

Introduction

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Names have fascinated thinkers for thousands of years, perhaps, one might say, ever since they were first given. Their special linguistic status and philosophical properties alike have intrigued ancient philosophers and modern linguists and psychologists, from Plato to Searle, so to speak, and that intellectual challenge has not worn off in the waning decades of the twentieth century. As a result, there have been theories aplenty, mostly concerned with the phenomenon of individuation, the question of meaning, the grammar of names, and their role as signs. In the last fifty years, an emancipated discipline called onomastics has developed its own strategies and theoretical stances in the study of names and has added new insights to those of the philosopher, the psychologist, and the linguist. The study of names has become respectable and respected for its own sake; its handmaiden status is, on the whole, a thing of the past.

In spite of all this intellectual activity and scholarly maneuvering, in spite of the attention which names have received from the best minds, in spite of the valid abstractions and systemic propositions which have been put forward with great persuasiveness and solid underpinning, it is probably true to say that we do not as yet have what could with justification be called a "Theory of Names" or "Theories of Names." What we are rather confronted with is a plethora of "theories about names," depending on the background and special interests of each theorist. In our own time, names like Gardiner, Pulgram, Searle, and Algeo come to mind, to mention only some of the very best work which has been done in the English-speaking world, in this respect. Their ideas overlap in places, clash in others, and, by and large, complement and curb each other by illuminating or emphasizing different aspects of what we have come to call the Onomastic Sciences. They are building blocks toward a "Theory of Names" if, indeed, such an eventuality will ever come about.

The articles in this special issue of *Names* have to be understood in a similar fashion. They are intended to be contributions to onomastic theory, without being in themselves fully-fledged or generally viable theories. The selection of contributors has been influenced by three major considerations: First and foremost, the quality of thought displayed; second, the variety of approaches adopted; and third,

the inclusion of internationally prominent scholars in the field whose work is perhaps less known to American readers although they are widely published in their own countries and on the international scene. For this last reason, Denmark's Vibeke Dalbert, Sweden's Bengt Pamp, and Belgium's Willy Van Langendonck are here represented alongside North America's John Algeo and J. Fisher Solomon. Several determined efforts to secure also a contribution from a German-speaking country have unfortunately failed. The special editor regrets this very much, because much exciting work in onomastics has recently been done in the two Germanys, Switzerland, and Austria, but since lack of time was the major reason given by those approached, it will perhaps be possible to include an article from a German-speaking author in a future issue of *Names*.

It is our hope that the views put forward by the contributors will challenge afresh the thinking of those who make it their business and their pleasure to think about names. While there is nothing in these articles that merely reiterates well-worn opinions, there is also nothing in them that is meant to startle through the impact of its innovations alone. If the cases they present are well enough reasoned and documented to be acceptable to those who are, within the context of their own high standards, willing to be persuaded, the major purpose of this issue will have been achieved, for the study of names in our time will have been enhanced.