An Interpretation of Proper Name References Based on "Principality of Existence" Theory

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important philosophical problems, at least in tradition of analytical philosophy, is the problem of proper names' references. This paper intends to represent a new interpretation of the reference of proper names based on the theory of Principality of Existence developed by Mulla Sadra. He has mentioned the differences between nominal existence and infinitive existence. The latter is an abstract concept of being while nominal existence is the principal reality or the fact of things that has a real and a mental appearance. In Islamic Philosophy context we can consider the real appearance as essence (dhat) which is indeed special limitation of nominal existence and makes the entity of an existent like X. On the other hand mental appearance could be considered as quiddity (mahiyyah) which has an epistemic aspect re-presenter of essence. On this basis this paper argues that the proposition "X exists" could be turn to "nominal existence is X" and the nominal existence, as the unchangeable fact, would be the best alternative of a proper name's reference. Also, changes on properties of an entity are caused by changes on limitations of existence without any on the reference of proper names.

Keywords: Existence, Individual Essence, Principality of Existence, Proper Names, Quiddity

As a result of Kripke's Direct Reference Theory, proper names must be the rigid designator (Kripke 1980: 72-81). In other words, when ones name, "Albert Einstein," the entity of Einstein, the name "Albert Einstein" predicates his entity in all possible worlds where Albert Einstein would exist. Hence, Einstein must be Einstein in Wi, a possible world, as it is in Wa, actual world even if he would lose some of his definite descriptions like "The Founder of Theory of Relativity". Consequently, an important question arises: "What is this thing called "Albert Einstein"?" Addressing this guides Kripke and his followers to a kind of essentialism which states what individual essence of one called "Albert Einstein" is (Hull 1984: 110-112). The fundamental issue, consequently, is about the interpretation of an individual essence which is not variable in possible worlds.

Individual essence, taken generally, is the qualified entity for essential descriptions. Kripke acknowledges the difficulty, in some cases impossibility, of a perfect identification of essential descriptions except mathematical entities. In other words, recognition of sufficient conditions would be impossible in order to consider a description an essential description. However, the origin of things can be represented as a necessary condition. One can suppose, for instance, possible world Wi with a person who is completely identical with Albert Einstein except for his parents. Indeed, one cannot say "he is Albert Einstein" in this case inasmuch as his origin differs fundamentally from that of Einstein. It seems, however, that what Kripke went through, i.e. elucidation of individual essence by essential descriptions, does not clarify individual essence for the readers, but merely states what could be essential description and what could not be so.

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The present paper intends to take a reverse direction concentrating mainly on individual essence as existence or appearance of existence and to represent an interpretation of individual essence based on "Principality of Existence" theory. Essential descriptions, hereinafter, could be known as following the recognition of existence and individual essence.

"Principality of Existence" (Asalat Wujud) is undoubtedly Mulla Sadra's most prominent philosophical achievement which was the key for Islamic philosopher during the post-classical era. However, the writer has come up with a version of principality of existence theory that is slightly different from Mulla Sadra's version. Understanding "Principality of Existence" theory, however, based on familiarity with three key terms mentioned: Quiddity, Individual Essence and Existence. Quiddity and individual essence in Islamic philosophers' works constantly refer to the term `*Mahiyyah'*. Since using one term for two referents breeds misunderstandings and ambiguities in this theory, the writer tries to wipe away this problematic equivocation through analyzing the terms and cautioning against their usage.

Considering "Albert Einstein" again, it could be analyzed through the following three questions and proper answers. They can be explained in details as follows:

1. What is "Albert Einstein"? It is a human.
2. Who is he? He is Albert Einstein.
3. Does Albert Einstein exist? Yes, he exists (Or no, he doesn't exist).

Quiddity

Question (a) is about what ones Quiddity is called. Apart from Plato's views on the Archetypes, one can consider Quiddity as a set of descriptions shown by Q. Members of Q, however, would be inductively identified and can more or less depend on the speaker's intention. For instance, following one's knowledge regarding to Adam, Eve, Able, and etc. one can abstract common descriptions like corporeality, growth, volitional movement and reason, and also consider them as members of a set called Quiddity of Human shown by QH. Considering $p_1, p_2, \ldots p_n$ as members of QH, grammatical reform, the proposition "Albert Einstein is human." would then be true if and only if all propositions "Albert Einstein is p_1" and "Albert Einstein is p_2" and ... "Albert Einstein is p_n" are true.

Meanwhile, the proposition "Albert Einstein is animal." could be true as an answer to question (a) when $p_1, p_2, \ldots p_k$ ($k \leq n$) are members of Q_A (Quiddity of Animals) assuming that propositions "Albert Einstein is p_1" and "Albert Einstein is p_2" and ... "Albert Einstein is p_k" are true. Similarly, the proposition "Albert Einstein is German (as a human race)", could be true as another answer to question (a) when $p_1, p_2 \ldots p_t$ ($n \leq t$) are members of Q_G (Quiddity of German) supposing "Albert Einstein is p_1" and "Albert Einstein is p_2" and ... "Albert Einstein is p_t" are true. The relationship between Q_A, Q_H and Q_G in these cases is:

$$Q_A \subseteq Q_H \subseteq Q_G$$

Through inversely extending Q, the number of applied entities by members of Q, would significantly decrease. In other words, if we call the set of objects O, we can write:

$$O_G \subseteq O_H \subseteq O_A$$

On the other hand, since we have an ongoing cognizance of human being properties, there is always a possibility that members of Q_H, for instance, change to $p_1, p_2 \ldots p_n, p_{n+1}$ or more. Therefore, Quiddity can be variable in two aspects: the intention of speaker and changing the number of Q members.

Now, if, supposing, we increase the number of members of Q_H, insofar as Albert Einstein would solely apply to them, we can say the Quiddity of Albert Einstein, and no one else, is the following set:

$$Q_E = \{p_1, p_2 \ldots p_t \ldots p_{t+m}\}$$

In other words, Quiddity can be general (like Q_H) or individual (like Q_E). In other words, we have:

O_H = {Adam, Ave, Able, . . ., Albert Einstein, . . . , x}
O_E = {Albert Einstein}
$Q_H \subseteq Q_E \subseteq O_E \subseteq O_H$

On the other hand, the important thing is that Q can't, undoubtedly, be an empty set, but there is no requirement that Q would be a set of descriptions, which are related to factual existents. Suppose a set of descriptions for winged horses are shown by Q_W, which could be known as Quiddity of winged horses. Q_W is obviously not an empty set, but members of Q_W are descriptions of nonexistent entities. Accepting realization of the sets, Q_W has an appreciation as well as Q_H in regards with the set, while they are different in the sense of some objects (humans) being members of Q_H.

We can also increase the number of members of Q_W hereinafter, Pegasus would solely apply. Say we call the new set Q_P, we shall then have:

$O_W = \varnothing$
$O_P = \varnothing$
$Q_W \subseteq Q_P \Leftrightarrow O_P = O_W$

It seems that in all cases, unlike definite descriptions, essential descriptions of members of O_i must be members of Q_i. For example, members of the set Q_H must be essential descriptions of Human kind like animality and rationality (according to Aristotle's definition), and the set Q_E, moreover, has to consist of essential descriptions of Albert Einstein, analogous to Kripke's view, a special sperm (1980: 113). However, the "Founder of the Theory of Relativity" is not necessary a member of Q_E; it is depended on speaker's intention that the "Founder of the Theory of Relativity" be a member of QE or not. Similarly, "sired by Poseidon" must be one of the members of Q_P, but "pure white color" does not necessarily include in Q_P. Note, even though the latter represents an empty set of factual objects ($O_P=\varnothing$), we can consider some essential descriptions for Pegasus as a fictional object. On the other hand, improving our knowledge about essential descriptions, would reorganize the set Q_i. On this basis Quiddity can't be considered as a reference of proper names because the related object-sets may be empty.

Individual Essence and Existence

We can peruse cases (b) and (c) together. Question (b) is about what is called individual essence and question (c) is about existence. It is very important to note, that the term "existence", in its turn, refers to two referents called nominal existence and infinitival existence. According to Mulla Sadra (1981a: 333) the first is the external reality of existents which is not related to our mind while the second is a mental abstract concept of nominal existences that could be infinitively equal to being. Each of the denotations of existence has its own features; for example, for nominal existence we can refer to the exclusion of non-existence, confirmation of strength and weakness, acceptance of intensity and simplicity, and recognition through intuition. On the other hand, for infinitival existence, we can refer to such characteristics as the capacity for coming together with non-existence in different directions, being general and universal, not being applied to essence.

Differences between two referents of the term "existence" are crucially pondered by this paper because principality of existence theory uses just one of them while another referent's usage, mistakenly, arises some misunderstandings and deflects the subject of this theory (Saeedi & Asadi 2012). It seems that, considering existence as a second order of predication is based on infinitival existence. In this view, existence is a property of an entity which could be nonexistent; so Albert Einstein has the property of "existence" while Pegasus doesn't. In addition, "being of Albert Einstein in Princeton" and "nonbeing of Albert Einstein in Berlin" points to an infinitive meaning of existence due to being and nonbeing agreement for one thing on modality point of view. But nominal existence can't be apart from Albert Einstein at all since it is Albert Einstein itself and separating a thing from itself is obviously meaningless. In principality of existence theory, the referent of term "existence" is nominal existence, certainly, and infinitive existence is just a conception in which reality of things are not to be considered.

On the other hand, unlike Quiddity, which is a type of sets, individual essence is an object that is antecedent to essential descriptions. Therefore, one can answer question (a) by Q_H and even Q_E but we can't use QE for question (b). In context (b), similarly, the answer to question "what is Pegasus?" is not Q_P while in context (a) Q_P is appropriate i.e. Pegasus has an individual Quiddity while it has no individual essence since it is not a factual object. Therefore, there is obviously relevance between individual essence and nominal existence. However, the relationship between them can be categorized in three general cases:

1. Nominal existence and essence are metaphysically separated, but form themselves into an object.
2. They have identity in regards with each other.
3. They are not metaphysically separated but one of them is the other's appearance.

It seems that most of Islamic philosophers before Mulla Sadra had advocated case (1) if their intent of the term "Mahiyyah" had been essence. General argument designed by some Islamic philosophers like Farabi and Avicenna for metaphysical separation of nominal existence and essence has turned over a new leaf as the following (al-Farabi 1984: 47; Avicenna 1996: 96):

1. If nominal existence is not separated from individual essence (Mahiyyah) then a reality would exist whenever we imagine an individual essence.
2. We can imagine an individual essence without being an existent.
3. This is not whenever we imagine an individual essence, the entity exists.
4. Nominal existence is separated from an individual essence

But there are some falsities in this argument. One of them is doubtfulness of individual essence and Quiddity. As explained above, nonexistent entities could have Quiddity. However, they would not have an individual essence and, as the result, line 2 of the above argument could not be a true proposition. For instance, when we imagine Pegasus, a horse sired by Poseidon with two wings and pure white color, indeed we have imagined a set of its descriptions (Q_P), not an individual essence, because a factual individual essence is an object not a set or a concept. In other words, this argument has brought out the separation of Quiddity and existence but it can't be useful to prove the separation of the individual essence and existence. On the other hand, the truth in the first line is suspicious; since in this case, nominal existence's non-separation and individual essence are equal to their identity but "non-separating" is not necessarily equal to "sameness".

Apart from the facilities of this argument, the idea of separating nominal existence and individual essence brings a fundamental challenge. Basically, if nominal existence and individual essence are two different things, they would separate in reality; now the question arises, "what could we say about the existence of individual essence?" Suppose the simple object O_1 that is

formed by the individual essence$_1$ and the nominal existence$_1$. Hence, the following two cases could be considered:

If the individual essence$_1$ had no existence, it would then be nonexistent and so our assumption, i.e. forming O$_1$ from two things, is incorrect where for one of them is nominal existence$_1$while for the other is nonexistent. In other words, O$_1$ is not shaped by the individual essence$_1$ and the nominal existence$_1$, but it is formed only by the presence of the nominal existence$_1$.

If the individual essence$_1$ had an existence different from the nominal existence$_1$, then the individual essence$_1$ could be considered the object O$_2$ which is formed by individual essence$_2$ and nominal existence$_2$. Likewise, the assumption of simplicity of o1 would be contracted, given that individual essence that is formed from the individual essence$_3$ and the nominal existence$_3$ resembles the simple object O$_1$ which is formed by countless existents. Thus, we must leave aside case (1).

Accepting case (2), similarly, raises some debatable questions. If individual essence and nominal existence have an identical entity, then all existential propositions would be tautology. For instance, proposition "Albert Einstein exists" becomes "Albert Einstein is Albert Einstein" whereas the first statement is an informative proposition and could be false, but the second one is a trivial proposition which lacks information, owing to the fact that it is a tautology. Additionally, in proposition "Albert Einstein exists," the subject can also be considered as an individual Quiddity, Q$_E$, propositional content consequently would be the set QE which is not empty. Nevertheless, we are surveying the member of OE at the moment, not Q$_E$. In other words, our subject in proposition "Albert Einstein exists" is a concrete object not a set and "existence" is the first order the predicates here. Therefore, the only way to interpret the relationship between individual essence and existence is the acceptance of case (3) which will be discussed in the following section.

Main Tenor of "Principality of Existence" Theory

The outcome of the previous section could be analyzed by the following propositions:

P$_1$: Each of the simple existents consist two and only two aspects: Nominal existence and individual essence.
P$_2$: (Since, as our assumption, the existent is simple) one of the existence or individual essence must be the reality of the existent (and another is just appearance of the reality).

As a result, we can reach the following possible scenarios:

S$_1$: Individual essence is the reality and the nominal existence is its appearance.
S$_2$: Nominal existence is the reality and the individual essence is its appearance.

Mulla Sadra and his followers have, in several ways, argued that S$_1$ is an impossible scenario and S$_2$ is the only one which can be the reality of things (Mulla Sadra 1981b: 12).The punch line of the arguments, however, concentrates on the causal relationship between principal reality and appearance. On this basis, we can design a summarized argument as follows, although predecessors' arguments are different from this:

1. Principal's reality is the cause of appearance.
2. Cause is antecedent in order to the caused.
3. If individual essence is principal then reality must be antecedent in order for the nominal existence.
4. Everything before its existence is nonexistent.
5. Individual essence is nonexistent.

6. Nonexistent cannot be the cause.
7. Individual essence is not antecedent in its order to the existence.
8. Individual essence is not a reality principal.
9. Existence is the principal of reality.

We can also express the principality of existence with a more common argument:

1. For an individual essence, by itself, existence has the same status as nonexistence.
2. Realization of one of the two same statuses needs a cause in favor of that status.
3. Existing of an individual essence needs a cause.
4. Nothing can be its own cause.
5. Each of the simple existents consists of two and only two aspects: nominal existence and individual essence.
6. Existence is the cause of an individual essence existing.
7. Cause is antecedent in its order to the caused.
8. Existence is antecedent in its order to the individual essence.
9. What proceeds from two aspects of nominal existence and individual essence is the principal of reality.
10. Nominal existence is the principal of reality.

Therefore, nominal existence as the cause of individual essence actualizes real individualization. Hence, the proposition "Albert Einstein exists" could be analyzed to the propositions:

P$_3$: Nominal existence of Albert Einstein has an appearance.
P$_4$: The appearance of this existence is Albert Einstein's individual essence (in other words it is what we call Albert Einstein).
P5: Nominal existence of Albert Einstein is the reality principal of Albert Einstein.

Propositional content of "Albert Einstein exists" accordingly to the reality principal, which is called "nominal existence" that has an appearance, which is called "Albert Einstein". Main proposition related to this content, consequently, is "nominal existence is Albert Einstein". All propositions in form "x exists" could be similarly reformed to "nominal existence is x" because the real subject is nominal existence which is predicated by the individual essence x. Therefore, Albert Einstein in *Wa* is identically Albert Einstein in *Wi* if Albert Einstein's nominal existence actualizes its individual essence. It means that reality principal of Albert Einstein is rigid, as long as Albert Einstein's nominal existence is realized. Therefore, nominal existence is subordinated by its appearance and it is the reality principal of things; this is what we call "principality of existence" theory. So, nominal existence is the best alternative for proper name reference.

Individual Essence: Mental or Real Appearance?

We have introduced individual essence as an appearance of nominal existence, however, the question is: "what is the meaning of appearance?" Or more precisely, "is it a mental phenomenon or a real one?" Both interpretations can be seen in Islamic philosophers' works. Even Mulla Sadra has sometimes represented individual essence as a real appearance and has sometimes represented it as a mental phenomenon, paradoxically (Asadi et. al. 2015). It seems that he and some of his followers could not find a definitive answer to this problematic discussion, so we explain both interpretations and then will clarify our point of view.

On this basis, proposition "nominal existence is Albert Einstein" is not tautology because real appearance of Albert Einstein's nominal existence is not Albert Einstein's nominal existence, identically.

On the other hand, other Mulla Sadra's followers, like Tabatabaei (1981), believe that the reality of things is just their nominal existence and its appearance is not an actual entity but it could be a mental appearance solely. We do not see a detailed certain argument on this view in their works as well as the previous interpretation. However, logical thinking process leads us to the following proposition:

P_6: Appearance of nominal existence is not identical to nominal existence.

It means that we have to give in to the realization of existence of appearance, because, for instance, Albert Einstein's individual essence is different from Albert Einstein's nominal existence, semantically. Secondly, however, this appearance cannot be actualized because other than what existence, and nonexistence are and nonexistent entities are not actual. So we can form an argument as follows:

1. X's nominal existence is semantically different than X.
2. Nominal existence's appearance is X'.
3. Nominal existence's appearance is somehow realized.
4. Nominal existence's appearance is not the nominal existence identically.
5. Nominal existence's appearance is not the nominal of another nominal existence.
6. Anything other than existence is nonexistence.
7. Nonexistence is not an actual entity.
8. Nominal existence's appearance is not an actual entity.
9. Non actual entity which is somehow realized must be a mental entity.
10. Nominal existence's appearance is a mental entity.

Accepting P_6 as a preconceiving proposition, the above argument would be admissible. Proposition P_6 eventuates strictly that concrete entities do not have two real aspects: an inwardly hidden aspect and externally real appearance; everything has just one existential aspect. Each proper nominal existence, however, has a mental appearance that differs from another appearance; based on various modes of nominal existences which makes our knowledge of the things possible.

Let us now consider the proposition "nominal existence is Albert Einstein" once more. In the present case, this proposition could be understood in two contexts; the first is focused on external reality and the second consists of the reality and the mental entity. In context (1), the proposition "nominal existence is Albert Einstein" is tautology and equal to "existence exists" or "Albert Einstein is Albert Einstein" because the reality of Albert Einstein is nothing but his nominal existence. In context (2), however, this proposition is not tautology since Albert Einstein is a mental appearance and is apart from nominal existence but as a cause related to it. On this basis, we can consider two referents for the term "individual essence". The first one is related to context (1) might be termed, "real individual essence," which is the nominal existence, identically; and the second one is related to context (2) which may be termed "mental individual essence" which is the appearance of a proper nominal existence and is caused by it. In fact, "mental individual essence" might be seen as a paradoxical term. However, we apply that for an appearance or image of a real individual essence which is solely related to it. So, for instance, mental individual essence of Albert Einstein is certainly related to his real individual essence. Like a metaphysical rope: On one end is the real individual essence and on the other end is the mental, none of which is related to either the causes or caused.

It seems that a reality consisting of existence alone is more of an acceptable scenario for the proposition "Anything other than existence is nonexistence," which is an analytic proposition.

To put it more precisely, the meaning of a subject is its predicate, like "husband is whoever has wife". Therefore, the above argument could be confirmed and we can say factual reality is just a nominal existence and its appearance is not a nominal existence, so is nonexistence and so it is not a factual reality. The last scenario is advocated and accepted by the researcher in this paper. The real proper name Albert Einstein's referent is his nominal existence certainly, which would be called Albert Einstein's real individual essence in actual world or each of possible worlds in which Albert Einstein would exist.

Diversity of Entities and Principality of Existence

If the existence is considered as a property of entities or, in other words, a second order of predication, the diversity of entities would be justified, because on this basis various entities could be existent or nonexistent and so we assert propositions "Albert Einstein exists" and "Pegasus doesn't exist" while Albert Einstein and Pegasus are distinguished. Nonetheless, according to the principality of existence theory, we face a challenge with the second version that could be explained by an example. Suppose I am looking at a green apple and you are looking at a red one. On the basis of principality of existence theory, all properties like color, size, etc. and even the location of apples are appearances of their nominal existences. So being green or red, small or big and near or far are dependent to and caused by nominal existences and not the reverse; therefore, differences between nominal existences can't be caused by their properties and an important question arises now: how can we justify the diversity of nominal existences on the basis of principality of existence theory? For example, what causes the difference between nominal existences of red apple and green apple while all of their properties are appearance of nominal existences?

A hasty answer is that nominal existences are different essentially, but a more profound thought guides us to shape the following conclusion. Since "nominal existing" is not a homonymous term; the meaning of "nominal existing" in all existents are the same. Therefore, nominal existences are the principal realities that are similar to all of the existents. For example, Albert Einstein's nominal existence and Newton nominal existence are fellow kinds and we cannot distinguish between them in the sense that both of them are of existence kinds. In other words, subjects of both propositions "nominal existence is Albert Einstein" and "nominal existence is Newton" are the same and it means the reality principal of Albert Einstein is similar to Newton.

We can answer this question with centrality of mode of existence. Notwithstanding the similarity between nominal existences, mode of existence for Albert Einstein is different from Newton which causes the diverse mental appearances. As a result, the reality principal of Albert Einstein is nominal existence with mode M_E and for Newton is nominal existence with mode M_G so that we can say existence modes determine nominal existences. To put it another way, mode of existence could be interpreted by another main term that is existence limits. In other words, mode of a nominal existence means that how the existence is limited by other nominal existences. One must suppose X's nominal existence allegorically to make the proposition P_7 analytically true:

P_7: absolute nonexistence is null.

Therefore, there cannot be any absolute nonexistence between X and other nominal existences. X's nominal existence is a principal reality so when nominal existences of Y, Z, etc. are nonexistent and where Y is a reality principal, X, Z . . . are nonexistent and so on. Therefore, each of nominal existences is limited by another one and its realization is like a limitation while all of them are of unique fellow existences. In other words, X non-existence is not absolute and means other existence is realized there. This meaning of non-existence called by some Islamic philosophers "added non-existence" (Adam al-Mozaaf) (Tabatabae 1981: 227). On this basis,

proposition "nominal existence is Albert Einstein" points to a limited existence whose appearance is what is known as Albert Einstein. It means that all properties of Albert Einstein as appearances of his nominal existence refer to his existence's limitations which enable us to distinguish between Albert Einstein and various other existents. On the other hand, each property's change is like that of limitations of existence which is indicative since the properties are related to appearance of nominal existence. As a result, when limitations of existence changes, properties change subordinately. For example, turning color of an apple from green to red means that its nominal existence changes so visibly that we can understand change on its appearance. Therefore, we allow ourselves to call nominal existence, flowing nominal existence exhaustively.

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