Plato's Cratylus and Beyond

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Abstract

Plato's *Cratylus* has proven through the centuries to be extremely challenging and puzzling philosophical treatise. Its main concern is the correctness of names or, in other words, the ability of words to express the nature of their nominata. Two conflicting theories of naming are presented, along with prolonged section dedicated to etymological analysis, as well as some crucial tenets of Platonic philosophy – the theory of Forms, the introduction of the dialectician as knower of the Forms, and, as I believe some early hints of the method of dialectic. My initial idea behind the inquiry into the *Cratylus* was to determine whether language is capable of depicting reality. The conclusions that I reach are that semantics of words, phonology and etymology are inconclusive and confusing and thus unable to properly account for the nature of the things the words are attached to. Names do not reflect or picture their nominata. But that outcome does not make language in general impotent in the matter of grasping reality. Shaped into *logoi* it serves as vehicle of dialectic, the ultimate method for approaching the intelligible realm.

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Introduction

Plato's interest in the intricacies of language is deep and perseverant, and that is only natural: no intellectual activity is imaginable without the use of language, and for Plato philosophy is the ultimate intellectual activity. That is why we find bits of inquiry into the 'philosophy of language' even in the early dialogues as the *Acibiades* and *Charmides* are, where speech and the speaker and the meaning of linguistic expressions are briefly discussed. Characteristically, Plato does not devote himself to systematic treatment of language, but facets of the problem remain dispersed throughout different dialogues. In his work he raises many relevant issues which fall under the domain of philosophy of language: the relation between language and thinking (as well as other subjects connected with linguistics) is dealt with in the *Theaetetus*. The meaning of the terms non-being and being, the genesis of logos (through *symploke* of ideas), the truth value of speech and thinking are expounded in the *Sophist*, as well as further language-related problems. It is important to note that Plato's linguistic speculations are almost never dissociated from his metaphysical and epistemological concerns. Therefore, the philosophical importance of Plato's rethinking of language lies in the fact that the linguistic issues are not considered in isolation, but more than often in the context of other fundamental problems, especially the ontological and epistemological ones.

My primary interest in the area of Plato's linguistic considerations was the interrelatedness of language or speech and reality (especially its highest realms) or, more precisely, the question whether language is capable of grasping and depicting being. However, since the language – reality relation is much too broad a subject, the main focus of this thesis will be placed upon the *Cratylus*, which plays a very significant, although sometimes underrated, role in Plato's opus. It is the only dialogue entirely dedicated to linguistic problems, and thus important both for the development of philosophy of language and linguistic in general[1]. Its main subject is the question of

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[1] In the field of phonetics and morphology, the *Cratilus* distinguishes between syllables and letters, with latter divided into vowels and consonants, gives an account names as larger linguistic units composed of *stoicheia*. Some ground-breaking efforts in the field of syntax are also visible therein: a distinction is made

correctness of names, presented through the opposition of two conflicting theories: naturalism and conventionalism. Plato undoubtedly ascribes immense importance to the problem of correctness of names, which is obvious from the statement of Cratylus: "But Hermogenes, do you really think that any subject can be taught or learned so quickly, not to mention one like this, which seems to be among the most important?"[2], in which he refers to the subject of names and their relation to reality. Besides the eminently linguistic issues, this dialogue tackles other fundamental Platonic themes. First, in the Cratylus we find two references to the theory of Forms: once with regard to Forms of artifacts (shuttle and name), and then in formulation familiar from the occurrence of the theory of Forms in *Phaedo*, *Symposium* and *Republic* – as Good itself and Beauty itself. Second, in this dialogue Plato for the first time uses the word 'dialectician' and attaches it to a person skilled in questioning and answering, and also capable knowing the true essence of things by seeing the Form both of their names and themselves. This reference naturally brings to our attention the question of the art practiced by the dialectician – the method of dialectic. Although far from being an unambiguous notion, the dialectic method, as understood and practiced by Plato, is finally the factor which brings language and being together. It embodies the faculty of discursive reasoning at it best, and thus is able to stir the soul in such a way that the curd of real knowledge will be separated from the whey of false opinions. The method of dialectic transcends the sensual realm and investigates the intelligible sphere. As a carrier of discursive thought, it simply cannot dispose of language, without which no account is possible. So, the dialectic method is crucial to philosophy, language is crucial to dialectic, the relation is transitive – that means that language is crucial to philosophy[3]. Thus, the central theme of our inquiry remains to be the reliability of language in relation to the ultimate reality, or the question whether the method of dialectic is a feasible one, but through the prism of the *Cratylus* and its account of correctness of names. Further clarification is needed here, because at the first sight posing such a question seems to be redundant. Namely, Plato himself explicitly establishes dialectic as a sufficient, if not the only possible tool for reaching out the realm

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between 'names' (*onomata*) and 'things said' (*rhemata*), while the entire discussion of 'correctness of names' is connected with semantics. (Cf. Long, 2000).

[2] *Crat. 427 e 5-7*

[3] The Seventh Letter might be relevant for the subject investigated here, but falls out of its scope, due to time and space limitations. Another reason for excluding it is its very questionable authenticity.

of intelligible things, or the Forms. That is true, beyond any doubt. But, what remains to be investigated is the following:

a) The nature of language, starting with its most primitive and minimal units, the phonemes, and extending to nouns and verbs (*onomata* and *rhêmata*), as the basic constituents of a meaningful sentence. Are they, on Plato's account, really capable of properly reflecting the objects they represent? More precisely, do they imitate or participate in stable and eternal Forms, as the properties supposedly do, or are they simply convenient tools brought to life by convention?

b) The explicit statement found in the *Cratylus* that the objects are to be known directly, rather then on the basis of the names and their resemblance to the former? Does it imply that there is a superior kind of cognition, independent of the human language as a cognitive system, does it mean that Plato's metaphysics culminates in intuitive insight?

In order to try to provide answers to these questions, I will work on presenting the overall argumentation of the dialogue, and pay special attention to the more or less controversial issues as are the etymological section, the account of the name-forms, as well as to the account of the legislator, or the name-giver. Through examination of these issues I will try to show that Plato is much more inclined to the theory of conventionalism then to the theory of naturalism, that the theory of name-forms is an eristic devise and not a belief of his own, as well as that the names are not appropriate tools for depicting reality. I will also try briefly to point out the issues that remain open or insufficiently discussed in this dialogue and how Plato deals with these questions in some later works. Finally, the conclusion will be presented that although semantics of words and etymology are not appropriate and sufficient epistemological tools for grasping the highest reality, that does not disqualifies language in general as a vehicle for the method of dialectic, which is according to Plato the only ladder to the intelligible world; the *onomata* might not be speaking the truth, but the *logoi* do.

1. The Janus-faced Cratylus

Entering the splendid mansion of Plato's *Cratylus* at first sight presents itself as a relatively easy task. This dialogue is not characterized by the voluminousness and multiplicity of subjects distinctive of the *Republic*, the obscurity and the seemingly impenetrable "deductions" of *Parmenides*, or the strong Pythagorean echoes and sometimes mystical allegories of *Timaeus*. But upon getting inside, the reader once again finds himself in an aporetic maze. A dilemma is presented at the very beginning of the text, which seems to get solved by Socrates. Still, in the last part of the *Cratylus*, during the discussion between Socrates and the Heraclitean instructor of young Plato, whose name served as an eponym of the book, another variable is introduced, namely Plato's own ontological outlook. Cratylus initially concedes to Plato's suggestion that there are such things as Forms, but later on nevertheless decides that he is convinced in Heraclitus' teaching. Thus the final conclusion of the dialogue – not atypically for Plato (at least in his early period) – is left for some other occasion[4]. The enlivening intermingling of irony and seriousness visible throughout the dialogue, the perplexity surrounding the reasons for the extensive etymologizing as well as the very grounding of the sometimes overly fanciful etymologies, the unexpected turns in the argumentation by which the same idea is first defended, simply to be rejected later on (remindful of a well conceived, but frivolous eristic play) – these are some of the reasons that make the *Cratylus* a work pleasant to read, but difficult to understand.

There are, of course, several plain truths about the *Cratylus* that are beyond doubt and some of them are the following: In no other dialogue of Plato is the subject matter of language so extensively discussed; the above mentioned dilemma refers to two conflicting theories of the correctness of names, namely conventionalism and naturalism[5]; the most pertinent issue of this work is the question of "correctness of

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[4] That occasion never occurred. That, of course, does not make *Cratylus* an aporetic dialogue as the so called Socratic, or early ones are. It occupies the middle ground between them and the more dogmatic dialogues, as the *Republic* (vide Barney (2001), p. 1). It is also a fact that in there Plato somewhat modestly advances certain very important doctrines of his own, primarily the theory of the Forms.

[5] Sedley (in 2003, p3) attributes the introduction of the terminology to Kretzmann (1971).

names[6]" (*orthotes tôn onomatôn*)[7], or the relation between the names and their reference. Now, regarding the essential idea underlying the discussion on the correctness of names, Sedley has to say the following: "*Plato's ultimate aim in our dialog is ... to show why it is that, when the approaches of his two mentors Cratylus and Socrates are brought into confrontation, Socrates has the edge*"[8]. But how are we to perceive and understand Socrates' superiority? And more importantly, what does it consist in? It seems that Socrates' own standpoint (and without any doubts Plato's as well), if at all explicitly expressed, is that the things should be investigated and learned about through themselves, rather than through their images, the names[9]. This conclusion, if true, would push the phonetic and semantic investigations aside, and establish the supremacy of eidetic epistemology (understanding things through their essences, or Forms) over its onomatic counterpart. We shall consider this problem later in the text, and especially in the concluding part. Now, in order to be able to establish his opinion as authoritative, Socrates is bound to first of all refute two distinct epistemological and ontological positions[10] underlying the linguistic theories of conventionalism[11] and naturalism[12]. His strategy in accomplishing this task is rather peculiar: he straightforwardly refutes the extreme version of conventionalism as held by Hermogenes and the quasi-ontological conception it presupposes, but seemingly endorses and even strongly advocates the theory of linguistic naturalism. Furthermore, the entire enterprise of the elaborate etymological analysis – at least in its initial, expositional phase – is meant to reveal that

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[6] By names, Plato in *Cratylus* implies "*a loose linguistic category, understood as including common nouns and adjectives as well as proper names.*" Sedley (2003, p. 4)

[7] This view is endorsed both by Sedley and Barney. But it hasn't always been the case. A.E. Taylor, for example, used to hold that the ostensive subject of the dialogue was the origin of language, while its main concern was to consider the function and use of language (vide Taylor 1926, pp. 77, 78).

[8] Sedley (2003, p. 23)

[9] Vide: *Crat. 439 a – b*

[10] The first ontological position is deducible from the Protagorean absolute epistemological relativism. His *homo mensura* thesis allows only for an extremely relativist ontology, making the being and essence of the things that are private for each person (Cf. *Crat. 385 e 4-5*). Such ontology produces, in turn, strong relativism in the field of values as well, and that is certainly not what Plato wants. The second one, on the other hand, the Heraclitean doctrine of constant flux, does not allow for any fixed subject of epistemological investigations, and that conviction allegedly made the historical Cratylus refrain from discussions and move his finger instead of answering.

[11] Briefly stated, the claim of the extreme conventionalists is that any name set down by any person for any object is the correct one, at least for that particular person.

[12] The naturalists' claim is „ ... *that there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by nature*" (*Crat. 383 a 3*). The extreme consequence of this viewpoint is that names which do not belong naturally to objects in question (those mistakenly assigned to them) are not names at all.

the name-givers of old espoused the allegedly Heraclitean theory of flux[13]. The etymology of the elements is explained on the basis of the presumption that the nature of things is unsteady and always moving. The same holds for the most important ethical (*aretê, sôphrosynê, dikaiosunê, andreia* etc.) and epistemological terms (*epistêmê, gnômê, doxa* etc.), and this seemingly aligns Socrates with the upholders of the flux doctrine. The truth is, of course, exactly the opposite, and that becomes very clear during his conversation with Cratylus. One very interesting thing to note is that Socrates also attributes the doctrine of constant change to the primeval name-givers, and that may have devastating consequences for the naturalist theory which is so much dependent on the authority of those wise men of old:

> *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 own internal condition, however, but on the nature of the things themselves, which they think are never stable or steadfast, but flowing and moving full of every sort of motion and constant coming into being[14].*

The fact that Socrates does not even attempt to veil the irony so obvious in the above lines, as well as the fact that this conception so detrimentally collides with his own opinion[15], namely that things possess stable essences (which will be once again presented by the very end of the dialogue[16]), seems to show that what he does here is exercising his eristic powers over Cratylus (who is at this point still only an auditor), with the aim to reduce Cratylus' philosophical standpoint to absurd.

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[13] It is really not certain that Heraclitus himself was an extreme Heraclitean of Cratylus' type, or even a flux theorist at all (as reported by Plato and further promoted by Aristotle). Against this view, among some other scholars, argues Marcovich (in 1983). The famous "river fragment" (B 12 DK = 40 Marcovich) in his rendition reads: "Upon those who are stepping in the same rivers different and again different waters flow". If correct, this rendition would make the statement that nobody can step into the same river twice a misreading forced upon Heraclitus by his interpreters. Marcovich concludes that the "river picture" is just another Heraclitus' device to support the notion of *coincidentia oppositorum* within the frame of his general theory of Logos.

[14] *Crat. 411 b 3 – c 4*

[15] Advanced much earlier, in *386 a ff.*

[16] *Crat. 439 c,* together with the conclusion that the name-givers, if they ascribed names to things in the belief that everything is always moving, were mistaken and consequently deceived their successors.

1.1 Socrates' Rebuttal of Conventionalism

But let us return to the starting point of the dialogue, where Hermogenes complains to Socrates that Cratylus confuses him with his sarcastic and unclear exposition of the doctrine of naturalism, and furthermore offends him by claming that his name cannot be Hermogenes. He, in opposition to his interlocutor, advocates the view that the correctness of names in their application to objects or notions is determined by nothing more than an agreement among the users of language. Hence, the main clash that we witness in the dialogue is between the two opposing views on the relation of words (more broadly – language) with reality: Cratylus[17], the propounder of the first one, maintains that they are connected *physei*, while Hermogenes[18], who represents the second view (in the order of appearance in the dialogue) holds that the connection is *nomô*. Still not discouraged enough to start seriously questioning his outlook, the latter provokes Socrates' exposition on the correctness of names with the following utterance: *ou gar physei hekastô pephykenai onoma ouden oudeni, alla nomô kai ethei tôn ethisantôn te kai kalountôn* – "not a single name belongs to any particular thing by nature, but by custom (rule) and habit of those who establish the custom and use it"[19]. Socrates, in replay to his position, advances the idea that the consequence of Hermogenes' theory of naming, if the same principle would be applied to things that are, or beings, instead of to names, would result in a doctrine of extreme ontological relativism. This doctrine was originally held by Protagoras, who famously stated: "of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not. Hermogenes, who is the advocate of the conventionalist's theory in the dialogue, reluctantly admits that there were times when he, due to intense internal turmoil, took refuge in Protagoras' doctrine, although without due consideration. Socrates deals the final blow to Protagoras teachings (refuting in passing yet another sophist's doctrine, the one of Euthydemus, who

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[17] Stewart (1909, p. 35) and Demand (1975, p. 107), citing other scholars (Raeder and Derbolav, von Fritz respectively), present the opinion that it was actually Antisthenes who upheld this view, and that Plato is thus arguing with his fellow student and forerunner of an influential school of thought, disguised in the robes of Cratylus. If this were true, it would, of course, add an additional weight to the argument that Plato's initial endorsement of the theory of naturalism was purposeful, namely with the aim to reduce it to absurd. After all, Antisthenes was known as a kind of opponent to Plato.
[18] Possibly a mouthpiece of Protagoras (cf. Steward, *ibid.*)
[19] *Crat. 384 d 4-6*

apparently believed that all the contrary properties are simultaneously present in every object, and consequently all statements whatsoever are true) in a rather interesting and elaborate line of reasoning[20]. Let us try to reconstruct the structure of this argument, which starts off with the necessary transposition from names to beings, only to finally return back to names and disprove conventionalism, which was after all the original intention of the dialectician, namely Socrates.

Hermogenes claims: whatever one decides to call a certain thing, that will be its name, and further supports his claim by the fact that different communities have different names for the same things, a truth that holds both among the Hellenes and the foreigners. Socrates, on the other hand, turns the argument to ontological grounds, and asks whether things have essences of their own, or do they, in the matter of their being, depend on the opinions of individual men. If they do not have fixed being of their own, than:

- We would not be able to distinguish one thing from the other[21], and also we would not have the means to attribute fixed properties to numerically different things if our opinions of them do not coincide[22].
- But we do distinguish one individual from another, and we do attribute them properties of, say, goodness and badness, and to a different degree.
- Therefore, the things of this world have essences or being of their own.

This is Socrates' interim conclusion in the argument. The things' essences do not stand in relation to our cognitive faculties, do not picture the transient mental states of the humans, but have fixed ontological status of their own.

Next, Socrates assumes that the same holds of actions, and therefore it is both legitimate and important for the later part of the argument to ask whether this assumption of his is well grounded, or presents a case of unjustified extrapolation. The status of events (and for that matter, actions) is a subject of huge debate among contemporary philosophers. Still, there seem to be some peculiarities that are shared by both things and events, one of them being that they are "*equally spatiotemporal in as much as both are*

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[20] Starting off with *Crat. 385 d*
[21] According to Euthydemus' version.
[22] If man is the measure of all things and Peter's opinion differs from John's, then it would not be possible to definitely say that, for example, the water is either warm or cold.

non-repeatable, dated particulars"[23]. And if events are particulars, that would make them susceptible of having certain other features in common with the things or objects, as for example Socrates' ascribing them fixed nature, or essence, would be. That move can be accomplished when both types of particular entities (objects and events) are subsumed under a sortal term, or, in the case of the events, and event or action type, which would have essence and whose instances the particular events would be. Davidson, on the other hand, although disclaims that events have essences (being particulars identified by the causal nexus), still offers good reasons why events should be taken seriously as entities[24]. He also holds that actions can be subsumed under events; of course, not every event is an action, but that fact does not seem to be relevant to the case explicated here by Socrates. Therefore, it is probably safe enough to conclude that Socrates is justified to attribute essentiality to actions, and that they can be described (at least those presented in *Cratylus*) as "species" of events which are necessary causally connected with a conscious agent. Let us now resume our argument.

- As for the actions (weaving, cutting), they also possess nature or essence, and are performed according to it, and not our liking. In order to perform them properly, we must use the appropriate tools that naturally attach to them.
- Speaking or saying something is one sort of action.
- Therefore, correct speech is the one performed according to nature, and includes saying words in the way natural to use them. Words are the proper tools employed in the speech act.

This is the second interim conclusion drawn by Socrates. He makes it clear that any enterprise undertaken has to be accomplished according to strict rules dictated by the essential nature of the activity itself. Nobody can perform a surgical operation without separating the tissues of the patient with a sharp metal tool. Similarly, nobody can speak properly without following the rules of the speech-action and using the appropriate tools – the names.

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[23] MacDonald (1989, p. 110)

[24] Davidson (1980, p. 164 ff). Any description of an event implies that there is an entity to be described; the logical form of the sentences we use in our ordinary talk presupposes that there are things our sentences are about.

Socrates next proceeds briefly to discuss true and false speech, with an intention to point out to Hermogenes that there is a possibility of false, incorrect speech. It is a matter of very basic knowledge of logic that truth-value is to be attributed to propositions, or more precisely utterances, specific uses of sentences. Plato's Socrates acknowledges that, but he is prone to also ascribe truth-value to the constituents, or parts of the statements as well, on the principle that what is true of the unit, has to be true of its parts as well. This seems to be an example of flagrant error in reasoning, known as the fallacy of division[25]. Why would Plato's Socrates commit such a fallacy in the course of what seems to be a valid and firm argument?[26] One obvious answer would be that the very theory he is about to expound presupposes the notion of names as independent bearers of meaning and truth, linguistic microcosms encapsulating within themselves both truth-value and reference, although it seems a bit odd that he would, at such an early stage of the argument, introduce the basic tenet of the doctrine of naturalism, which he has not yet properly touched upon. The other possible answer would be that this inconsistency is yet another eristic move of the playful Socrates, who is determined to establish the theory of naturalism upon a host of absurdities, just in order to deconstruct it later on.

But let us, for the time being, leave this issue as it is, and proceed with the argument. So, since true and false speech is possible, some statements are true, some false; the same holds for the smallest parts of sentences – the names. But using names is

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[25] Elsewhere (*Soph. 263 d*) Plato clearly asserts that truth-value arises from the combination of names and verbs.

[26] Not all the scholars agree that this is a case of fallacy. Taylor (1926, p. 79) flatly denies that, arguing that the attribution of truth-value to names is confined to limited cases of superimposition of private nomenclature on common or public usage of language. With Schofield's transposition (Schofield, 1972) of the relevant passage on truth and falsity of names (*385 b2-d1*) after *387c*, followed in the standard English translation of Plato's works edited by Cooper, this objection is not valid anymore, since the passage does not follow the discussion on "private" versus "public" names. Sedley (2003, p. 11 ff) considers the above mentioned passage an unintentionally left residue from a previous edition of the dialogue which was later on amended to suit the conclusion of the *Sophist*, with the passage in question deleted. This assumption, even if pretty bold, is quite legitimate since the flow of the argument is not interrupted by the omission the disputed passage. On the other hand, the passage cannot be unequivocally pronounced as completely redundant, since the attribution of falsity to some names may be used for fostering the idea of names' capacity to convey fixed meaning (which is a supporting pillar of the theory of naturalism), by pointing out their inability to do so if not proper (false); after all, the discussion that immediately follows the transposed passage focuses on the usage of proper or natural tools for performing actions. In the light of the above understanding, the proper names would be true, the improper false. Furthermore, even if Plato did edited *385 b2-d1* out, that would in no way strengthen the case for the existence of name-forms (which is the present issue), but would mean only one inconsistency less.

part of the action of speaking, therefore, using names is also a sort of speech-action. Consequently, if using names is a speech-action, it follows from the interim conclusions II and I that we cannot name things according to our liking or even on the basis of agreement among citizens, but rather have to name them in a natural way, in accordance with their essences and by using appropriate tools. Eschewing this procedure of naming would imply failure in the attempt to name things. In this way it is proven that the conventionalist theory of naming and the underlying Protagorean theory of knowledge stand no chance against the powerful dialectic of Socrates.

After Socrates established that speaking or saying was an activity which should be performed in accordance with its own nature and that names were natural tools for performing that activity (in the same way as surgical knife is the natural tool for the activity of cutting, which has separating tissues as is purpose), a question may spontaneously present itself to the inquisitive mind: what is the purpose which is to be accomplished by the usage of names as tools for the activity of saying? Socrates gives straightforward and precise answer to this question – the main functions of names are to help us teach (*didaskô*) one another something and separate (*diacrinô*) things. He gives this answer after Hermogenes admits that he does not know what precisely we do when we name things. Isn't it, says Socrates, that by naming we instruct each other, and also separate things according to their nature, and Hermogenes readily expresses his consent[27]. Now, by the end of the dialogue[28], Socrates points out to Cratylus that a well fashioned speech should say of a thing firstly that it is *this* and further on that it is *such*

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[27] *Crat. 388 b 9-10: ar' ou didaskomen ti allêlous kai ta pragmata diakrinomen ê echei;* Socrates does not elaborate much on these functions of names, but I think that, although closely related, they should be kept separate. 'Instructing' and 'dividing things' (in *388 c 1* a name is said to be *organon diakritikon tês ousias* – a tool for separating *being*) here probably mean on the one hand imparting positive information about a particular object, and on the other marking it off from other objects or, better, beings. According to Sedley (2006, p. 217 f) both functions are eminently in the service of philosophy; 'instructing' means teaching philosophical truth, while 'separating being' refers to a range of meanings: from pointing out what a thing is by distinguishing it from other things to encapsulating the thing's essence in definition. This seems to be possible only if we accept as true the premise that names are bearers of both meaning and reference, or independently capable of expressing the essence of things. But that is hardly possible; both the truth-value and the capability of forming definitions belong to propositions or statements. It is also very well possible that Socrates is here echoing Heraclitus' statement in B 1 DK that he is teaching by dividing each thing according to its nature.

[28] *Crat. 439 d 8*

and such - proton men hoti ekeino estin, epeita hoti toiuton[29]. And in order for the later account of function of speech[30] found in *Cratylus 439 d 8* (determining what a thing is (*ekeino*) and then enumerating its properties *(toiouto)*) to be in a similar way reconciled with the earlier account of function of names (*didaskô* and *diacrinô*), we would have to understand *didaskô* (teaching or instructing) as indicating the thing's essential nature, while *diacrinô* (separating) as the usual way of defining a thing, or grasping its essence by marking it off from the other things (not belonging to the same kind), through pointing out its *genus proximus* and *differentia specifica*. As it was already mentioned, Sedley holds that both functions of instructing and separating being are primarily of philosophical nature; they are not meant to simply label things or describe them superficially, but to encapsulate their essence, although most of the names are at low level of approximation to their ultimate aim. At the face of it, this conclusion sounds reasonable enough, but if it were true, then Plato would be very serious about the naturalist theory of naming. However, his commitment to such a theory is dubious even at this early point, exactly because of the above inconsistency surrounding the attribution of truth-value to names, and, more importantly, because of the assumption underlying the whole truth-value issue – that is that names have the power to encapsulate and convey essences, which is actually what was to be proven, if possible at all.

1.2 A Nice Pair

Another question that naturally imposes itself concerns the position and the authority of the craftsmen responsible for manufacturing names. It was already established that names are tools for performing speech-acts, in the very same respect as a saw, for example, is a tool for performing a sawing act. In order for a sawing act to be properly executed, the skills of two kinds of artisans are needed: the one who is proficient in performing it (lumberjack of carpenter) and the one who is an expert in manufacturing the tool necessary for its performance (probably a blacksmith). By persisting on the analogy of

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[29] Sedley (in 2006, p. 215) interprets this statement as follows: „ … *to utter a complete statement (*logos*), you must first* name *your subject, then go on to* describe *it*".
[30] As I understand it to be, and as it is confirmed by Sedley (cf. footnote 22)

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speaking to other productive activities, and falling back on the functions of names determined in *439 d 8*, Socrates picks out *ho didaskalikos*, an instructor or teacher, as the person who will be proficient in using names, and his interlocutor have no problems with that. But when it comes to the manufacturer of the product used by the teacher, Hermogenes is perplexed again. Fortunately, not so Socrates: he readily directs his interlocutor's attention to the possessor of the craft (*ho tên technên echôn*), in this case the very specific craft of constructing names. Socrates at this point once again discards the belief previously held by Hermogenes that just any speaker of a language can construct names and assign them to things. At the contrary, that kind of craftsmanship (*technê*) is most rarely found among humans and is associated with very unusual kind of vocation, namely that of a name-maker (*onomatourgos*), who is at the same time called a law-giver or legislator (*nomothetês*)[31]. The introduction of the almost mythical legislators seems as yet another peculiar move on the side of Socrates, but Sedley advances the thesis that the recognition of an anonymous originator of language was an established tradition by the time the *Cratylus* was composed[32]. Even if this were true[33], it does not seem to me that Plato is truly convinced in the indispensable role of the legislator(s), and there are quite some reasons to support this claim. Both Demand[34] and Sedley[35] rightly notice the discrepancy in *388 d*, where Socrates first introduces that rarest of craftsmen,

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[31] Sedley (in Sedley 2003, p. 69) inserts a very interesting remark on this point: "… Plato has Socrates introduce an apparent neologism, *onomatourgos*, 'name-maker', then immediately drop it in favor of *nomothetês*, as if in recognition that the skill of institutionalizing a name is something far more than the simple ability to string meaningful sounds together into new forms". Of course, the sounds can be meaningful only under the assumption of the theory, allegedly propounded in *Cratylus*, that sounds are capable of expressing properties (like motion, length, smallness, smoothness) of things, but the real point here is that the *technê* possessed by a *nomothetês* is something much more elevated than simple introduction of neologisms; the *nomothetês* is a 'linguistic legislator' efficient not only in contriving the names, but also in 'bringing them into currency'.

[32] Sedley (2003, p. 70). He does that on the basis of the brief mention of *nomothetês* in the probably earlier dialogue *Charmides*, but recognizes the silence engulfing the mysterious legislator in the other ancient sources. Therefore, Sedley advances the hypothesis that the notion of *nomothetês* "… was a product of the fifth-century etymological industry, a large-scale Sophistic enterprise of which Plato's *Cratylus* is no more than a faint echo". The assumption is that the early etymologists linked the word '*onoma*' (name) with '*ho nomos*' (law) and thus brought out the idea that naming is some kind of lawmaking, which on its turn paved the way for postulating a personified *nomothetês*, or several of them.

[33] Demand once again points out the deficiency of sources recognizing the *nomothetês* prior to Plato (cf. Demand (1975, p.108)).

[34] Demand (1975, p. 107)

[35] Sedley (2003, p. 71)

the *nomothetês. Tis paradidôsin hêmin ta onomata;*[36] – asks Socrates, just to himself give the answer instead of the perplexed Hermogenes – *ho nomos*[37]. Interestingly enough, that was exactly the point which Socrates was supposed to disprove or refute: that the names are not given according *to nomos*, but according to *physis*. Here however, we find that the very name of the honorable *nomothetês* is derived from his function to set a law (but also rule, custom, habit) – *ho nomos thesthai* – which at least from an etymological point of view collides with his supposed ability to assign names *physei*.[38] It turns out that the name-maker is also, or even primarily, a legislator, whose verdict, unfortunately, is often not the right one (as it will be shown later). Demand believes that Plato here uses a play of words resulting in etymological pun which is meant to discredit the position of the supposed *nomothetês*[39], and I agree with her. After all, it does sound like a play of words when Socrates says that not just anybody can be the one to *onoma thesthai*, but only an *onomatourgos,* who seems to be a *nomothetês*[40]. The point is that if Plato were serious about the etymologies (and he seems to be so, at least in some respect), then he would be serious about this one as well – it is at any rate peculiar to try to confirm the hypothesis of *physei* relation between words and reality by introducing a figure who does that by establishing *nomos*, what is exactly the rival theory of language-world interrelatedness. Sedley, however, maintains a different view on the matter, based on the etymological analysis mentioned above (cf. footnote 28): it was because the word *onoma* was derived from *ho nomos* that the *nomothetês* was so named. Thus, when Socrates says *ar' ouchi ho nomos dokei soi (einai) ho paradidous auta;*[41] he is not referring to a depersonalized activity of setting rules, but to a personal *onomatourgos* who passes down to us *onomata* and who can be interchangeably called both *ho nomos* and *nomothetês*[42]. The problem with this interpretation (besides the exegetical strain that it involves) is that nowhere else

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[36] "Who provides us with names?"

[37] "The law."

[38] The idea behind the belief in the 'cunning nature' of Plato's act of naming the name-giver a *nomothetês*, is that it is directed against Hermogenes' extreme version of conventionalism. *Nomos* is here not taken to mean 'law', but rather 'custom' or 'habit'; and indeed Hermogenes' claim from the beginning of the dialogue (*384 c-d*) is not that names are given and handed down to posteriority on the basis of a firm and definite law or a rule set by a respectful person, but that they are simply a matter of convention and agreement.

[39] Demand (1975, p. 107)

[40] *Crat. 388 e 6-389 a 1*

[41] *Crat. 388 d 9* – "Don't you think it is the law who provides us with them (the names)?"

[42] Cf. Sedley (2003, p. 71)

in *Cratylus* is the *nomothetês* referred to with the name *nomos,* as well as the fact that Socrates' own etymological analysis of the word *onoma* in *421 a* breeds utterly different result: name is "a being for which there is a search". Furthermore, the argumentative structure of *Cratylus* obviously does not support the notion of *nomos* as "personified original benefactor in linguistic matters"[43], and for that matter any of kind of *nomothetês* endowed with absolute immaculacy as regards contriving linguistic tools. This fact is a very strong argument in support of the thesis that by introducing *ho nomos* as the provider of names, Plato intends to produce internal tension in the notion of *nomothetês* and ultimately establish its inadequacy, with the aim to direct the inquirer toward investigation not of names, but Forms.

> *The Nomothetes is brought in again and again simply because his name itself makes the very point which the discussion as a whole makes: that you cannot learn from names. A* Nomoethetes *who gives names* physei *is a contradiction. But if that is the case, then we have, in a sense, learned from a name that we cannot learn from names: the circle is complete, and etymology, in succeeding, has defeated itself[44].*

The royal road leading to such a conclusion is the inconsistency between the early and the later accounts of *nomothetês*. Using once again the analogy of other crafts, Socrates, while introducing that exceptional artisan, relates that, in order properly to execute his function, he would have to be able to embody in sounds the name naturally suited to each thing, in the same way as the blacksmith embodies in iron the tool exactly suited for sawing wood. And how is he to accomplish that task? Socrates is resolute: only by being endowed with the ability to look *pros auto ekeino ho estin onoma*[45]. He is an authentic *nomothetês* who can perceive the Form of a given thing and then capture it with phonetic devises. Again, approximately one Stephanus page later, while winding up his discourse on the *nomothetês*, besides pronouncing Cratylus the winner of the dispute (just to very strongly, if not detrimentally, challenge this conclusion later on), Socrates reiterates what was already said (in *390 d-e*). First, name-giving cannot be inconsequential or frivolous

[43] Ibid.
[44] Demand (1975, p. 108f)

[45] *Crat. 389 d 6* – "Upon that which is the name itself"

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activity; and consequently cannot be performed by a chance person. Second, that non-inconsequential name-giver must posses the most unusual ability, and is identified as: *monon ekeinon ton apobleponta eis to tê physei onoma on hekasto*[46]. But that is not everything that Socrates has to say about the *nomothetês*. Later on in the dialogue, besides introducing multiple *nomothetai* (as opposed to *388 b ff* where the first occurrence of the almost mythical craftsman takes place), he also attributes them proneness to commit mistakes, which is hard to conceive, granted that they posses the ability to look upon the essence of a name and then encapsulate it in appropriate string of sounds. Let us briefly note some of the places in the dialogue where Socrates speaks more or less pejoratively about the *nomothetês*. It was already pointed out that in *411 b 3-c 4* Socrates speaks of them (notice the plural) using irony in abundance, and furthermore, in *436 c 6-d 3,* clearly states that they, or rather he in this case, because singular is used, is liable to mistakes and might have wrongly named one thing at the beginning and thus caused a domino-effect with the consequence that all the names that we use are consistent, but wrong. Then again, in *439 c 1-5* (continuing to waver between *nomothetês* and *nomothetai*): "… The name-givers really did give them (the names) in the belief that everything is always moving and flowing, and as it happens things aren't really that way at all, but the name-givers themselves have fallen into a kind of vortex and are whirled around it, dragging us with them". Thus, by the end of *Cratylus*, it turns out that they (he) are at best well wishing and hard working men, though highly liable to mistakes.

Everything that has thus far been said about the *nomothetês* may not necessarily mean that he is a fictional character, purposefully invented by Plato just in order to make pun with his interlocutors. He might have believed that there were *nomothetês or nomothetai,* and as a matter of fact he himself was, in a sense, one of them – words like 'dialectic' and 'quality' are Plato's lasting contributions to our philosophical vocabulary.[47] The moral of the story about the *nomothetês,* as is seems to me, is that even the most meticulously coined names present at best a dim reflection of reality, because their manufacturers, however well-wishing and sincere they may be, are but fallible

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[46] *Crat. 390 e 1-2* – „He alone who looks upon the name that each thing has by nature."
[47] Cf. Sedley (2003, p.69)

human beings[48]. This would further imply that etymology, although during Plato's times widely practiced and respected, is inconclusive or even misleading. And if we wish to accept these claims as true, they will, on their turn, gradually lead us to what I believe is the very heart of *Cratylus* – the conclusion that the things should be studied through themselves, and not by way of names.

There is yet another peculiarity in the account of the *nomothetês,* which appears during the initial discussion regarding his craft and function, when he is said to be able to embody in sounds the names naturally befitting the things. The peculiarity in question is the ascription of a special power over the *nomothetês* to him who was at first introduced as user of the product manufactured by the *nomothetês,* and referred to as instructor or teacher. The transformation of the teacher into supervisor makes the supposed ability of the *nomothetês* to look at the natural name of each thing, or in other words at the Form of each name, and thus manufacture it perfectly, even more puzzling. What we learn from *390 b-e* is that in order to be able to perform his duty properly, the legislator has to have an overseer assigned to him. The rationale for this move, given by Socrates, is again borrowed from the field of craftsmanship: as the user, and not the manufacturer, is the real knower of the appropriate Form of the tool with which he operates[49], so is the user of words entitled to supervise the work of a *nomothetês,* being very well-acquainted with the name-forms of the words the latter coins[50]. In this section, however, unlike in *388 c* when the proper user of names was first introduced, he is given further job-description and a novel name: the best supervisor of the legislator will be he who is expert in asking and answering questions and he is to be denominated as dialectician[51]*,* or metaphysician

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[48] Cf. (for instance) *Tim. 35 c 2-4* – *"But as for us men, even as we ourselves partake largely of the accidental and casual, so also do our words."*

[49] *Crat. 390 a 7-b 1 – tis oun ho gnôsomenos (ei) to prosêokon eidos kerkidos*? (Who is then he who knows the appropriate Form of shuttle?)

[50] Taylor (in Taylor 1926, p. 81) rightly points put that this is a matter of a general rule – "the man who makes the implement must 'take his specifications' from the man who is to use it" – which will later lead to explicit formulation of a distinction between superior and subordinate craft, the former being the craft who uses the product, while the latter being the art that produces it (*Rep. 601 d-e:* Therein actually three crafts are introduced: the one that uses, the one that produces, and the one that imitates a thing. The user is the most experienced, and therefore entitled to give instructions). But the question remains why would the manufacturer, who is somehow capable to perceive the Form of his product (e.g. a name), have to have a supervisor. Is it because his vision is imperfect? That might be, but it will turn out that even the supervisor's is not fully reliable.

[51] Sedley (in Sedley, 2003, p.62) directly associates the instructor or dialectician of *Cratylus* with the verdict of *Meno* that to teach is to pose right questions which will prompt *anamnesis* and thus 'extract' true

(Taylor's conjecture)[52]. Socrates leaves no room for doubt on this matter: "And if names are to be given well, a dialectician must supervise him"[53]. So the dialectician is the paradigmatic name-user, naturally fit to supervise the *nomothetês* and also instrumental in determining the correctness of names.

The problem with the dialectician, as I see it, is that he further compromises the position of the *nomothetês.* If the latter is endowed with the ability to look upon a name-form and then translate his vision into sounds, why would he need an overseer? Furthermore, it was already shown that the *nomothetês,* even if accepted by Plato as a historical figure is prone to commit mistakes and thus involuntarily deceive the generations that follows. But now we are informed that he has a supervisor, a kind of guarantor that the *nomothetês* will complete his job satisfactorily, and that the names will be given well. He thus becomes obliged to work in harmony with the dialectician. If the *nomothetês* wants to perform his work dutifully and correctly, he has to be supervised and instructed by a dialectician. This, in turn, may mean that the outcome of the new situation is not going to be favorable for those who hold fast to the naturalist theory: the expert team of seer and overseer is not a nice pair after all[54] – despite their best intentions they at least occasionally commit blunders, and the best they can achieve in coining a name is a certain level of approximation to reality. It seems that the above conclusion unavoidably reduces to absurd the fundamental postulate of the theory, namely that names are assigned *physei*, which as a further consequence has the idea that semantics is a key to deciphering reality[55].

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knowledge from the soul. But his insistence that the dialecticians primary function is to ask, not to answer questions seems a bit constrained. There is a natural flow (and no emphasis whatsoever) between *390 c 5* where Socrates introduces the dialecticians capacity to ask questions, and *390 c 7*, where his ability to answer them is mentioned. Asking naturally antecedents answering.

[52] Cf. Taylor (1926, p. 82). This additional appellation used for the dialectician points out in direction of the understanding that language is ultimately for philosophy and that, if properly fashioned and used, should be expressive of the truth about reality. So Sedley (ibid.): "The paradigmatic name-user should be expected to be whoever achieves the highest good with names as instruments, and this good is, once again, to be identified with philosophy."

[53] *Crat. 390 d 5*

[54] As it turns out that the current names don't reflect the reality properly. The antecedents of such an outcome may be either that the postulated historical *nomothetês* had a supervisor which was not up to his task, or no supervisor at all. I will briefly mention the alternative outlook on the situation, namely the dialectician's absence at the time when names were coined, in the concluding part of the text.

[55] This does not necessarily mean that no name whatsoever is properly assigned to a thing or phenomenon; but the strict theory of naturalism (having here Cratylus as its exponent) requires them to be either accurate or not names at all (therefore poor Hermogenes, who is not abundantly supplied with resources, is denied

1.3 The Name-Form Theory

At this point it might be helpful to make a short recapitulation of what Socrates says about the process of fashioning names[56], which will lead us back to the most important, most intriguing and probably the most controversial topic advanced in this part of the dialogue. There are three main ideas deserving attention here, and they are all result of a transfer of the principles an ordinary craftsman sticks with, to the craftsman 'most rarely found among human beings' – the *nomothetês*. 1) The *nomothetês,* while embodying in sounds the name of a thing, is not free to fashion it any way he pleases, but have to keep in mind the function it has to perform, i.e. to instruct and separate beings. In other words, a name cannot be constructed whimsically or just by random choice (in opposition to Hermogenes' opinion) if it should be at all an appropriate tool for instructing about a specific thing and distinguishing it from the others. 2) When fashioning the name while preserving its function, what he actually does is encapsulating the Form, or the name as it is, the true name (*ekeino ho estin onoma*), in the appropriate material (sounds and syllables). 3) Although the function of a name is determined by its Form, the *nomothetês* is free to use, in non-literal sense, different materials, or embody it in different languages, as long as the name answers its function. The point here is that different languages naturally use different phonetic systems, different orthographic devises and different rules of grammar. But one thing that names across languages should fulfill, if professing to aim at correctness and accuracy, is to preserve the function of providing instruction and separating being encapsulated in the archetypal Name.

So the main problem at this juncture is the notion of unchanging paradigm or Form, after which the names are manufactured. It is exactly through their relation with a particular Form, not of the object, but of the name itself that the names are fit to operate across different language and still preserve their natural appropriateness to stand for

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his given name. Interestingly enough, in the course of Socrates' speech on the names of gods, Hermogenes concedes that he is not Hermogenes after all, but on different basis – Hermes was the god who contrived speech, while he himself is not good at devising speeches (Cf. *408 b-c*)). Cratylus also claims (*435 d 3-4*) the simple truth to be that anybody who knows a thing's name knows also the thing itself, as well as that the inquiry into language is the best and only way of inquiry and discovery of truth (*435 e 8*) – which Socrates is quick to refute. Therefore, faced with increasing number of improperly attached or ambiguous names, the naturalists are obliged to either modify or drop the theory altogether.

[56] Based on Taylor (1926, p. 81)

things. It is up to the *nomothetês*, assisted by the dialectician, to capture the Form and translate into sounds: "Provided he gives each thing the form of name suited to it (*to tou onomatos eidos apodidô to prosêkon hekastô)*, no matter what syllables it is embodied in, he is an equally good *nomothetês* whether he is in Greece or abroad."[57] The Form of a name does not dictate neither the material of which it is composed, nor the shape. And in a similar way as any other artifact can be produced out of different kinds of materials[58] and shaped into slightly different shapes, a name may be embodied in different signs, according to different phonetic rules. It even may be so fashioned as to convey a slightly different sense, but still properly signify the thing in question, provided it successfully captures its being. Socrates gives, among some others, the example of the names *agis*, *polemarchus*, *eupolemus* (leader, war-lord, good-warrior), which all signify general – they differ in their letters and syllables, but still have the same force or power when spoken[59]. What it must be able to do, is to fulfill the function for which the Form of the name stands, and that is the already mentioned teaching and separating beings[60]. The doctrine of the existence of Forms of names thus answers the most detrimental objections to the naturalist theory: how is it possible to ascribe a nature to a name which differs, not only across languages, but also within the same language, in the case when, due to historical reasons, some letters are added or subtracted? Socrates relays on the idea that it is the force of the name that is embodied in different letters. The same may apply to different languages, as well. Even the etymological meaning may be different. But what counts is whether the name can deliver the force it is endowed with, or the Form. Therefore, name-giving cannot be just some unplanned, chance activity, and the name-giver cannot be any random person with no special qualification.

Thus Socrates safely concludes (or at least so it seems) that the correctness of a name consists in expressing the nature of its referent, the thing. "So Cratylus is right in saying that things have natural names and that not anyone can be a craftsman of names".[61] And Hermogenes is almost forced, by the strength of Socrates' arguments to

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[57] *Crat. 390 a 4-6*
[58] A table may be made out of wood, glass etc, while a sword may be produced out of different kinds of metal.
[59] Cf. *Crat. 394 c*
[60] Cf. Sedley (2006, p. 218f)
[61] *Crat. 390 d 9-e 1*

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comply, but resents doing it, because the opposite used to be a long-held conviction of his, and, as somebody said, to change a habit is more difficult than to move a mountain. Hermogenes asks for further persuasion, and that compels Socrates to launch the elaborate and controversial enterprise of etymological analysis of words.

1.4 Etymology as 'Enigma Machine' for Deciphering Reality

The etymological section of the *Cratylus* is very lengthy; it occupies (together with the brief account of the onomatopoetic character of the primary elements, the phonemes) more than half of the dialogue (*391 – 427*). Nevertheless, most of the 20th century Plato scholars have disregarded Socrates' etymologizing, proclaiming it too inaccurate or too far-fetched to be serious, and thus at best a kind of satire on somebody or something[62], or a way to show the inaccuracy of the Heraclitean theory of constant change, without true commitment to the given etymologies. Taylor certainly has a negative outlook on this part of *Cratylus*[63], and even pronounces it nonsensical. It is interesting to note that as a decisive prove for the satirical nature of the etymological section Taylor specifies Socrates' confession that he is himself surprised by the powerful influence of the inspired Euthyphro with whom he had a conversation earlier that day and thus became possessed by his interlocutor's superhuman wisdom. This is probably because the same character was scorned and almost ridiculed in the eponymous dialogue. Sedley, on the other hand, uses this instance as a contra-argument: he does not perceive Socrates' claim that he is inspired as a joke but as a confirmation of the seriousness of etymologizing, while Euthyphro is assumed to be truly versed in the science of etymology[64]. Yet another somewhat problematic argument of Sedley's in favor of the utter seriousness of the etymologies in the *Cratylus* (which is the position he endorses) is that "the etymologies are based on a meticulously argued theory of naming, according to which a name is an

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[62] Cf. Sedley (1998, p. 140) He mentions there that almost nobody, with few rare exceptions including Barney, has in the last 130 years (since Grote) assumed that Plato might have believed in the hidden meanings of words that Socrates extracted through the means of etymology.

[63] Cf. Taylor (1926, p. 88)

[64] Cf. Sedley (1998, p. 145ff) The problem with this approach is the lack of independent prove that Euthyphro ever bussied himself with etymology.

expertly crafted tool for objective ontological analysis (*385 e-390 e*)."[65] It is a fact that the theory of naming in question is 'meticulously argued', but in my opinion that does not imply that Plato truly believes that semantics is the key to reality. His exposition of the theory of correctness of names is really too elaborate to be a joke; but it could have been a way to reduce Cratylus' position than names are signposts to reality to absurd, which is a pretty serious tool in argumentation. Still, there are further arguments and indications in the text itself that make a strong case for the seriousness (at least in some sense) of the host of name-derivations as well as for etymology as an important branch of ancient linguistics.

First of all, the practice of etymology was not at all foreign to the spirit of ancient Greeks: although grammar was hardly, if at all, developed by Plato's time, "etymology was already very widely practiced, especially with regard to divine names"[66]. Plato also, although not too often, makes use of etymology – in the *Timaeus*, *Laws*, *Republic*, *Phaedo* (*Cratylus* aside)[67]. Now, very common objections to the etymologies expounded there are that they are overly fanciful and often differ from text to text. Sedley[68], disagreeing with the objectors, gives the examples of *oiônistikê* (augury) which is interpreted as the use of reasoning (*dianoia*) *to bring intelligence (*nous*) and learning (historia) into human thought (oiêsis)*[69] (instead of the much simpler derivation from *oiônos* – the bird of augury), as well as the inconsistencies between the etymology of *himeros* (desire) as presented in the *Cratylus* and the *Phaedrus*. He uses these two examples to point out the fact that the ancients prided themselves on discovering the 'real' hidden meaning of words and not dwelling on superficialities, as well as that they believed that multiple etymologies were not considered as inconsistencies, but rather as reinforcing each other. More generally, the aforementioned objections truly miss the target because they neglect the spirit of the epoch[70]. The goal of the ancient etymologists was not linguistic pedantry, but discovering the hidden meaning carefully encoded in

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[65] Sedley, (1998, p. 141)
[66] Ibid. Also Cf. Barney, (2001, p. 50f) where etymology is confirmed as established practice on the basis of the etymogizing in the Derveni Payrus.
[67] Cf. Ibid.
[68] Cf. Sedley (1998, p. 142)
[69] *Phaed. 244 c*
[70] It is of utmost importance to note that the ancient and the modern concept of etymology do not fully coincide (Cf. Barey 2001, p. 47)

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words, especially if those were divine names. Finding out that one name combines two or more meanings was not considered as a fault but an advantage. Let us borrow an example from another tradition: in the *Anushasana Parva* (the book of instructions) of the lofty Indian epic *Mahabharata* (loosely dated sometime between 400 BC and 400 AD, although the tradition holds it much older), in the famous *Mokshadharma* (the way of emancipation) section, a hymn dedicated to *Shri Vishnu*, entitled *Vishnusahasranamastotram* (eulogium comprised of 1000 names of *Vishnu*) is placed. Therein the name *Vishnu* appears thrice: once in the first stanza, than in the 28th, and again in the 70th. It is derived from the verbal root *vish – vyapnoti* – to pervade, permeate, spread through, or *vis – visati* – to enter, and this are the basic interpretations of the name – *Vishnu* is he who pervades the entire universe as the World Soul, or he who enters all beings, having created them. But then other, more fanciful interpretations are given: the pervasion is understood in the sense of association, so *Vishnu* becomes he who is always by the side of those devoted to him, offering them all kinds of assistance. Furthermore, due to the richness of Sanskrit language, different meanings can be deduced from the same roots; thus from *vish – veshati* or *vevishati*, so *Vishnu* becomes he who subdues everyone or he who consumes the entire creation at the end of the cosmic cycle. This short digression was to show that the ancients did not take etymology lightly or as a jocular matter, and combined with what was said above, it makes the serious approach to etymology true both for the "Hellenes and the Barbarians".

Furthermore, it seems that Plato does propound some of his basic philosophical tenets in the guise of etymological derivations of words[71]. Let us, in order to illustrate this point, briefly turn our attention to just one such example: analyses of the names given to soul and body[72]. Socrates first of all presents what he believes to be the established opinion of the etymology of 'soul' – it is called *psychê* because it gives life and refreshes (*anapsychon*) the body by giving it the power to breath, and when this refreshing is no more (probably due to its leaving the body), death occurs. But he has something more accurate to offer: it is the one principle that sustains, carries[73] and supports, holds the whole of nature (*he physin ochei kai echei*), which is very much in accordance with

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[71] Cf Sedley (1998, p. 152ff)
[72] Crat. *399 d – 400 c*
[73] These are both English synonyms of *ocheô*.

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Plato's own understanding of the soul as the mover[74] and master[75] of the body. Trying to point out the nature of the latter, Socrates employs what has by now become a textbook analogy, based on a play of words – the body is the tomb (*sôma* – *sêma*) of the soul which is kept there securely, because it has some *diken didonai* (to pay a penalty). This understanding is, although not original, still an eminently Platonic doctrine, found both in the *Phaedo* and the *Phaedrus*. So, it seems that Plato does pay serious heed to etymology as a way to decipher the meanings or words, but not so to the allegedly specially qualified *nomothetês* or *nomothetai*. It is shown time and again throughout the dialogue that they are often mislead into error while coining the names of things and concepts. Sometimes they make it right, sometimes almost succeed, but sometimes are badly mistaken, and being such simply cannot be regarded as firm authority on the matter. It is also important to note that when it comes to sacred, highly intricate matters as are the names of the gods, Socrates, 'being an intelligent man', confesses his utter lack of knowledge about both themselves and their names, and promises to limit his speech to the realm of human *doxa* about such an elevated subject as naming the gods is (*peri autôn (theôn) ouden hêmeis skepsometha … alla peri tôn antrôpôn, hên pote tina doxan echontes etithento autois ta onomata*)[76].

All the aforementioned, jointly with the observation that virtually no ancient commentator took the etymological analysis in the *Cratylus* to be an over-extended joke[77], still allots a somewhat ambivalent position to the etymologies in the dialogue. Sedley quotes Galen's opinion "that etymology offers access to the beliefs of the name-maker, provided that it is properly done"[78], and that is exactly what might be true of most of the etymologies presented in the *Cratylus*: *if* there was a name-giver, this is what he might have thought about how names express reality. Elsewhere (*410 c 5*), discussing the names for 'season' and 'year' Socrates explicitly says *eiper boulei to eikos eidenai* : "if

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[74] *Laws 896 b, Phaed. 245 c*

[75] *Tim. 34 c*

[76] *Crat. 401 a 2-5* The entire passage may be compared with *Rep. 505 a*, where the Good is said to be the most important thing to know, but we have no adequate knowledge of it, then *506 d – e*, where Socrates professes that he would ridicule and disgrace himself if he tries to do that, and agrees instead to talk about its offspring, the Sun, which as a object of knowledge falls under to the *doxa* section of the epistemological scale.

[77] Cf. Sedley (1998, p. 142). Although there are quite a few entertaining moments both in the etymological section and in the dialogue as a whole.

[78] Ibid.

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you want to know the probable truth… you must look to the fact…". However, an important point to note is that the real purpose of the dialogue is not to dwell on the *doxa* of the *nomothetês,* (regardless of whether ancient, present, or imaginary) but to discuss the *orthotes tôn onomatôn.*[79] A natural conclusion to draw would be that etymology is not the right tool for determining the correctness of names, or if it is, it only shows that names do not belong naturally to their referents. On the other hand, the assumption that Plato was conducting a 'gigantic leg-pull' by having Socrates perform the etymological analysis is not firmly founded; firstly, some of the etymologies presented certainly fit well into his own philosophical system (the already mentioned *psychê* and *soma* (*439 d-400 c*) *anêr* (*414 a*), *doxa* (420 b-c), the second occurrence of *epistêmê* (*437 a*) etc.), and secondly etymology was well established and respected discipline in his times, to which he also adhered from time to time. If there was pun intended at all, its ultimate aim was a pretty serious one: to refute the Heraclitean theory of constant flux and thus pave the way for the introduction of Plato's theory of Forms; besides being a great philosopher, Plato was a great dramatist as well, and he might have used his expertise to defeat Cratylus by employing the elaborate means of etymological analysis, which at first seemed as a way to confirm his believes.

All in all, the moral that should be drawn from the longest section of the dialogue, as it seems to me, is that the etymological investigations are not to be discarded all together, but that they simply cannot be the perfect, or even preferred, tool for grasping reality, due to their belonging to the realm of *doxa*, a fact which as consequence has the obvious arbitrariness in drawing them, further reflecting the fallible nature of the human beings. Still, they are worthwhile pursuing, because the names sometimes do speak to us about their referents, though imperfectly, and often indirectly. After much effort and deep reflection the etymological investigation can yield some commendable results. Socrates, for example, is not an etymologist himself, but by embarking on the etymological venture he once again proves his intellectual prowess and superiority and touches upon some deep truths about the nature of things; etymology is an admirable discipline, after all. Names do not depict reality, but etymology can help a man of penetrating intelligence

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[79] If the names were given by *nomothetai*, then their correctness would naturally depend on their *doxai*. On the other hand, however, if we accept the underlying assumption that the *nomothetai* gave the names *physei*, by observing the name-forms, then their *doxai* would fall off the picture.

unveil some important truths about the nature of things (as shown in the case of *psyche*) taken in isolation. It can also be understood as an excellent philosophical exercise which sharpens the mind, and that is very much what Socrates does in this section. Next, as pointed out by Sedley[80], the etymological analysis seen as a survey of Plato's predecessors' teachings reveals that, although they did not do that well in axiology and (borrowing an Aristotelian term) first philosophy, the ancients had some genuine insights in the field of cosmology, especially by recognizing and recording the instability and the fluidness of the cosmos. Still, when it comes to creating the big picture and the discovery of the deepest layers of reality, etymology shows to be impotent, and another means of investigation has to be applied – studying things through Forms, which is under jurisdiction of dialectic. In other words, after paying due attention and making most out of the method of etymological analysis, Socrates abandons it, implicitly[81] in favor of Plato's preferred method of dialecic, which doesn't deal with phonetics and semantics of *onomata*, but with *logoi*. And that is the most important lesson that the etymological account in the *Cratylus* paradoxically teaches us: names are inappropriate tools for grasping reality, etymology cannot be the right method applied by the philosopher[82].

1.5 Against Naturalism

As an unassailable master of disputes, Socrates next launches formidable attack the theory he was proving and defending – the naturalism. He does that by seemingly trying

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[80] Sedley, (1998, p. 150f)

[81] The dialectical method is not directly touched upon in the *Cratylus*, but was certainly very much on Plato's mind in the time of writing this dialogue, since its date of composition, as argued by Luce (Luce 1964) and Kahn (Kahn 1996, p 47) falls not long before the *Republic*, and loosely in the same period as the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, in both of which versions of the method are presented.

[82] In Barney (2001, pp. 46-70) we find a very systematic analysis of the etymological section. Therein three features of Socrates' etymologizing are singled out: a) it presents a rational reconstruction of contemporary intellectual practice of etymologizing, having Cratilus himself as a representative; b) as an 'inspired event' Socrates' etymological account involves distancing form the first-person position, demands further interpretation and thus cannot be taken as authoritative; c) it is an agonistic display during which Socrates exhibits his resourcefulness, intellectual stamina and overall superiority over the imaginary opponent, and also represents a distinct genre often employed in Plato's works. Barney concludes that although the etymologies as presented in the *Cratylus* are intrinsically misleading, their value lies in the possibility to discover a grain of eminently Platonic truth in them; but that task requires their drastic reinterpretation and transposition to the stabile world of Forms, instead of their present reference to the transient world we live in.

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to explain to Hermogenes (who is at this point still his interlocutor) how the names succeed in expressing the nature of a thing[83] (*422 b ff*). In order to answer this question, Socrates draws the analogy of a painting. We can easily imagine a picture of a man, and notice that it is composed of many parts, with further components and subcomponents, till we reach the level of individual colors. Similarly, the names may be analyzed and their components discovered, starting with derivative names (*hystera onomata*) – like *agathos*, then the primary names (*prôta onomata*) which constitute them – in this case *agaston* and *thoon* ('admirable' and 'fast'), down to the most elementary parts, *ta stoikheia*, which are the individual phonemes. Now, names are correct when they express the nature of their referent, and the derivative manage to do that by the means of the primary, that are composed of elements, not of names. But how do the elements manage to build up a correct derivative name? On the strength of their power to imitate the essence or being both of things and qualities[84]. So, in the same way as a picture is pictorial imitation of reality, so the names are vocal imitations and establish a kind of portrait-like resemblance with the things, down to the lowest level of word-analysis, the level of elements represented by sounds, which still carry some semantic value: they express properties, like motion, hardness, softness, largeness, which also have essences. This is, presented in the briefest possible manner, the mimetic theory of names[85]. "So if someone were able to imitate in letters and syllables this being or essence that each thing has, wouldn't he express what each thing itself is"[86]. And the one who does that is, of course, the *nomothetês*.

Socrates, unlike Cratylus, who approximately at his juncture joins the conversations, claims that even names that imperfectly imitate or resemble thing may still capture the essence of a thing. Even an imperfect image is an image[87]. That claim may

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[83] *Crat. 422 d 1-2*: „Now, the correctness of every name we analyzed was intended to consist in expressing the nature of one of the things that are."

[84] Cf. *Crat. 423 e 1-4*.

[85] This is what Deretić calls a phonemo-analytic model, the last move in the attempt to check the foundation of the theory of naturalism, before undertaking the project of its rebuttal. (Deretić 2001 p. 41)

[86] *Crat. 423 e 6-8*

[87] Socrates later on gives the example of the word *sklerotes* (hardness), where the '*l*' is supposed to express the opposite of hardness (*Crat. 434 d*), as well as of the names of the numbers, which do not reflect the nature of what they are applied to (*Crat. 435 b*) – a name properly expressing the nature of 'hundred' should consist of hundred units. Therefore, even if we take the names to picture reality, they can at most be imperfect and incomplete pictures.

lead to the conclusion that not all names are perfect imitations of things, and consequently, not all legislators are on the same level. But Cratylus strongly objects to this notion, considering that a badly given name is not a name at all, and that a bad legislator is not a legislator at all. His stubborn attitude leads him in number of aporiai, and allows Socrates to deconstruct the theory of naturalism he was seemingly upholding, and proclaim the ineffectiveness of names in the matter of acquiring true knowledge. He does that on two bases. Firstly by offering contradictory etymologies which refute the ones previously given, themselves expressing or confirming the theory of flux (*437 a-d*). The alternative rendition establishes rest as a principle, instead of motion, Eleatic ontology instead of Heraclitean. Secondly, since Cratylus claimed that knowing the name meant knowing the thing, Socrates challenges him by saying that if the only way to know a thing is to know its name, then the legislators must have not known the things prior to naming them: "So, if things cannot be learned except from their names, how can we possibly claim that the name givers or the rule-setters had knowledge before any names had been given for them to know?"[88] But if they did have some knowledge of them, a premise which Cratylus has to accept as true, then there must be another way to know the things except through their names. That way is to know them directly, through steadfast inquiry in the first principles, which are the Forms[89]. Finally, Socrates once again addresses the inadequacy of the flux theory, and strongly postulates Plato's theory of Forms, arguing that the-always-changing-universe would not allow for preserving the identity of particulars, and would certainly make all attempts to know anything futile. But at the contrary, we are able to identify the beautiful itself as always beautiful, the good itself as always good[90], and therefore the theory of constant change cannot be true.

Socrates' opening line in the *Cratylus* is very indicative in itself: "'fine things are very difficult' to know about, and it certainly isn't easy to know about names"[91], says he, and slips throughout the text statements like 'I will speak the probable truth'[92], 'we are ignorant about gods and names'[93] etc, but still accepts the challenge and undertakes the

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[88] *Crat. 438 b 5-7*
[89] Cf. *Crat. 439 b 5-6.*
[90] Cf. *Crat. 439 c-d*
[91] *Crat. 384 b 1-2*
[92] Cf. *Crat. 410 c 5*
[93] Cf. *Crat. 425 c*

big enterprise of determining the truth about the correctness of names. Thus he initiates the discussion in the dialogue with a prolonged, but straightforward refutation of the conventionalist theory of correctness of names and the underlying quasi-ontology of Protagoras. Then as persuasively as possible argues for the theory of naturalism and further supports it with extensive etymological analysis. The etymologies presented there go in favor of "Heraclitean" ontology of incessant motion and change. Further on he deconstructs his own argumentation, shows the absurdity of the theory of constant flux (when it comes to values and being) and introduces some conventionalist elements into the theory of naturalism, only to proclaim finally the arbitrariness of naming and the inadequacy of etymology and phonetic analysis in the matter of grasping the real nature of things. This point is very wittily illustrated with the Socrates final remark in the dialogue[94]: Although neither a wealthy person nor a very eloquent speaker, Hermogenes, who in the course of the discussion accepted the opposite, is Hermogenes after all, in view of his capacity to see Cratylus on his way to the countryside, as a good son of Hermes who escorts the souls to Hades. Thus at the very end of the *Cratylus* we once again learn from a name that we cannot learn from names. Etymology has proven to be, although an admirable art, inconclusive or even contradictory.

1.6 The Problem of the Name-Forms

Plato's position on the *orthotes tôn onomatôn* as presented in the dialogue is, to the best of my understanding, a negative one. Names are ultimately not capable of delivering reality. But there still remains one grave issue to be settled before the worm of doubt finally stops burrowing, and that is the introduction of the doctrine of name-forms. The theory of Forms is so crucial and prominent in Plato's system, that its association with the theory of naming, if done with conviction and in 'good faith' wouldn't be inconsequential, and simply must not be overlooked. If the introduction of the name-forms doctrine was not yet another Plato's eristic device, than there must either be names which are capable of picturing and depicting reality, or the forms would remain distant

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[94] *Crat. 440 e 4*, as pointed out in the editor's footnote.

ideal paradigms, with the words situated on different stages of approximation to them. However, it seems hardly viable that Plato was really upholding the theory of name-forms (of which there is absolutely no mention in Plato's opus outside the *Cratylus*), out of the following reasons:

The fallacy of division, if committed at all, would make the whole argument about correctness of names invalid. The theory of true and false names also stands in direct conflict with the verdict of the *Sophist:* therein Plato attributes truth-value only to combinations of *onomata* and *rhemata,* to speech (*logos*) produced by putting a thing together with an action by means of a name and a verb, or in other words to complete statements (*logoi*)[95]. So, is he contradicting himself in this case? I think that (if we accept the present edition of the *Cratylus* as authoritative, despite Sedley's intervention) he is not – the development of the argument as we have it may lead to a conclusion that the doctrine of name-forms was presented with an aim different then it appears at first sight – Plato's Socrates needed such a concept to (initially) further the thesis of naturalism.

Furthermore, the introduction of name-forms would result in an unnecessary multiplication of beings. First of all there will be "a Form of Name in general, the semantic link between language and the world"[96], after which an entire array of name-forms, corresponding to each particular word will follow. But what would this complex universe of name-forms 'do' except for representing the Form of the particular it applies to, or acting as an intermediary between the knower and the object of knowledge (be it a proper one, namely a Form, or its reflection in the sensible realm)? Nowhere in his works does Plato postulates a need for such an intermediary, and that is also what Socrates here denies[97], by suggesting near the end of the *Cratylus* (*439 b*) that it is better to know the things directly.

In a similar way, but from a slightly different point of view, Plato's doctrine of self-predication of Forms might be used as a further argument against the existence of name-forms. It seems to me that the principle of self-predication would make the Form of a name identical with the Form of the object of which it is a name, and thus once again

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[95] *Soph. 262 e*

[96] Kahn (1996, p. 365)

[97] In opposition to Cratylus, who notoriously claims "… that anyone who knows a thing's name also knows the thing". (*435 d 4*)

redundant. The principle of self-predication "saturates" the Forms, makes them self-standing, separate. If there are name-forms the same principle of self-predication should be applicable to them as well, and thus we would end up with a pretty strained concept of a 'Form' of a name which is its Form because it naturally and unmistakably captures the essence of the name's referent. A name is an instrument, a tool for teaching and dividing being, which is another way of saying (as mentioned earlier in the text) that a name is an instrument for separating thing's essence, or representing his nature, and it does that by resembling the thing. But isn't separating the essence duty of the Form of that particular thing? Then the Form of a name has to fit perfectly the Form of the thing it refers too. How are we to distinguish between these two distinct Forms, when they both, as it seems, have the same function, i.e. to provide us with a definition of a particular thing? It is a common place of Plato's philosophy that knowledge is possible only of (to use Kant's terminology) the noumenal, not the phenomenal. Knowing or understanding something means being able to give an account or definition of that thing and defend it from all refutation, through the art of dialectic (*Rep. 534 b*). And dialectic, on its part, deals with the realm of *noesis*, or the world of Forms. Furthermore, according to Aristotle's testimony "Plato… held that the problem applied not to any sensible thing but to entities of another kind – for this reason, that the common definition could not be a definition of any sensible thing, as they were always changing. Things of this other sort, then, he called Forms… "(*Met. 987 b 4-7*). It might be interesting to note that, in the same passage, Aristotle says that the sensible things are named (or spoken of – *legesthai*) after those Forms. So the hypostatized concept or notion which separates the essential universality of a certain type is that according to which its tokens are named. The Form reigns supreme on the ontological plane – it provides being to *ta aisthêta* which participate in it, as well as on the epistemological, because knowledge is possible only in relation to it. Finally, it is also due to its participation in a uniform Form that a multitude of things is allotted a common name. I simply cannot see what separate or unique function a name-form would perform in reality structured in such a way. What a name-form does is embodying the essence of the ideal name, which is, on its part, supposed to express the essence of a thing, all the while allowing for some kind of arbitrariness in naming – which cannot be evaded across languages. But that is exactly what the Form

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itself does, and the name-form remains a redundant, ghost-like entity. In the light of such an understanding, what could the Form of the name "bed" be but an "ideal bed", because it is supposed to reveal the objective bed. But the latter itself participates in a Form, which is a "bed ideal"; thus we end up with two identical but separate ideas, which is impossible.

It also appears to me that if the existence of the name-forms is accepted they would turn out to be some kind of complex entities. A name, on the theory of the *Cratylus* is constituted of component names, they, on their part of letters. A true name is composed of true components, and it seems that they, in order to be true, have to participate in a Form. The same principle might be applicable to the letters as well. That would make a Form of a name a composite Form, consisting of Forms of the parts of that name. But the Forms proper are conceived as simple entities[98].

Plato's reflections on linguistic issues in the *Cratylus* are extensionally limited – he considers the attribution of linguistic expressions to their designata and their interrelatedness, the semantics of those expressions examined through appliance of etymological and phonetic analysis, as well as some subsidiary inquiries into the origins of language. Therefore, when it comes to the problem of relation between language and reality, or the reliability of language with regard to the quest for the ultimate truth, a solution has to be sought beyond *Cratylus*, although the dialogue provides enough hints how to proceed with the investigation. Plato here does not advance the theory of naturalism in the strong sense, allows for arbitrariness in naming and consequently does not support the existence of name-forms. He also allows for significant diminution of the *nomothetês'* authority and all in all seems not to believe that names are capable of accurately represent beings. Socrates' claim near the end of the dialogue that it must be possible to understand the things independently of names is very significant. The names are fallible soldiers; but the alternative – knowing the things through themselves – must involve use of accounts, *logoi*, who are necessarily composed of words, and an

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[98] I don't think that the doctrine of *koinônia eidôn* (combination of Forms), as expounded in the *Sophists*, necessarily jeopardizes their simplicity and immutability. They (especially the *megista genê*), will stand in a relation, point to each other, but still preserve their uniqueness "… he'll be capable of adequately discriminating a single Form spread out all through a lot of other things, each of which stands separate from the others. In addition he can discriminate Forms that are different from each other but included within a single Form that's outside them, or a single form that's connected as a unit throughout many wholes, or many Forms that are completely separate from others." (*Soph. 253 d*)

indispensable tool in enterprise of the intellectual grasping of the Forms, because knowing thing through itself means nothing else but knowing its Form, or the generalizing natural law behind it.

2. Conclusion – Forms and Dialectic in the Cratylus

As if in a more or less successful attempt to tease or even frustrate his readers, Plato winds up the *Cratylus* (*440 c-d*) by having Socrates say that he is not exactly certain about the outcome of their discussion, that the matters they have pondered over are not to be taken lightly, and that the gravity of the problem requires additional courageous and perseverant investigation. Furthermore, by hinting at Cratylus' age[99] as an advantage, he indicates that such an inquiry might consume lots of time. These statements may be understood as providing support to Barney's claim (cf. fn. 84) that there is a grain of truth in word-analysis, but that a radical reinterpretation and shift of focus is needed. Still, this does not necessarily mean that we are dealing with a thoroughly aporetic dialogue; Socrates, on careful examination, *seems* to draw a definite conclusion: "But surely, no one with any understanding will commit himself or the cultivation of his soul to names, or trust them and their givers to the point of firmly stating that he knows something"[100]. So what will a person endowed with *nous* do instead? The already well known answer to this question is that he will investigate and learn about things through themselves, rather than through names[101]. Knowing a thing through itself means knowing it as it is, directly, discarding all images derived from sense-experience, knowing its Form (*eidos*) – the object of true knowledge, or *epistêmê*. Unlike the objects of this world, the Forms are not visible, but intelligible[102]. In the famous analogy of the divided line in the *Republic*, these realities are conveniently placed in the *noêsis* section, while the method of investigation applicable to that ontological realm is sad to be the method of dialectic. Then, what is it that Plato in the *Cratylus* tells us about the Forms and the method of dialectic? Not that much, indeed, but still enough. There are two passages in the *Cratylus* where the Forms are mentioned, and it seems as if Socrates assumes that his interlocutors are already well

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[99] He is young and in his prime.

[100] *Crat. 440 c 2-5*: *Oude pany noun echontos anthrôpou epitrpsanta onomasin auton kai tên autou psychên therapeuein, pepisteukota ekeinois kai tois themenois auta, diischyridzesthai hôs ti eidota.* Unfortunately, with one important qualification – granted that they reflect the extreme interpretation of Heraclitus' teachings, or the theory of constant flux. Still, this might not be a detrimental obstacle to the above conclusion, since it was already concluded that the names are either like that, or even worse – contradictory, containing both Heraclitean and Eleatic elements, and thus deserving to be discarded in the noble attempt to know the truth and replaced with the investigation of the things through themselves.

[101] *Crat. 439 b 5-6: poly mallon auta ex autôn kai mathêteon kai dzêtêteon ê ek tôn onomatôn.*

[102] *Cf. Rep. 509 b*

acquainted with the doctrine, since he does not provide much explanation. The first mention (*389 b - d*) refers to Forms of artefacts, namely shuttle and name (also understood as an artefact, manufactured by the legislator and used as a tool in the activity of speaking). The long-standing controversy concerning the status of the Forms of artefacts aside, these are 'regular' Platonic Forms, being *auto ho esti kerkis* and *auto ho estin onoma*[103], and serving as a paradigm according to which the artisans manufacture individual tools. The second reference to Forms in the *Cratylus*, coming up at the end of the dialogue (*439 c-440 b*) is slightly more elaborate. It sets an opposition between the flux theory and Plato's doctrine of stable and determinate principles that constitute reality. Socrates asks and Cratylus agrees that there "is a beautiful itself, and a good itself, and the same for each one of the things that are"[104], which are the *archai* of the *Republic VI* and *VII*. If there is to be any such thing as knowledge, fixed and unchangeable (the alternative simple not being knowledge), then the existence of immutable objects of knowledge is necessary. "If things are capable of being described in language and grasped in cognition, then something definite must be the case."[105] Now, claims Plato, we do have fixed knowledge, we know that there are such things as the Beautiful, the Good etc. On the other hand, however, the things in this world *are* in a state of flux, which means that they cannot be neither grasped by the intellect, nor properly described. Therefore, Plato postulates his two realms of *doxa* and *epistêmê,* further subdivided into *eikasia* and *pistis,* and *dianoia* and *noêsis* respectively, the visible and changeable objects belonging in the former, while the intelligible and immutable in the latter. In the light of this understanding the names themselves, both because of their origin and their phonetic structure, cannot be absolutely correct, and they certainly do not belong to the higher ontological realm. Names, to use Wittgenstein's language, are not pictures of reality that can be laid against it and touch it as the end-points of a ruler touch the object that is to be measured. The philosopher has to rise above the realm of constant

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[103] The situation with the name-form is more complicated. While the 'ideal shuttle' is a more or less unitary concept (although it can be instantiated in different materials and, probably, different shapes), the concept of 'ideal name' seems to require first of all an overall Form of name (capturing the general functions of teaching and dividing beings) and then distinct Forms for each specific name.

[104] *Crat. 439 c 5-7: einai auto kalon kai agathon kai hen hekaston tôn ontôn*

[105] Kahn (1996, p. 365)

change and proceed towards the *archai* and ultimately the first principle[106], grasping their nature not through names, but through themselves.

As already stated, knowing things directly means apprehending Forms, and the only way to do that is to pursue dialectics, a feat that not everybody can accomplish, because proficiency in the method of dialectic (as explained in the long passage in *Republic VII* which discusses the subjects that "draws the soul from the realm of becoming to the realm of what is"[107]) is a matter of life-long philosophical activity. Now, we cannot get much information about dialectic itself from the *Cratylus*; but we do get to know something about the dialectician and thus understand something about the art he possesses as well. There also might be some indications in the text that Plato is hinting to his favored philosophical method.

According to Khan, the dialogues *Cratylus* and *Euthydemus* are the first in which the adjective *dialektikos* appears[108]. Especially "the *Cratylus* passage might have been designed to introduce the term *dialektikos* for the first time, since its appearance is prepared by careful *epagôgê*."[109] The dialectician, the user of names skilled in the art of asking and answering question, if pretending to be a rightful overseer of the legislator's work, have to have access to the Forms, both of the name and of the thing it represents. "The 'use' of a name … is, in fact, the Idea of the name."[110] Thus it becomes clear that the art of dialectic is meant to elevate its practitioner to the knowledge of the intelligible world. There is, however, one problem with this account of the dialectician. If he is such a remarkable personality as presented in the dialogue, how is it possible that things are attributed imperfect and sometimes wrong names? The answer might be that there was no *dialektikos* present when the *nomothetês* was coining the names[111], or that names are

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[106] *Rep. 510 b, 511 a-b, 533 d*
[107] *Rep. 521 d 3-4*
[108] Not substantivated in its first appearance. The lexical meaning as an adjective is 'conversational'.
[109] Kahn (1996, p. 306)
[110] Stewart (1909, p. 36) The 'use' mentioned here refers to the function a name is supposed to perform, which is, again, to teach and separate being. In order to do so it has to be like the thing it applies to, and further embodied in the appropriate letters. This 'being like the thing' is both its use its Form which is, in my opinion, an example of unnecessary multiplication of beings, since such a Form cannot be easily distinguished from the Form of the thing.
[111] Although we read in *Crat. 398 d* that the heroes of old – as skilled questioners – were dialecticians. But they are proclaimed to be so on the basic of etymological analysis, which was already found to be unreliable.

simply not meant to adequately represent reality, and that the entire attention of the inquirer has to be focused on the Forms.

The format of this work does not allow for discussion of the term 'dialectic' as used by Plato, because it is all but unambiguous, and will take too much space. Kahn, in the introduction to the subject gives an appropriate, but vague definition of dialectic: knowledge of the Good is the ultimate goal of philosophy, but it cannot be acquired without the intellectual grasp of fundamental realities, which in turn requires an arduous training. "The training and the method of approach is what Plato calls dialectic."[112] So, the method of dialectic is specifically contrived to ultimately reach the highest subsection of the divided line, to grasp the *archai*. That is the verdict of the *Republic*, where the method is most fully described. The lower segment of the *epistêmê* section, the one concerned with mathematicals, uses hypotheses and sense-data, while dialectic is "… doing away with hypotheses and proceeding to the first principle itself, so as to be secure."[113] Benson claims that the method of dialectic has a very complex structure and that in the broader sense it includes the method of hypotheses (as taught and practiced in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*), the method of collection and division (*Phaedrus, Sophist* etc.) and dialectic proper, as presented in the *Republic VI* and *VII*.[114] They are all linked together by the unifying purpose to discover the ultimate realities behind the fleeting phenomena, as well as with the use of discursive reasoning and language.

What we are here specifically interested in is whether there are any hints of Plato's preferred philosophical method in the *Cratylus*, and I believe that there are. First, in *436 d*, Socrates draws an analogy between incorrectly construed names and a geometrical diagram with an initial error (I believe that the same would apply to an axiomatic system relying on a wrong hypothesis), and then suggests that all men should be very careful in determining the *archai* of their undertaking – "for if they have been

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[112] Khan (1996, p. 292)

[113] *Rep. 533 c 6-d 1* Benson (2006, p. 478) further explains that dialectic also uses hypotheses, but, unlike the dianoetic method, seeks for their confirmation. Thus the difference between the two methods amounts to a difference between the use of sense-experience and the a priori method, andbetween treating hypotheses as though they were confirmed and as mere unconfirmed stepping stones in need of justification, respectively for the dianoetic (applicable to mathematicals) and the dialectic method (applicable to first principles).

[114] Benson (2006, p.)

adequately examined, the subsequent steps will plainly follow from them."[115] And that is one of the essential features of the method of dialectic as presented in the *Republic*: it does not consider the hypotheses as first principles, but as hypotheses in need of justification, and stepping stones leading to the unhypothetical first principle[116]. Furthermore, as noted by Steward[117] when Socrates for the first time introduces to Cratylus the notion of 'knowing things through themselves', he introduces a method as well: "What other way is left by which you could expect to know them? What other than the natural and the straightest way, through each other, if they are akin, and through themselves? For that which is other and different from them would signify not them, but something other and different."[118] Steward here recognizes a "… method of discovering a specific 'law' valid for a given class of phenomena…"[119] And what would the 'specific law' from this quotation be but a Form?[120] The passage from the *Cratylus* reminds me of the dialectician's skill to 'instruct and separate beings', or to determine the essence of a thing and mark it off from the others. And that is also what we read in the *Republic* (*534 b-c*) – a dialectician is capable of providing an account of a Form and also of distinguishing it from everything else.

This is how the journey of the *Cratylus* ends; it started with the question of the correctness of names – Socrates defended their impeccability with developed argumentation, and supported it with witty etymological analysis, just to show finally that names are incapable of accurately representing reality, and thus at best imperfect epistemological tools. But declaring names' insufficiency in reflecting reality does not mean giving up on language; the investigation of names is to be replaced by the investigations of the Forms, which is conducted through the method of dialectic. Plato's favored method necessarily operates with linguistic units, *logoi*, and on its way towards the first principles uses discursive thought, justifying or rejecting hypotheses, transitioning from premise to conclusion, finally grasping the Forms themselves through

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[115] *Crat. 436 d 5-6*

[116] *Rep. 511 b*

[117] Cf. Stewart (1909, p. 37f)

[118] *Crat. 438 e*

[119] Stewart (1909, p. 38)

[120] I believe that Stewart by 'law' implies a substantial principle or even a definition that transcends the host of particulars subsumed under it, identifies the thing in question (as a universal) and distinguishes it from the others.

understanding, knowing them as same or different. And even after the philosopher "reaches the end of the intelligible"[121], the power of discursive reasoning remains unaffected, because the dialectician is then able to give a perfect account of the principles he understood, and also to defend them from all refutations. The method of dialectic, as presented in the *Republic* culminates into accurate and true *logoi*.

[121] *Rep. 532 b 1*

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