultures. Verene comments, "The thought of the origin is uniform from nation to nation…The gods have different names but they become gods by a common act of thought."[35] The names are used as representations of the original thought; and, in order to communicate ideas about the gods amongst men to achieve a common understanding, the names men use must correspond to the *lingua mentale comune*, the universal mental language, common to all men. According to Verene, "Fundamental human communication depends upon us making touch with [this] common mental language in a direct fashion".[36] He continues, "Words and meanings are conjoined in a kind of first language of imagination, of imaginative universals."[37] Therefore, the meanings behind names, though they may be in different languages, would evoke the same mental images and emotions in each human due to universal mental structures at the primordial level, leading to a common understanding of the name's significance.

2.2

Cassirer's Perspective

The act of naming allows one to transcend the immediacy of his surroundings by assigning specific rather than abstract meanings to concepts and things in one's experience. Cassirer explains the manifestation of the representative function in a child, in order for him to engage in naming and to use language. He says, "When the representative function of names has thus dawned on a child, his whole inner attitude toward reality has changed-a fundamentally new

---

[35] Verene, 177.

[36] Verene, 178.

[37] Ibid.

relation between subject and object has come into being. Only now do the objects which hitherto

acted directly on the emotions and will begin in a sense to recede into the distance: into a

distance where they can be "looked at," "intuited," in which they can be actualized in their

spatial outlines and independent qualitative determinations."[38] Once a child is given the power

of utilizing names, his perception of the world changes. He is permitted to make distinctions and

draw conclusions about his environment.

In uttering a name, the child gains dominance over the thing to which the name

corresponds. He can assign meaning to the thing at hand, and understand it not as an abstraction,

but as best as it can be understood as a distinct thing in human consciousness. The process of

creating and assigning names to things has deep roots in the history of human consciousness, and

Cassirer takes his readers back to the level of primordial knowledge and communication, what

Vico refers to as the ages of gods and heroes.

Cassirer describes the act of naming as first coming about through the initial letting go of

the idea of the image as actual, and engaging in the acts of recognition and reflection.[39] It is

through reflection upon one's environment that one can "find again."[40] One is able to recognize

the unifying characteristics of things in one's experience, and recognize that multiple things can

be of the same kind.[41] For example, one sees that both a flat-surfaced object at school and a flat-

surfaced object at home holds books. Once "found again" an object that shares the same

---

[38] *PSF*, 113.

[39] *PSF*, 114-15.

[40] *PSF*, 114.

[41] Ibid.

function as the former, and can be used to label other things that share this function. Names, however, do not only serve to categorize the human environment, but actually reshape our perceptions of things. Names allow us to create and change meanings attached to the linguistic symbols.

Cassirer writes, "language cannot simply designate given impressions or representations: the sheer act of naming always comprises a change of form, an intellectual transposition. We have seen that this transposition becomes more and more pronounced as language progresses, as it comes into its own."[42] The name takes on a life of its own once it is spoken. Its power lies in its ability to represent the thing at hand. Cassirer explains, "For the name becomes a name only through its power to designate and signify something. To take away this function is to take away its whole character as a name and reduce it to a mere sensuous sound."[43] The life of the name exists within the varying meanings of names, as exact signification of names varies between men.

On the whole, names allow humans to share a mutual experience with their environment by providing universal, predefined categories to mediate our perceptions. Language is currently at an evolved state where almost all things already are organized into names, which seem to have distinct meanings of things to which the names correspond, but linguistic symbols posses different meanings for different individuals. Each individual assigns his own meaning to a name

---

[42] *PSF.*, 413.

[43] *PSF.*, 291.

and can understand it in a variety of ways, based upon how he as an individual categorizes his environment. It is this "free play of signification" that gives the name its power, as well.[44]

Cassirer explains the power names have through his discussion of their origin in human consciousness, as well as their implementation in the human experience. Humans evolved past the level of expressive consciousness, which was limiting in that it only permitted communication and understanding in terms of what was immediately accessible. In this evolution mythical method was replaced by the representative function. This transformation allowed humans to begin to reflect upon their environment and "find again" things that shared similar characteristics. The act of recognition assigned distinct meanings to individual entities and allowed humans dominance over their environment. The power to name things allowed humans to make logical and scientific conclusion about things in their experience. The names humans used to designate and label these things, however, are subject to change over time, based upon social perception of the name. The name can then be used as a powerful instrument to label others in a choice manner based on social perception of the name. The ability to name gave humans power, and subsequently, the name took on power itself.

---

[44] *PSF.*, 337.

4

The Role of the Name in the Theory of Knowledge

3.1

Vico's Perspective

With reference to Vico's thoughts governing his theories on language, Verene says Vico

believes, "The beginning of the human world is tied to the beginning of languages and letters."[45]

Although human consciousness has now evolved to a level of articulate thought and speech, man

previously cycled through two ages in which he utilized a different method of thinking. Man's

first thought was poetic in nature. It was a type of knowledge Vico refered to as, "*sapienza*

poetica," which was present during the ages of gods and heroes.[46] Poetic wisdom required an

imaginative perspective of the world. Vico believed that man was able to use his imagination to

actually see the gods during their ruling age. Men were able to obtain a more mutual

understanding of things, as they held an awareness of their *sensus comunis*, meaning common

sense, or sense common to all men.[47] This idea of a common sense relates to the notion of the

---

[45] Verene, 65.

[46] Verene, 195, 65.

[47] Verene, 196.

topoi (or symbols from Cassirer's perspective) that govern man's perception of things, and with which today's man has lost touch.

Verene believes that Vico's work is "a kind of wisdom in an age dominated by the barbarism of reflection."[48] Man's way of thinking in the current age primarily centers on "technical procedure."[49] Man has reduced the *imaginative universals* of thought to technical particulars that prohibit an abstract understanding of concepts. All awareness of the connection between the archetypes of consciousness and their presence in man's speech and cognition is lost. Verene cites Jacques Ellul's philosophy of technology to explain how the current way of understanding the world is restrictive to humans, epistemologically.

In terms of man's knowledge of his surroundings, Ellul believes man is limited to an awareness of the "systems of order" he creates and perceives.[50] With man's desire for more efficient thinking, and understanding of the particular, came this technical method of perception, which functions according to the principles of logic. All things in perception then became "procedural," and man now sees only what is logically permitted. All imaginative insight is lost for the sake of a more effective way of understanding the particular. The nature of things was transformed, and was only perceptible from the intellectual framework that requires an identification of "cause and effect."[51] Vico's *New Science* and the study of theories of

---

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Verene, 198.

[51] Verene, 148.

knowledge must be considered within the context of this new "human mentality," which is inhibited by the development and application of human logic.

In terms of language and the theory of knowledge, Verene cites Vico, saying, "And history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also narrates them."[52] Verene explains, "Since the human is the maker of the world in which he exists, he can be the certain knower of the world. His account of the human world will be *vera narratio,* or true speech; it will be like the natural speech through which the mind originally gives form to the world."[53] As was previously stated, the origin of speech was in the act of naming. Just as the name gave form to the world through its ability to make things communicable and distinct, the way in which man talks about the world gives it meaning. Man determines the significance of things in his experience.

3.2

Cassirer's Perspective

In reference to language and thought, Cassirer says, "There is undeniably a thinking without words, such thinking remains far more confined within the particular, within what is given here and now, than is true of linguistic thinking. It is in linguistic thinking that the concept rises clearly over the sphere of perception and intuition."[54] Perception was an immediate, passive phenomenon, and man was "receptive" rather than "selective" in his experience of his

---

[52] Vico, 93.

[53] Verene, 156.

[54] *PSF,* 331.

environment.[55] Man took in sensory information passively, and was not able to integrate it into a system of knowledge that would allow him to gain enough understanding of things to act upon or manipulate them. Cassirer says, "Man can act upon the world only by breaking it into pieces-by dissecting it into separate spheres of action and objects of action."[56] For man to evolve, some sort of representation of *particular* thought was necessary, as it is "only through representation" that "the world of senses" can "be molded into a world of intuition and perception."[57] The mythical way of thinking, however, limited man to an imagistic rather than linguistic understanding of things. Images were the principle method of understanding and communicating before articulate language.

Although it seems that imagistic consciousness is an archaic and obsolete method of comprehending the world, man continues to utilize his connection to the symbol, even in the age of articulate language. Cassirer says, "The submerging of the contents of mythical consciousness does not signify the end of the spiritual function in which they originated."[58] Symbols have retained functionality across time, as man has used them to guide him in his acts of judgment. Man must recognize the significance of symbols within his conscience, in that, "..into every mode of positing reality there enters a definite motif of symbolic formation which must be recognized as such. …"[59] Symbols are significant still, in that they are mental

---

[55] *PSF*, 291.

[56] *PSF*, 36.

[57] *PSF*., 330.

[58] *PSF*., 79.

[59] *PSF*., 87.

checkpoints through which sensations or perceptions must pass in the process of forming ideas. Perhaps they play a role in the processing of names, and the understanding of their significance.

Although thinking in imagistic symbols inhibits a more evolved manner of thinking, Cassirer finds perception "embraces an originally symbolic element," which allows man to use his intuition to categorize his environment.[60] Man desires to make sense of the things in his surroundings, and does so by synthesizing input sensory information into an integrative whole for the purposes of greater understanding. "Ultimately," he says, "thought seeks to fit all particular propositions, all particular conceptual structure into a unitary and all-inclusive intellectual context."[61] Man creates thought from the "realm of symbols" by "draw[ing] up the schemata" which classify incoming information.[62] Like Vico and his notion of the *topoi*, Cassirer believes that humans draw upon these ancient symbols when forming thoughts. They exist as universal archetypes amongst men across time, and they lie at the foundation of consciousness. Cassirer says, "there is always an obscure remainder" from language "which seems to defy all metaphysical thought."[63] It seems Cassirer is saying that there is some intuitive connection to the understanding of a word that cannot be explained, but likely stems from symbolic consciousness. If names are at the root of all language, this connection functions for names as well. Man's understanding of names is predicated upon symbolic consciousness, as well.

---

[60] *PSF.*, 232.

[61] *PSF.*, 284.

[62] Ibid.

[63] *PSF.*, 91

Once articulate language was introduced, the human mind could work in terms of

particulars rather than universals. With the decline of the age of mythical thinking, man

developed "an urge to give life to and personify" things around himself.[64] Although intuition is

more influenced by then symbol than the word, the word possesses an "ephemeral quality"

which allows ideas and things to take on specific, individual meanings based on the "context of

speech," rather than simply as products of symbolic inference.[65] Cassirer says, "The word of

language differs from the sensuous, intuitive image precisely in that it is no longer weighted

down, so to speak, with a sensuous matter of its own."[66] He explains the benefit of the

movement from symbols to words, saying:

> Considered in its mere sensuous content, it [the word] appears volatile and
> indeterminate, a mere breath of air. But from the standpoint of the pure
> representative function precisely this intangible, ephemeral quality is also the
> basis of its superiority over the immediate, sensuous contents. For the word, one
> might say, no longer possesses any independent, self-subsistent mass which
> might offer resistance to the energy of relational thinking. The word is open to
> every form which thought wishes to imprint upon it, for it is in itself no
> independent being, no concrete, substantial thing, but first takes its meaning
> from the predicative sentence and from the context of speech.[67]

In leaving the mythical realm, man lost his awareness of the symbolic character of the thing, but

gained the ability to "give form to this world" through language.[68] With the word came names

for things, and subsequently, the linguistic development of the category. Man no longer needed

---

[64] *PSF.*, 76.

[65] *PSF.*, 330

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] *PSF,* 331.

to point, as Vico said was once necessary, in order for man to distinguish between or to associate things related to one another. From an epistemological perspective, language gave man a greater potential for knowledge. He gained the ability to state "universal characteristics" which all things in a certain class possess, and to classify them accordingly. The power of names, however, is not limited to raising man up to become a dominant, intelligent force. The names of things beyond the human experience, such as the names of gods, are seen to hold great power over humans as well.

5

The Power of the Name in Religion

4.1

Cassirer's Perspective

Cassirer traces the connection between names and religion in his discussion of the foundations of language and the power of names. In his book *Language and Myth*, Cassirer describes the "Word," written with a capital letter, as, "a sort of primary force in which all being and doing originate."[69] As was previously discussed, Cassirer believes in the relationship between mythical thought and language. The mythical thoughts are contained within the Word, and endow the word with its power.[70] He explains the power of the Word in referencing different accounts of creation, accounts of ethics, accounts of the soul and of essence across religions and systems of belief.

---

[69] Ernst Cassirer. *Language and Myth,* trans. Susanne K. Langer, (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), 45. Hereafter cited as *LM*.

[70] Ibid.

In various accounts of creation, the Word is seen to be a powerful entity. Cassirer references Konrad T. Preuss' recognition of the similarity between a text of the Uitoto and the opening passage of St. John, which states, "In the beginning, the Word gave the Father his origin."[71] In Egyptian theology, the creation-god, Ptah, is the ruler of both "the heart and the tongue." Being and the essences of things originated in the thoughts and words of the creator.[72] The word was an "instrument of creation."[73]

Cassirer further explicates the power of the Word in his reference to religions that place the duality of good and evil at the foundation of their system of ethics.[74] He says these religions "venerate the spoken word as the primary force by whose sole agency Chaos was transformed into an ethico-religious cosmos."[75] He offers a story of the Zoroastrian religion, in which personified Good and Evil fight. Good is able to defeat Evil by saying a prayer of twenty-one words. Evil "falls to his knees" and is rendered defenseless by the end of the prayer.[76] The word is more powerful than the god entities themselves. It was the Word that allowed Good to overcome Evil, and metaphorically, establish an ethical framework for religion.

---

[71] Konrad Theodor Preuss. *Religion und Mythologie der Uitoto*, I, 25 f.; II, 659. Cited by Cassirer in *LM*, 45.

[72] Alexandre Moret. *Mysteres Egyptiens* (Paris: 1913), 118ff. 138. Cited by Cassirer in *LM*, 46.

[73] *LM*, 46.

[74] *LM*, 47.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Justi, Ferdinand. *Der Bundehesh zum ersten Male herausgegeben, (*Leipzig, 1869), Chap. 1, p. 3. Cited by Cassirer in *LM*, 47.

Cassirer goes on to address the power of knowledge of a name, especially that of a deity. He cites Brinton's *Religions of Primitive Peoples* in saying, as the Word is first in origin, it is also supreme in power. Often it is the *name* of the deity, rather than the god himself that seems to be the real source of knowledge. Knowledge of the name gives him who knows it mastery over the being and the will of the god.[77] Cassirer says the Egyptian people believe in the "supremacy" and "magic power" of the name. In the Egyptian legend of the gods Isis and Ra, it is said that Isis gained power over Ra and all other gods by persuading him to tell her his name.[78] The power of names extends to the fate of the soul in the afterlife, as well. In death, according to the Egyptians, the soul must journey to Death's kingdom; and it is only through knowledge of the "names of the gatekeepers in the netherworld" that one is able to pass through the gates leading to the soul's final destination.[79] Perhaps it is that the name encompasses the essence of the being, and to learn the name is to understand the essence of the thing or being, and thereby to gain power over it.

Due to this inherent power of names, man was limited in his ability to speak the names of beings who were powerful in themselves. The practice of refraining from uttering the "Holy Name" was common in both Jewish, as was previously mentioned, and Greek societies. Cassirer says, "And the further a Being's power extends, the more mythic potency and "significance" he embodies, the greater is the sphere of influence of his name. The rule of secrecy, therefore, applies first and foremost to the Holy Name; for the mention of it would immediately release all

---

[77] *LM*, 48.

[78] Ibid.

[79] *LM*, 49.

the powers inherent in the god himself".[80] According to Albrecht Deitrich, author of *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, "The fact that the name functions as a proxy for its bearer and to speak the name may be equal to calling a person into being; that a name is feared because it is a real power."[81] Deitrich says that knowledge of a name gives the one who knows it the power that the name holds.[82]

Cassirer believes this idea relates to the recitations of early Christians. The Christians wrote and practiced their prayers, saying the phrases "In God's name" or "in Christ's name" versus "in God" or in Christ. The bible says "where there are two or three gathered in my name, there am I in the mist of them.[83] Perhaps in praying "in the name" of God, man is attempting to invoke His presence to bring himself closer to God. Jews cannot utter his real name, for His power is beyond human control.

4.2

Maimonides' Perspective

Through the exploration of the foundations of the name, Vico explains that the first name ever given was the name of the god Jove. It was the first articulate thought that entered into the human mind. The mythical mind believed that gods inhabited all things in man's experience,

---

[80] Hopfner, Theodor. *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber : mit einer eingehenden Darstellung des griechisch-synkretistischen Daemonenglaubens und der Voraussetzungen und Mittel des Zaubers überhaupt und der magischen Divination im besonderen* (Leipzig, 1886),. 179. Cited by Cassirer in *LM,* 53.

[81] Albert Dieterich. *Eine Mithrasliturgie (*Leipzig, 1908) 111, 114. Cited by Cassirer in *LM,* 54.

[82] *LM*, 54.

[83] Ibid.

and such things were named accordingly. It has previously been established that to give a name

to something is to give it life. Man's desire to name things originates from his urge to personify

and anthropomorphize the things in his experience. The names of gods, then, are of utmost

importance as they underlie all names of things that followed.

From a Jewish perspective, the names of God are recognized to be of great importance, as

well. Moises Maimonides offers his insight into the significance of the Hebrew names of God in

his book *The Guide of the Perplexed*. God has many names that correspond to different

meanings. All the names of God in scripture, reserving one, arose from His actions.[84] They

reference the attributes humans perceive as belonging to God, denoting his perfection.[85] The

name *Shaddai* is translated to mean "he who is sufficient."[86] God is not dependent upon

anything, and exists in sufficient manner, independently from his creation.[87] He is known in

Hebrew as "rock," "strength,"[88] "almighty," "righteous," and "merciful," among many others

names, which Maimonides describes as "apellatives" and "derivatives."[89] None of these

attributes or qualities, however, can be used to properly address God, for the names here are

---

[84] Moses Maimonides. *The Guide of the Perplexed of Maimonides Part I*, trans. M. Friedlander
(New York: Hebrew Publishing Co,1886), 226.

[85] Maimonides, 229.

[86] Ibid., 240.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., 228.

attributable to qualities of humans, and God possesses his own essence and nature.[90] He is

beyond whatever name a human could give him. It is simply the fault of human comprehension

that forces man to give God names which do not accurately describe him.

There is one name, however, that attempts to capture the essence of God. It is known as

the *Shem ha-meforesh* or the Tetragrammaton.[91] The name is comprised of four Hebrew letters:

yod, hé, vau, and *hé.*[92] The combination of these letters usually signifies being in the past,

present or future. In the Hebrew language, indications of pronunciation or vowels in the form of

dots and dashes above or below the letter are necessary in knowing how to pronounce the letters.

In this name, however, there are no indications of pronunciation or vowels; therefore, there is no

way to pronounce it. It is assumed, then, that the name was once pronounced to mean "Absolute

existence."[93] Only the high or sacerdotal priests of ancient times were able to say the name in the

holiest of circumstances. It is the only name, however, that captures the essence of God, in that

it speaks to his existence being beyond human conception and speech.

There are two other names of God that were said to come much closer to capturing his

essence, but are lost today. There is one of twelve and one of forty-two letters, which likely

referred to metaphysical ideas.[94] The name of twelve letters was used as a substitution for the

---

[90] Ibid., 221.

[91] Ibid., 226, 228.

[92] Ibid., 228.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid., 234.

Tetragrammaton, at a time after one of the high priests passed away.[95] The name of forty-two

letters was likely a phrase, and was said to be "exceedingly holy."[96] Only those who were

extremely virtuous were permitted to know the name. Maimonides says that many people

believed that pronunciation of the letters of the name would allow a person to reach a

transcendent state. Although Maimonides discounts this theory and calls these people foolish, it

is interesting that these people are still not permitted to know the essence-bearing names of God.

It seems that either it is too disrespectful for someone who is not righteous to know and say the

name, or that knowing the name would give the person some sort of powerful, metaphysical

knowledge. The fact that the name imparts esoteric knowledge of God might compel one to

think that the name of God itself is powerful, and that knowledge of it would give the knower

power as well.

The name of God is discussed further in Maimonides' account of Moses and his teaching

of God to the Israelites. Moses asks God's for help in conveying the existence of God to the

people. Moses says to God, "And they shall say unto me, what is his name? What shall I say

unto them?".[97] Maimonides explains that Moses did not imply that the Israelites were ignorant

of God's existence, so instead he says they were ignorant of his name.[98] God gives Moses the

name *Ehyeh asher Ehyeh* to give to the people, which means "the existing Being which is the

existing Being."[99] The people were to contemplate the name, and understand the absolute nature

---

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid., 236.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., 239.

of God's existence. In Judaism, then, one of the first functions of the name of God was for purposes of proof of his existence.

In relation to Vico's theory of history, the people during the age of gods categorized things in their environments according to their divine names. During the age in which Moses existed, things in man's environment could not have been named according to the names of God, at least not for the Jewish people. Not only were the Jews monotheists, but they had no knowledge whatsoever of the true names of God. It could have been the attributes of God that man recognized, and was then prompted to use to name things in his environment. However, for the Jews, language did not begin with the name of their God, for no one knew his name. It is clear, though, that names are associated with evolution of consciousness and knowledge, as man was able to conceive of God through the contemplation of his names.

The names of God are esoteric knowledge, and may be a link to a level of higher understanding, in that contemplation of a name allows man to understand a complicated metaphysical concept.

4.3

The Power of Man's Name

In the domain of mythical thinking, one's name is one's possession and exists in conjunction with one's ego and sense of self.[100] Cassirer says, "the name is what first makes man an individual."[101] A man's name establishes his individual natures as unique and distinct. Many

---

[100] *LM*, 50.

[101] *LM*, 51.

families across time have engaged in the practice of naming a child after a relative, deceased or living. According to Jean André Cuoq, a surveyor of the Algonquin people, two men who bear the same name are each others' "alter ego."[102] A child who bears the same name as one of his ancestors is believed to be an actual reincarnation of that ancestor.[103] This act of naming somehow invokes the spirit of the deceased and causes the spirit to inhabit the child's body. This custom is referenced in the Jewish practice of naming children, as well. The Ashkenazic Jews do not name a child after a living person. The implication is that the one who names a child after one of the living wishes the living person were dead.[104] The name is property of individual, and to use it is to rob it from him. It is to alter his essence.

As mythical man traversed the stages of his life, his name changed with him. From the mythical perspective, personality was fluid. It evolved and changed with man as he matured.[105] Therefore, man received a new name upon reaching new stages of his life. When a man's personality changed, as it did when faced with the ever-changing circumstances of life, the man became, in essence, a different person. Cassirer notes that in mythical times, when a boy reached puberty, he was given a new name, and was "reborn" as one of his ancestors.[106] A man who was sick might have changed his name to an appellation of a more frightening connotation in order to

---

[102] Friedrich Giesebrecht. *Die alttestamentliche Schätzung des Gottesnamens in ihrer religionsgeschichtlichen Grundlage* (Königsberg, 1901), 89. Cited by Cassirer in *LM, 51.*

[103] *LM*, 51.

[104] B'rit Avot 8:20, as cited by Eliezer Posner of Chabad.org. See bibliography.

[105] *LM*, 51.

[106] *LM*, 51-2.

frighten and confuse Death.[107] The act of naming of men served to redefine and re-recognize the

self and others in a world of immediacy and constant change.

---

[107] *LM*, 52.

Conclusion

As names and their functions were cultivated, knowledge as a whole grew amongst men. With the introduction of names came words and categories, and thus a categorical understanding of things in the human experience. This type of understanding transformed knowledge from the realm of the universal to the particular. Knowing and understanding particular things gave man the ability to become a dominant and active entity in his environment, taking him out of the realm of mythical immediacy and into the current age, in which man has become a creator through words. Man has been able to give form and significance to things in his reality through names and the act of naming.

Furthermore, the name itself became powerful. Names grew in signification as man used them to make sense of his surroundings. Man gained more awareness of things, as he was able to integrate what he saw into named categories. The name, then, gained power in its ability to convey significance. However, the name limited man in terms of his cognitive capacities. It would seem that a more efficient understanding of the human experience would allow man's cognitive capacities to grow. Mythical thinking allowed man to take a more imaginative, creative approach to perception. Perhaps mythical thinking was the key to understanding the essence of a thing. Furthermore, all men could once obtain a mutual understanding of the significance of a particular thing because the structure of the human mind was, and continues to be, constant between men, regardless of place or time. However, man has lost his ability to connect with the internal significance of things due to man's preoccupation with worldly logic. Perception has become restricted to only what the name will allow man to perceive.

From a religious perspective, the names of the gods hold substantial powers of control and understanding. Many different religions tell stories of the power of names. Man used names for functions such as: invoking the spirits of the dead, distinguishing between good and evil and taking power over evil, guiding him in the afterlife, and attempting to call God's presence into the human world. The names of gods and men alike are possessions of their owners, and relate directly to the owner's spirit and ego. As is evidenced in the practice of naming children after the deceased, it is thought that to know a name and employ it is to take power over the being to which the name corresponds. For this reason, some names of God are not to be spoken in the Jewish faith. In Judaism, God has many names, which are personified attributes of God. The knowledge of those names which are able to be spoken will allow man to contemplate and obtain a conceptual understanding of God's existence. The knowledge of the names of gods and men is power.

In his examination of the transition of consciousness, Cassirer cites Wilhelm Humbolt's definition of language, which classifies it as "the eternally repeated effort of the spirit to make the articulated sound capable of expressing thought."[108] The spirit is compelled to give names to things and ideas to appease man's desire for expression. Cassirer says, "Language lives in a world of denominations, of phonetic symbols, with which it links definite meanings-it holds fast to the unity and determinacy of these denominations, and thereby the manifold sensory experiences which it strives to grasp and signalize take on a relative stability and come to a kind of standstill. It is the *name* which introduces the first factor of constancy and permanence into this manifold; the identity of the name is the preliminary step, an anticipation of the identity of

---

[108] *PSF*, 15.

the logical concept."[109] It is, then, through the act of naming that man gains a sense of control

over his environment

---

[109] *PSF*, 14.

Bibliography

Cassirer, Ernst. *Language and Myth*. Trans. Susanne K. Langer. New York: Dover

Publications, 1953.

Cassirer, Ernst. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, Trans. Ralph Manheim.

Yale UP, 1976.

Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide of the Perplexed of Maimonides Part I.* Trans. M. Friedlander.

New York: Hebrew Publishing Co, 1881.

Posner, Eliezer. "Can a Child be Named After a Living Person?." Chabad.org. 2013.

Verene, Donald Phillip. *Vico's Science of Imagination.* Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981.

Vico, Giambattista. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*. Trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and

Max Harold Fisch. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1948.