

The Meanings of Names

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1 The issue

Is it weird that we generally, as a society, don't know the lexicographical meaning of our names?

Names are words, just like any other. They have meanings beyond a narrowly understood reference to an individual, yet I don't think we broadly know much about their meanings, choosing them for aesthetic reasons. Perhaps in modern times, since the meanings of names are traced back to dead or antiquated languages or words, it's more normal. Were names always dissociated from their meanings by similar arguments?

We can give examples of names that have meaning as ordinary words (Faith, Hope, Grace, Ginger). Even Charity, perhaps a good example of a fringe case. It does have a meaning in modern English (though it's different from the original meaning of the word, I gather), but it's somewhat more obscure. Names were not always so divorced from their meaning, though. Issac's name is said to mean "laughter", but does that translate to a modern parent naming their child Laughter? Or was it an older word for laughter, or from a different language or dialect?

Should we choose names for their meaning? Are the root meanings of names significant? More than a curiosity? I don't think we can project change into reality by naming, but should names reflect a hope, expectation, or goal for a child?