

Plato's *Cratylus*: Analysis and Dialectic

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I Preliminaries

The *Cratylus* is one of Plato's lesser known dialogues and seems to have been less extensively studied than others, at least in English. By comparison with the *Gorgias*,¹ *Protagoras*, *Republic*, or *Phaedo*, which were also written in Plato's middle period, the *Cratylus* has yielded no commentaries in English for many years.²

In many of Plato's middle dialogues the topic is usually the analysis of a central concept, such as an ethical concept like justice. The analysis usually takes the form of an attempt to frame a definition of the concept and proceeds by way of question and answer. The questioner seeks to reduce the respondent to a state of perplexity, called in Greek *aporia*.³ This type of dialectical analysis, and the dialogues to which it gave rise, is common to both Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle's dialogues have not survived, but Aristotle wrote a manual of this methodology, which was employed both in Plato's Academy and in his own school, the Lyceum. The work is known as *Topics* and sets out a method employed in Aristotle's own works.

Part of the problem with the *Cratylus* is its subject, which is the correctness of names.⁴ There are three interlocutors: Cratylus, his companion Hermogenes, and Socrates. The dialogue begins with the

first two in argument and Hermogenes calling on Socrates for help. Cratylus believes that names are correct only to the extent to which they display the nature or essence of the thing that is named, whereas Hermogenes believes that names are correct purely by convention. Socrates joins in the conversation and questions Hermogenes and Cratylus in turn. In so far as the dispute is resolved at all, the result is a compromise.

The dialogue can be divided into three main parts, of which the first is a discussion with Hermogenes, in which Socrates gradually undermines Hermogenes' belief that names are correct by convention. In the final part of the dialogue, Cratylus becomes the interlocutor and Socrates undermines his belief, also. This time the belief is that names are correct because of the essential relationship of the name and the entity named. These two parts are relatively short and are separated by a long discussion between Socrates and Hermogenes, wherein Socrates undertakes with Hermogenes a joint enquiry, largely consisting of Socrates asking questions and suggesting plausible answers, with the aim of showing in just what way names can be shown to be correct.

This lengthy central part of the dialogue has been the target of much scathing comment by scholars and commentators. It is thought that Socrates was either being ironic, and did not really believe a word of what he was saying to Hermogenes, or he was plainly wrong, since we can be sure, from our knowledge of modern linguistics, that names are not correct in the way Socrates suggests—and he probably suspected it, hence the irony.⁵

Socrates has often been thought to use irony as part of his strategy in inducing the necessary state of *aporia* in his interlocutors. However,

the irony displayed in the *Cratylus* is different. Here the irony lies in the fact that Hermogenes is being carried along by a display of sophistry, which turns out to be false and of no value as a contribution to the argument and conclusion of the dialogue. Since the analyses are of no value in answering the main question posed by the dialogue, about the correctness of names, it is considered of no value to analyze them in any detail. It is worth pointing out that this view, that Socrates was being ironic when he produced the analyses in the central section of the dialogue, is comparatively recent. The view was not shared by his pupil, Aristotle, for example, who gives similar analyses in his own works, or by the ancient commentators. So, in opposition to this 'modern' view, the more traditional view assumes that Socrates was being serious and meant what he said in the long analytical sections in the middle of the dialogue. The irony can be explained as self-deprecation, that Socrates is inspired by sophists like Euthyphro, who was much better at analyzing the origins of names than Socrates himself, rather than Socrates' disbelief in his own analyses. The aim of this paper is not to produce a full analysis of the entire dialogue, but to examine the long central section and attempt to place the analyses therein in the context of Plato's concerns about language and dialectic.⁶

II Undermining Hermogenes

At the outset, it is important to remember the strategy employed by Socrates to undermine the belief of Hermogenes that names are correct purely by convention. Hermogenes regards names as arbitrary labels.

No name belongs to a thing by nature, but only because of the rules and usage of those who establish the usage and call it by that name (384c 5-8).

His position is similar to that of Augustine, quoted by Wittgenstein at the beginning of his *Philosophical Investigations*. Augustine recalls that when he was young, he was taught the names of things and came to regard names generally as labels for things. Augustine does not worry whether the labels are conventional or not and Wittgenstein undermines this position by setting up a simple case of naming in order to show the complexity of hidden assumptions involved in such a process.⁷

Explicit in the position of Hermogenes is the belief that the labels are given by name-givers, and he cites as an example the common Greek practice of giving new Greek names to foreign slaves. The names they had before are no longer their names, since they have been superseded.⁸ However, names do not simply arise spontaneously. They have always been given by someone. In his translation of the *Cratylus* C. D. Reeves cites the example of Adam in the Garden of Eden.⁹ God thought that Adam was lonely and needed a mate, so, as a first step to finding one, he brought all the animals to Adam one by one and had him name them. Whatever name Adam gave, that was their name. The logistics of such an operation are somewhat challenging to a modern reader, versed in linguistics, and as a matter of fact the naming operation was not successful, in the sense that it did not yield a mate for Adam, but the *Genesis* story embodies a belief common at that time that names had primitive name-givers.

From the *Genesis* story we cannot tell whether the name that Adam gave to each animal had a *sense*, or descriptive content, as well as a referent, to use Frege's distinction.¹⁰ However, the ambiguity of the

Genesis story is highly relevant to the argument of the *Cratylus*, for Hermogenes and Cratylus represent the two poles of the ambiguity. Whereas for Hermogenes a name is a *label* and the sense is secondary to the referent, for Cratylus a name is a *key* and if the sense does not fit the name, that is, if the name does not reveal the nature of the thing named, it cannot be a genuine name. Nevertheless, both Cratylus and Hermogenes take it for granted that names are given by name-givers and Socrates begins by focusing on the skill of name-giving and the conditions required for its successful exercise. This provides the basis for the lengthy discussion in the central part of the dialogue.

Hermogenes is first induced to agree that things have some fixed being or essence of their own. They are in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature. Actions are also included in this class of things that are. Thus the performance of an action has to be in accordance with the action's own nature. An action like cutting has to take place in accordance with the nature of cutting and with the natural tools for cutting.

Speaking is included in the class of actions and Socrates quickly distinguishes between making true and false statements and also includes using names as a type of action. The conclusion is that we cannot name things as we choose, but must name things in the natural way for them to be named and with the natural tools for naming them.

The subject of tools leads Socrates to introduce the concept of *techné*, which is a craft or skill. He sets up the analogy of weaving, using the example of a shuttle. The weaver exercises the skill of weaving by using his shuttle well. However, he cannot do this unless he uses a shuttle that is designed for the job, which requires the skill of

the carpenter who makes the shuttle. The carpenter has to make a shuttle that is suitable for the particular kind of weaving the weaver needs to do. The analogy is applied to naming. The counterpart of the weaver is the communicator or conveyor of information, who uses names for the particular purpose of “dividing things according to their natures” (388b). The communicator uses the products of the name-giver, who is the counterpart of the carpenter. The term that Socrates uses here is *nomothetes*. This can mean a lawgiver or legislator, but here Socrates uses the term more widely, to mean someone who establishes the rules of usage that give significance to names.

There is an important point that also needs to be established. A name (*onoma*), along with a predicate (*rema*), is a constituent part of a statement (*logos*) and Socrates leads Hermogenes to accept that if a statement is true, then all its parts must be true. This is a dubious move, since one can argue that for a statement or proposition to be true, the constituent name has to have a certain referent and the constituent predicate has to have a certain meaning (again using the distinction first made by Frege). However, it is also possible to regard a statement as true of the world if and only if the world is ordered in a certain way. On this view of truth, not only must the statement be true, but also the names and predicates used in the statement.

Socrates makes this move in order to prevent Hermogenes from claiming that naming is done in a naturally correct way if it is done merely in accordance with the conventions that the name-giver has adopted. If names are conventional tags, then it is their nature to be conventional tags. Socrates has to show that the activity of natural naming is subject to the same truth conditions as the activity of natural communicating or making statements. If to be true a name

must naturally accord with the thing named, Hermogenes cannot argue that the natural correctness of names is so merely by convention.¹¹

The second step is to analyze the work of the carpenter in making a shuttle. Socrates induces Hermogenes to agree that a good carpenter will be able to embody the form of a shuttle in the wood, “putting into it the nature that naturally best suits it to perform its own work” (389b). Similarly, the maker of a musical instrument will be able to embody the form of the instrument in the materials. Equally, the rule-setter (*nomothetes*) must also know how to embody in sounds and syllables the name naturally suited to each thing and so, if he is to be an authentic name-giver, in giving each name he must look to the form of the name — what the name itself is. Just as different carpenters may make good shuttles out of different types of wood, so Greek and non-Greek name-givers will operate in the same way, provided they give each thing the form of the name suited to it.

The next point is that it is the weaver who will know best if the appropriate form of shuttle is present in any given piece of wood, that is, it is a good shuttle and does the job for which it has been made. As for the maker of musical instruments, the person who knows best if the maker of the musical instrument has made the instrument well or not is the person who plays the instrument and produces good music from it. Similarly, the work of the *nomothetes*, in turn, has to be judged by someone else, who can check if he has deployed his name-making/rule-setting skills correctly. Socrates suggests that for language and names, this person is the dialectician, who knows how to ask questions and to answer them. The dialectician will subject the skills of the name-givers to scrutiny. Socrates does not at this point give much explanation

of how the dialectician actually does this. He nevertheless reminds Hermogenes that name-giving is a considerable skill. The name-giver has the skill of looking to the natural name of each thing and putting its form into letters and syllables—and so Cratylus appears to be right. A stunned Hermogenes is only partially convinced by the arguments offered by Socrates and wants to be shown some examples of naturally correct names, so that he can see exactly how each name expresses the nature of the thing.

It is important to see the strategy employed by Socrates here and also a certain fudging of the argument. The *nomothete*, or communicator/maker of statements is identified with the dialectician in some passages; in others he is not and the dialectician is seen as the supervisor of the communicator. However, the role of the dialectician is never in question. By means of question and answer, he has to establish whether names have been given correctly, in accordance with the natures of the beings named. This provides the basis for the joint project that Socrates undertakes with Hermogenes in the long central part of the dialogue. It is also plausible evidence that Socrates takes these analyses quite seriously, regarding them as part and parcel of dialectic.¹²

III Names, Analysis & Dialectic

First of all, Socrates claims that he is no expert and expresses doubts that he can meet Hermogenes' request. He suggests that Hermogenes approach the Sophists, since they claim to have found the answer and are sufficiently confident that they are right that they charge high fees for giving it. In view of what Socrates had to say

about the Sophists elsewhere, it is reasonable to detect some irony here. When Hermogenes will have none of this, Socrates suggests Homer and the early poets. There is no irony here, however, for Socrates was adhering to a Greek convention: if the Sophists were the new teachers, the poets were certainly the old.

All of the dialogue so far has concerned name-givers and it has to be emphasized once more that Plato believes that languages were consciously devised by our human ancestors, who created each word as a brief description of what it names. Contemporary name-givers did the same thing. It was not until the end of the 4th century BC, when Epicurus suggested that names were the human counterparts of animal cries, that this belief was questioned. Socrates goes further and suggests that the original name-givers, “lofty thinkers and subtle reasoners” (401b6-8), based their belief that names signified the being or essence of things on the further assumption that all things were moving and swept along as in a river. In other words they had a view of cosmology that was Heraclitean.

Since the names are really descriptions, in order to uncover the beliefs of the early name-givers we have to ‘break the code’, so to speak. However, this is not merely an *exegetical* enterprise, designed to discover whether the etymologies of the terms are correct. It is also a *philosophical* enterprise, designed to discover whether the beliefs of the early name-givers were true beliefs and yield knowledge about the world. Thus the investigations that Socrates undertakes are not etymological in a modern sense. They are a kind of literary analysis that tries to uncover more than simply how a particular word developed in meaning.

To illuminate more clearly what Socrates is doing, an analogy with

explicating the Chinese characters used to write Japanese is in order here. Japanese martial arts are traditionally known as 武術 or 武道 and martial arts experts occasionally try to explain how the meaning of the terms, especially ‘武’, relates to the arts they practice. The character ‘武’ is a combination of ‘止’ (stop) and ‘戈’ (spear or halberd) and the explanation is commonly given that ‘武’ means ‘stopping spears’, that is, that the arts are defensive, rather than offensive. Now ‘stop’ and ‘spear’ might be a useful way of remembering how to write the character, but it is questionable whether the Chinese who originally devised the character had a defensive interpretation in mind, especially as they went on to build a vast empire. In fact this explanation has been questioned. The compiler of a dictionary entitled 『現代漢字語辞典』 adds a note, with an illustration, explaining that ‘止’ meant ‘人の足跡’ (the length of a person's footstep) and that the character ‘武’ actually means ‘a man moving forward in a line holding a spear’. The compilers add that the ‘defensive’ explanation, though old, is mistaken.¹³

A curious aspect of this explanation is the general assumption that present-day dictionary compilers can construct plausible explanations of the beliefs of those early Chinese who constructed the original Chinese characters, as exhibited in the way the character is constructed. The gap between a mnemonic or learning device and an explanation of origins is a very fine line to draw. By comparison, Socrates' investigation with Hermogenes is just as fanciful—or plausible, even though Socrates ends the analysis by rejecting the main conclusions. The original name-givers were generally right in their analyses of cosmological names, but wrong in their analyses of ethical names, since they relied too heavily on the notion that the world is in a

state of constant flux.

Before embarking on the joint investigation with Hermogenes, Socrates expands on his suggestion, mentioned above, that Hermogenes should begin with Homer and the poets. The discussion here is actually the beginning of the investigation, since Socrates gives many examples in support of his thesis that names can be correct to varying degrees. In support of his thesis that there are degrees of correctness in names, he makes several points. It is generally believed, Socrates suggests, that the gods use names more correctly than humans do, that men use names more correctly than women, and that Homer uses names more correctly than other poets. The second point is offensively sexist to modern readers, but male superiority was generally accepted by the Greeks. The status of those like Homer and the poets, the 'Wise', was also accepted by educated Greeks and their statements were taken as the starting point of any dialectical or scientific investigation. This is clear from Aristotle's *Topics*, an early work recognized as reflecting the practice of dialectical analysis in Plato's Academy. According to Aristotle, any dialectical or scientific investigation should start from *endoxa*, the beliefs of the many or the wise.¹⁴ These are not merely common beliefs, but beliefs of people like Homer and others who enjoyed high public status. In the analysis by Socrates of names in the *Cratylus*, Plato is giving the preliminaries of a dialectical investigation.

An example used by Socrates is that of Hector and his son, called 'Astyanax' by the men of Troy. The boy has another name, Skamandrios, and Socrates concludes that the name must have been used by the women of Troy (392d). (Actually Socrates is mistaken, for we can read in Book VI of Homer's *Iliad* that Hector himself calls his son by that

name, whereas in Book XXII, the ‘townsmen’ called him Astyanax.) However, this is a mistake and does not undermine the point that Socrates believed that there were degrees in the correctness of names.¹⁵

Socrates gives more reasons why it is right (*dikaion*) that the son of a king should have a name that indicates this. Hector is a king and his name comes from ‘*echein*’ (meaning to possess). Hector ‘possesses’ the city of Troy and so this is a correct name since he has a kingly nature. Since his son also has a kingly nature, it is also fitting that he has a kingly name. Thus, Astyanax, which means ‘king of the city’, is exactly right, since the name of the son expresses the same nature or form as that of the father.

Another way of stating that names are thought to display natures is in terms of power (*dunamis*) and Socrates gives examples of the smallest units of names, namely, letters of the alphabet. The power or force of the word ‘*beta*’ is contained in the letter ‘*b*’, which ‘separates’ or marks it off from the other letters of the alphabet; the addition of the other vowels and consonants when the word is uttered do not detract from the power of the or nature of the element/letter named. Similarly, the names ‘Hector’ and ‘Astyanax’ have the same power to signify, but the only letter in common is the letter ‘*t*’.

Thus the function of the name, the Form of Name, is to be a tool for instruction or communication by separating being, or vocally separating what a thing is. This can be understood in several ways, from singling out the thing as the subject or object of a sentence, to classifying the thing in a scientific category or table. As Socrates suggests in his discussion of Hector and Astyanax, it does not matter which letters or syllables are used, so long as the being of the entity, indicated in the name, remains ‘*enkrates*’ (in force). As we shall see later, the principal

power of primary names will be in imitating what they name, but not all imitations are names. So, for Socrates naming differs from painting or music because these arts produce imitations of the sounds or shapes of entities, whereas naming produces imitations of the being of the things named. Thus mimicking animal sounds is not the same as naming the animal in question.

There is some elasticity in this notion of being and this is what Socrates is out to investigate. In the best case a name might capture the very essence of the thing named; in less good cases the name might convey by imitation what a thing *is*, merely by marking it off from other objects. The concept that a name must capture the being or *ousia* of a thing is seen again in the list of categories given in Aristotle's *Topics*. The first category signifies a thing's being or *ousia*.¹⁶ So, a name signifies the thing named by capturing in a string of sound, or letters, the ideal Form or function of the name of the thing, which Socrates terms 'separating the being' of the thing. This can be done in different and equivalent ways, first because the letters and syllables of different languages can vary, but also because within the same language there will be alternative ways, and degrees, of capturing the Form. A photograph in a passport or on a credit card or driver's license is supposed to represent, but not resemble, the bearer, though it cannot do the former without doing the latter. Different photographs have the same power of representing the bearer, but the actual resemblances will be different. Similarly, names are supposed to separate one's being, not to describe, but cannot do so without describing.

Thus there is a semantic theory underlying the *Cratylus* and this underpins the project that Socrates undertakes in the central part of the dialogue, which is devoted to an exhaustive and imaginative

investigation of a large group of names, divided into two broad sub-groups that correspond to two stages in the investigation. I will take one or two examples from each group and then make some general comments on the method and the results. In the examples I have paraphrased Reeve's translation of the Greek text and followed the grouping adopted by Sedley (2003).

In going through his survey of names Socrates sometimes compares himself to a charioteer engaged in a race to the finishing line. Socrates also occasionally chastises himself for not keeping to the correct order in discussing the names. This and the vast number of names discussed over 30 pages, in a careful order, suggest that Socrates was not giving any random samples, but that he, or rather, Plato, was working through a curriculum that was already predetermined.

Group A: Cosmological Analyses

The joint investigation first takes up the analysis of cosmological entities, rather than the everyday items that Plato's successors tended to use. In addition, Socrates and Hermogenes work through a vast number of items in a systematic sequence. The sequence represents part of an entire philosophical curriculum, designed to form part of a dialectical investigation. The project is similar to the lexicon of philosophical terms given in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.¹⁷ However, in the *Cratylus* Plato combines two projects that Aristotle kept separate. In *Metaphysics* Book D, Aristotle confined himself to giving the meanings systematically of philosophical terms, explaining how the terms captured the being or *ousia* of the items named. In Book A, he gives a critical account of the efforts made by his predecessors to explain some of the terms discussed in the lexicon.

1. Hierarchy of Living Beings (397c-399c): *theioi* ('gods'), *daimones* ('daimons'), *heros* ('hero'), *anthropoi* ('humans').

Socrates equates *daimon* with wisdom, on the grounds that good men are wise and knowing (386b). *Heroes* are initially derived from *eros*, the love of a god for a mortal, but Socrates suggests another alternative, which is that the name derives from *eirein* (the same as *legein*) or *erotan*, which is to speak or to ask. He infers that the *heroes* were wise speakers, clever rhetoricians or skilled questioners, namely dialecticians.

Socrates goes into considerable detail explaining how members of the human race are called *anthropoi*. He suggests that the word *anthropos* was originally a phrase *anathron ha opepe* ('one who observes closely what he has seen'), since other animals do not investigate or reason about anything they see, or observe anything closely. But a human being no sooner sees something (that is *opepe*) than he observes it closely and then reasons and calculates about it. Of course, Socrates has no compunction in removing letters and changing accents and claims that this commonly happens with names. The other example he gives of this process seems quite reasonable. *Dii philos* ('Friend to Zeus') is a phrase that became a name by the removal of the second 'i' and the substitution of a grave accent for an acute accent in the second syllable, becoming *Diphilos*. Thus, the explanation that a phrase evolved into a word is at least plausible.

2. Names of Constituents of Animal Beings (399d-400d): *psyche* ('soul'), *soma* ('body').

Socrates begins *'ek tou parachrema legein'* (speaking off-hand) by suggesting that those who gave the soul its name thought that when the soul is present in the body, it causes it to live and gives it power to breathe and be revitalized (*anapsuchon*). When the revitalization fails, the body dies, so it is called *psuche*. Socrates then offers another explanation. He suggests that it is the soul that sustains and supports each body, so that it lives and moves. Thus, a good name to give this power which *ochei kai echei* (supports and sustains) all *phusis* (nature) is *'phuseche'* ('nature-sustainer'). Without demur Hermogenes prefers the second *technichoteron* (more scientific) explanation. The philosophical implications of the analysis are regarded as more important than purely etymological considerations.

With the name *'soma'* ('body') no such changes need to be made. If, as seems likely to Socrates, the name was given by followers of Orpheus, who believed that the soul is being punished for something and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul *'sozesthai'* ('is securely kept'), then the name *'soma'* suggests this as it is. Those who explain *'soma'* by changing the name, have *'soma'* as the *'sema'* (tomb) of the body, while others with the same view see a human being's *'soma'* as the *'sema'* (sign) of the soul, since the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body.

3. Names of Individual Gods (400d-408e): *'Hestia'*, *'Rhea'*, *'Kronos'*, *'Tethys'*, *'Poseidon'*, *'Pluto'*, *'Hades'*, *'Demeter'*, *'Hera'*, *'Persephone'*, *'Apollo'*, *'Muses'*, *'Leto'*, *'Artemis'*, *'Dionysus'*, *'Aphrodite'*, *'Athena'*, *'Hephaestus'*, *'Ares'*, *'Hermes'*, *'Pan'*.

If we take his analysis of *'Hestia'* as an example of this group,

Socrates asks what the name-giver of this goddess (the goddess of the hearth, who usually received the first part of a sacrifice and was named first in prayers), had in mind in choosing the name. He adds that the first name-givers were “lofty thinkers and subtle reasoners” (*meteorologoi tines kai adoleschai*, which can also mean “airheads and logic-choppers”, 401b 8-9). Socrates starts off with the word ‘ousia’ (‘being’) in Attic Greek and suggests that these subtle name-givers knew that the same word is ‘essia’ or ‘osia’ in other dialects. Thus it is reasonable (*echei logon*) to call the essence of things ‘Hestia’, in accordance with the second of these names, since the words are so similar. In addition, Attic Greek speakers also say that what partakes of being ‘is’ (*estin*), so being is correctly called ‘Hestia’. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of one making sacrifices, anyone who called the being or essence of things ‘essia’ would naturally sacrifice to Hestia before the other gods.

Socrates then gives an alternative explanation. Those who use the name ‘osia’ seem thereby to agree with the doctrine of Heraclitus, namely, that the things that are, are always flowing and nothing stands fast. The cause and originator of these things is named ‘*othoun*’ (the pusher) and so ‘ossia’ is well named, and presumably ‘Hestia’, but Socrates does not pursue this point further.

Thus, there are three plausible analyses given of ‘Hestia’, two associated with Being and the primacy of Being and the third associating Being with motion and change. The reference to *meteorologoi tines kai adoleschai* merits special examination. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates states that all *technai* (crafts or scientific disciplines) need *adolescchia* (chatter) and *meteorologia* (skywatching) about nature and this is what made Pericles such a good orator, for he did the same. In the *Republic* Socrates characterizes ‘sky-watching’ as the study of the Forms, the

highest form of dialectic, and was accused of the very same thing by Aristophanes in *The Clouds*. Thus, the terms convey a mixture of irony and approval.¹⁸

4. Names of Astronomical Entities (408e-410e): *'helios'* ('sun'), *'selene'* ('moon'), *'meis'* ('month'), *'astra'* ('stars').

'Helios' is Attic Greek for 'sun', but Socrates suggests that it will make things clearer if we start with the Doric Greek word, which is *'halios'*. He offers several possibilities. The sun *'halizein'* ('collects') people together when it rises. Alternatively the sun *aei heilen ion* (is always rolling) around the earth. Or, the sun seems to *poikillei* (to colour) the products of the earth, since *'poikillei'* is close in meaning to *'aiolein'* ('to shift rapidly to and fro' = *'heilein'*) or, in the passive, to change colour or hue. Here again some of the alternative analyses are associated with a belief in flux.

5. Names of Elements (409c-410e)
'pur' ('fire'), *'hudor'* ('water'), *'aer'* ('air'), *'horai'* ('seasons'), *'enautios'*, *'etos'* ('year').

There are several themes in this part of the investigation. One is the importance of astronomy as a study of cosmic intelligence. Thus, even before the joint investigation begins, Socrates analyzes the names 'Ouranos', 'Cronos' and 'Zeus', and establishes the connected sequence of heaven, intellect, and life. This connection is a familiar theme of Plato, seen in the *Republic* and especially the *Timaeus*, where there is a cosmic intelligence (*nous*) responsible for the creation of the divinities

which in turn create all mortal forms of life. Thus, the philosophical curriculum also includes cosmology. Another theme is the hierarchy of elites: the moral elite of *daimons*, the intelligent elite of heroes and the rationalizing elite of humans. The central point about humans is the rationality that distinguishes them from the animals and which they share with heroes and *daimons*. The body-soul duality is a third theme, with the soul firmly thought to be the mover of the body. This duality also has a major place in a philosophical curriculum. So far, none of the analyses has clearly demonstrated any false beliefs, so the original name-givers had a high level of understanding and insights relevant to philosophical study as Plato sees it.

Another very important theme in many of the cosmological analyses is flux, already mentioned in the analyses of 'Hestia' and '*helios*.' Socrates offers to give another analysis of 'Cronos', but instead discusses the famous 'river' statements attributed to Heraclitus.¹⁹ Heraclitus is alleged to have likened the things that are to flowing rivers, such that one cannot step into the same river twice. From '*helios*' onwards all the remaining names in this group are analyzed, with general approval, on the basis of cosmic flux. The break comes at 411a, when the investigation turns to names relating to ethics. This turning point in the dialogue is worth quoting in full (Reeve's translation):

Most of our wise men nowadays get so dizzy going around and around in their search for the nature of things that are, that the things themselves appear to them to be turning around and moving every which way. Well, I think that the people who gave things their names in very ancient times are exactly like these wise men. They don't blame this on their internal

condition, however, but on the nature of things themselves, which they think never stable or steadfast, but flowing and moving, full of every sort of motion and constant coming into being. I say this because the names you mentioned just now put me in mind of it. (411b2-411c5).

Socrates is giving a warning that the analyses of ethical names will be analyzed in the same way as the cosmological names were in the previous section, but the results will be somewhat different. The name-givers will be shown to have been misguided.

Group B: Ethical Analyses

6. Names of Primary Intellectual Virtues or Powers (411a-412b): ‘*phronesis*’ (‘wisdom’), ‘*gnome*’ (‘judgment’), ‘*skopein*’ (‘examining’), ‘*noesis*’ (‘understanding’), ‘*sophrosune*’ (‘moderation’), ‘*episteme*’ (‘knowledge’), ‘*sunesis*’ (‘comprehension’), ‘*sophia*’ (‘wisdom’).

All of the analyses offered by Socrates of the above terms are offered on the assumption that the ancients who gave names to things are like the wise men of today (i.e., the time of Socrates), who believe that things are constantly changing. The ancients believed that things in their very natures were never stable or steadfast, but constantly changing. In the light of this Heraclitean thesis Socrates quickly works through an analysis of each concept. The terms are considered systematically, as if part of a philosophical curriculum and little is omitted. The analyses seem rather implausible, as if the all his predecessors thought about was flux. However, like Aristotle after him, Plato also presents the views of his predecessors in a dialectical fashion: in dialogues like the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, as in the *Cratylus*,

there is always a preoccupation with the clash between one extreme of complete stasis, exemplified by Parmenides, and the more widespread Heraclitean extreme of complete flux.

'*Phronesis*' ('wisdom'), for example, was so named because it is *phoras noesis* ('the understanding of motion'), or because of *phoras onesis* ('taking delight in motion').

7. Names of Moral Virtues (412c-414b)

'*agathon*' ('good'), '*dikaiosune*' ('justice'), '*dikaion*' ('just'), '*andreia*' ('courage').

After a rapid analysis of the primary intellectual virtues, Socrates pauses to offer a lengthy analysis of '*dikaion*' (just). As the name-givers of '*dikaion*' Socrates has in mind his Presocratic predecessors. Those who think that the universe is in motion believe that it is penetrated by some force that generates everything that comes into being. As the governor and penetrator (*diaion*) of everything else it is rightly called '*dikaion*' (with the 'k' added for the sake of euphony). The mention of force seems a pointed reference to Anaximander, who believed presented cosmic change in terms of transgression and retribution. This agent of retribution was called by Heraclitus '*Dike*' (justice). The ancients agreed up to this point, but Socrates tells Hermogenes that he persisted questioning in secret and found that this governor and perpetrator was called a cause, since it is through which (*di'ho*) a thing comes to be. He was even told that this something was correctly called '*Dia*' (Zeus). However, when Socrates persisted further, there was disagreement and each told Socrates his own view. One called this something the sun, since the sun governs all things that are by penetrating (*diaion*) and burning (*kaon*) them. This suggestion gives a

reason for the 'k' of *dikaion*, as against mere euphony. But this was ridiculed by other thinkers, who thought that the just was fire, or the heat in fire. These thinkers are not named and there is little evidence to identify any of them with actual Presocratic thinkers. The last thinker mentioned is Anaxagoras, who believed that *nous* (mind) orders everything in the cosmos while remaining 'unmixed' with it. However, Anaxagoras never equated *nous* with *dikaion*.

The point of this discussion was to emphasize that because the earliest thinkers were locked into seeing the world as in perpetual flux, they could not escape from thinking of *dikaion* in term of change, rather than a fixed principle standing above and beyond all change.

8. Technical Virtues (414b-415a) '*techne*' ('craft'), '*mechane*' ('contrivance').

In analyzing '*techne*' ('craft') Socrates adds another factor in his method. He notes that the first names that were given to things have long been covered up and hidden, with letters being added or subtracted, resulting in much distortion and ornamentation. Thus to explain the naming of '*techne*', one must remove 't' and insert 'o' between the 'ch' and the 'n' and the 'n' and the 'e'. The result is '*echonoe*', which is a running together of '*echein*'/'*hexis*' and '*noe*' (and means 'possession of understanding').

9. Generic Names of Evaluation (415a-419b): '*arête*' ('virtue'), '*kakia*' ('vice'), '*deilia*' ('cowardice'), '*aporia*' ('perplexity'), '*kakon*' ('bad'), '*kalon*' ('beautiful'), '*aischron*' ('disgraceful'), '*sumpheron*' ('advantageous'), '*kerdaleon*' ('gainful'), '*lusiteloun*' ('profitable'), '*ophelimon*' ('beneficial'),

'blaberon' ('harmful'), *'zemiodes'* ('hurtful'), *'deon'* ('obligation').

In accordance with his overall plan, Socrates analyzes *'arete'* and *'kakia'* in terms of motion. To the degree that things are in motion, all that is *kakos ion* (moving badly) should be called *'kakia'*. Socrates adds that the name is usually given to a soul in which this bad movement in relation to things resides. Matters are opposite with *'arete'*. *'Arete'* signifies that the flow of a good soul is always unimpeded, so it is *aei rheon* (always flowing) and thus could be called *'aei-rheite'*, but has been contracted to *'arete'*. Socrates continues in the same vein through all the ethical names listed below. Each is analyzed in terms of the Heraclitean theory of flux. The analysis continues until the primary names are reached, in Section 14, below.

10. Names of Emotive States (419b-420b)

'hedone' ('pleasure'), *'lupe'* ('pain'), *'ania'* ('sorrow'), *'algedon'* ('distress'), *'odune'* ('grief'), *'achthedon'* ('affliction'), *'chara'* ('joy'), *'erpsis'* ('delight'), *'euphrosune'* ('lightheartedness'), *'epithumia'* ('appetite'), *'thumos'* ('spirit', 'anger'), *'himeros'* ('desire'), *'pothos'* ('longing'), *'eros'* ('erotic love')

11. Names for Judgments (420-b-420d)

'doxa' ('opinion'), *'oiesis'* ('thinking'), *'boule'* ('planning'), *'boulesthai'* ('wishing'), *'aboulia'* ('lack of planning').

12. Names of Willings (420d-420e)

'hekousion' ('voluntary'), *'anangke'* ('compulsion').

13. The Finest and Most Important Names for Truth (421a-c): *'onoma'*

(‘name’), *‘aletheia’* (‘truth’), *‘pseudos’* (‘falsehood’), *‘on’* or *‘ousia’* (‘being’).

Compression is what has taken place with *‘onoma’* (‘name’), which seems to be the running together of a statement *“hoti tout'estin on, hou tunchanei zetema”* (‘that “this is a being for which there is a search”). This is seen more easily in *‘onomaston’* (‘thing named’), which would be *“on hou masma estin”* (‘a being for which there is a search’).

14. The Primary Names (421c-427d): *‘ion’* (‘going’), *‘rheon’* (‘flowing’), *‘doun’* (‘shackling’), *‘rhoe’* (‘flowing’), *‘schesis’* (‘restraining’).

The names given in this section, all relating to flowing and restraining, are primary because they are thought to be essential in the theory that was assumed by the first name-givers. The names here are also primary because they are thought to be the building blocks of the names that have been considered previously. They are the foundation for the concepts of fundamental philosophical importance in theology, cosmology, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and ethics.

The analysis begins with a discussion on infinite regress. The analysis of names into their primary constituents has to stop somewhere. The analysis stops with *ta prota onomata*, the primary elements of the first names given to things, which are letters and syllables. In one respect the analysis has to be different from what has gone before, since the analysis of elements cannot be based on other names. Socrates suggests to Hermogenes that the elements express the being or essence of each thing by some kind of imitation. Socrates suggests that the letter ‘*r*’ seemed to the earliest name-givers to be a good tool for copying motion, as evidenced in words like *‘rhein’* (flowing),

'*rhoe*' (flow), '*rhumbein*', (whirling), even in words with a different initial letter, such as '*trechein*' (running) or '*thruptein*' (breaking). He continues in this way with examples of other letters in the Greek alphabet and concludes that the original name-giver used the letters as likenesses in order to make a name or sign for each of the things that are and compounded all the remaining names out of these, imitating the things they name (427c).

It is important to understand what Socrates is doing here. His whole analysis is based on the assumption that the original name-givers were Heracliteans. The analyses turn on whether they do in fact satisfactorily explain all the fundamental concepts of philosophy in accordance with the Heraclitean view of the world. The second point is that Socrates takes the analyses as a kind of model. If names are based on a correct theory of the nature of things, this is what they would be like. Given a Heraclitean model, the analysis would reasonably follow the pattern given in the long central part of the dialogue. It is a further question whether Socrates actually believes that the Heraclitean view of the world is correct and in the remaining part of the dialogue Socrates argues with Cratylus that the Heraclitean model of imitation is too simple.

IV Conclusion

The first group of analyses works through the main concepts of cosmology, understood by the Greeks as physics: the classification of living beings into kinds and a progression through cosmic entities. Then there is a major shift of focus and the investigation progresses through the sequence of virtues: intellectual, moral, technical. This is

followed by analyses of the constituents of ethical discourse: terms of evaluation, emotion, judgment, the will, and truth and falsity. Thus Plato was following a bipartite division of philosophy, into cosmology, on one hand, and ethics on the other, which included logic and metaphysics. In cosmology, the existing tradition had already made a contribution to the understanding of the world, hence the careful analyses of the first group of names. In ethics, little progress had been made because of the excessive concentration on physics and Socrates does not spend much time on analyses of the second group of names.

Aristotle has been severely criticized by some scholars for being a bad historian, namely, for a blatant lack of accuracy in depicting the theories of the early thinkers he attacks.²⁰ Those who think that Socrates was joking when he wrote his analyses of names would excuse Plato of such a charge and also the charge of being a bad philologist. However, the discussion of ethical names reveals concerns other than philological and Plato, also, was interested less in philology for its own sake than in the degree to which analysis of names could lead to real knowledge about the contents of a philosophical curriculum. Thus the literary analyses of the *Cratylus* need to be examined in the context of the concept of dialectic set out in the *Republic* and refined in the later dialogues, such as the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*. The early thinkers were so preoccupied with constant change underlying the cosmos that they were led to exclude a whole range of stable values that underpin human life. This is why Socrates does not spend much time on the ethical names, for he thinks that their etymologies were fundamentally misconceived.

As has been stated above, according to Plato, a name is correct to the extent that it resembles the object, which it does by communicating,

i.e., separating the object's being from that of other objects. Plato argues that at the highest level, only the dialectician can use the name to search for the object's *ousia*, or being in the richer sense that corresponds to essence. If the name resembles the object sufficiently accurately, the name can communicate and instruct in the investigation of the object's being. It is likely that the resemblance will not be sufficient to yield knowledge, which Socrates will argue can come only from the study of things in themselves. The correct name will be a start and will help the process of dialectical questioning, which can sometimes lead to knowledge. However, the analyses in the *Cratylus* are intended to show that virtually none of the names analyzed are sufficient in quality to be useful for this dialectical exercise. Nevertheless, it has been shown that they do have a serious purpose and are not there simply to display a special type of Socratic irony or mockery.

- 1 It is commonly accepted that the *Cratylus* is a dialogue of Plato's middle period, later than dialogues like the *Charmides* and *Lysis*, but earlier than the *Sophist* and *Philebus*. However, there are some passages, cited in Note 11, that appear to have been added later.
- 2 C.D. Reeve (1998) is a new English translation, but does not contain a detailed commentary.
- 3 A definition and explanation of the term is given by Matthews (1999), pp.29-30. Matthews points to some differences between Plato and Aristotle in their usage of the term, but fails to include the example of *aporia* given by Socrates in the *Cratylus*.
- 4 Names (sing. *onomal* pl. *onomata*) are to be understood as the most general term for nouns & verbs. It will be clear from the examples given in the central part of the dialogue that Socrates uses the word to designate a vast range of individuals and concepts.
- 5 A good example of such an approach is Crombie (1963).
- 6 This has been done before, notably by Sedley, in Sedley (1998).

- 7 Wittengenstein (1967), p. 2.
- 8 Actually, it is known that Plato is the second name of the author of the *Cratylus*; Aristocles was the first. We do not know why it was changed. Sedley (2003) gives an inconclusive discussion on pp. 21-22.
- 9 Reeves (1998), p.xii., citing *Genesis*, Ch 2.
- 10 Geach & Black (1980), pp.56-78.
- 11 This and the previous paragraph summarize the main points of a controversy between Fine (1977) and Sedley (2003). In a later passage (431b-c) in the third part of the dialogue, statements are analyzed as combinations of names and predicates and this is in line with what is stated in the *Sophist*, which is a later dialogue. It is clear, however, that the text of the *Cratylus* contains passages that were added after the first version was written. The discussions at 437d10 - 438a2 and at 385b2 - 385d1 are examples.
- 12 Sedley (2003), pp. 8-11, has pointed to two passages that contradict each other in this connection. At 438a3-b4 Socrates simply asks Cratylus to agree that the first *nomothetes* possessed knowledge when assigning the first names. However, at 437d10-438a2 Socrates asks Cratylus whether the original name-givers named the things they named with knowledge or in ignorance. In other words the question is asked as a fresh question. Cratylus answers that they acted with knowledge and Socrates accepts the comment without agreement. Sedley argues that the second passage is a later addition, made to bring the argument of the *Cratylus* into line with that of the *Republic*, concerning the role of the dialectician. The second passage makes a distinction between the *nomothete* and the dialectician and provides a justification for Socrates playing this latter role.
- 13 阿辻哲次 釜谷武志 林原純生 (2001), p. 1279.
- 14 Aristotle, *Topics* I, 1, 100b21-23.
- 15 *Iliad*, VI, ll. 402-404, XXII, ll. 505-506.
- 16 Aristotle, *Topics* I 9 27-35.
- 17 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book Delta.
- 18 *Phaedrus*, 270a, *Republic*, 488c4-489a1, 489c6. In *The Clouds*, Socrates is satirized in the speech of Strepsiades, ll.1478-1492.
- 19 The conversation occurs at 402a4-402b4.
- 20 Cherniss (1935), (1944).

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