

The Naming of Facts¹

Achille C. Varzi, Columbia University

[Final version in *Analysis*, 72 (2012), 322–323]

The Naming of Facts is a difficult matter,
 It isn't just one of your holiday games;
 You may think at first I'm as mad as a hatter
 When I tell you, a fact may have TWO DIFFERENT NAMES.
 First of all, there's the name that we tend to use daily,
 Which is simply a 'that'-clause, as in 'that she kissed James'
 Or 'that Victor and Jonathan met with Bill Bailey'—
 These are just normal sentences turned into names.
 The fancier solutions, which are often applied,
 Involve a gerundive, as in 'her kissing James',
 Where the verb is alive (still) and kicking inside:²
 These are not perfect nominals—yet perfect fact names.
 Indeed, if you go for a name that's less fake,
 A name that will not like a sentence behave,
 There's a danger, I tell you, that you will mistake
 The fact that she kissed for the kiss that she gave.³
 Remember what J. (a philosopher) claims,
 Viz. that facts are more copious than that which is done:
 Her kissing James tenderly and her kissing James
 Are two, while the kiss—which was tender—was one.⁴
 But above and beyond there's the practical matter
 That the naming of facts can continue for aye;
 For the name that you use can grow fatter and fatter
 If you don't pay attention in this delicate play.
 When you fix on a fact in profound meditation,
 The reason, believe me, is always the same
 As your mind will engage in this rapt realization:
 THAT the fact THAT the fact THAT each fact has a name
 Has a name has a name
 Has itself its own name—
 Silly inscrutable singular Name.

¹ After T. S. Eliot, 'The Naming of Cats', in his *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, London: Faber and Faber, 1939.

² From Z. Vendler, 'Facts and Events', in his *Linguistics in Philosophy*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 131.

³ Cp. F. Ramsey, 'Facts and Propositions', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. 7 (1927), 153–170, at p. 156.

⁴ Namely, J. Bennett, *Events and Their Names*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, at pp. 78–79.