PLATO ON TRUTH AND FALSITY IN NAMES[1]

I

IN *Cratylus* 385 b–c Plato argues that if statements (λόγοι) can be true or false, names (ὀνόματα),[2] as parts (μόρια) of statements, are also capable of being true or false. From Aristotle onwards this view has often been challenged,[3] and R. Robinson put the case against it trenchantly when he wrote:[4]

> This argument is bad; for names have no truth-value, and the reason given for saying that they do is a fallacy of division. No one in the dialogue points out that it is bad. . . . Nevertheless it is fairly probable that Plato saw or at least felt that it is a bad argument, quite different in quality from those he later produces against the nature-theory.

Robinson's criticism rests on a clear-cut distinction between *statements*, which have truth-value because they describe and assert, and *names*, which are neither true nor false because they neither assert nor describe but merely refer (p. 335). He admits that in parts of the *Cratylus* names are treated as 'little statements' with a descriptive function, but regards this as an 'error' (p. 338). He further thinks that in later dialogues, e.g. the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*, Plato tended to develop a sounder approach to language in so far as he began to realize the distinction between reference and description (pp. 337–8).

In a recent article, K. Lorenz and J. Mittelstrass have expressed complete disagreement with Robinson's criticism.[5] They maintain that the application of the truth/falsity distinction to parts of statements is justifiable on the assumption that all names have a predicative as well as a denotative function. They argue that an assumption of this type underlies Plato's treatment of names, and that he understands naming as 'referring to an individual by mentioning some characteristic concept under which it falls' (p. 6). On this assumption it will make sense to talk about the truth-value of names. If a name conveys correct information about its nominate it will be a true name; if it describes misleadingly it will be a false name. If this position is logically tenable, and if Lorenz and Mittelstrass are correct in attributing it to Plato, *Cratylus* 385 b–c will not be fallacious, and we need not suppose, with Robinson, that Plato was more or less aware that his argument was bad, and that in later dialogues

[2] In the Greek conception of ὄνομα, as R. Robinson has pointed out ('The Theory of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Rev. Int. de Philos.* xxxii, 1955, 1–16), 'there lay undistinguished at least five notions that are distinct now: the proper name, the name, the word, the noun, and the subject of predication' (p. 2). After discussion of possible Greek equivalents for 'word' and 'language' he concludes that 'it is usually better to say that the *Cratylus* is about names than to say that it is about language' (p. 3). I shall follow his lead and use 'name' for ὄνομα.

[3] See, for example, Aristotle *Cat.* 4. 2ᵃ7–10: ἅπασα γὰρ δοκεῖ κατάφασις ἤτοι ἀληθὴς ἢ ψευδὴς εἶναι, τῶν δὲ κατὰ μηδεμίαν συμπλοκὴν λεγομένων οὐδὲν οὔτε ἀληθὲς οὔτε ψεῦδός ἐστιν, οἷον ἄνθρωπος, λευκόν, τρέχει, νικᾷ. Cf. *De Int.* 1. 16ᵃ13–16, *De An.* 3. 6, 430ᵃ26–ᵇ2. Also Grote, *Plato* (2nd edn.), ii, 502 n. e.; Steinthal, *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*, 108.

[4] 'A Criticism of Plato's *Cratylus*', *Philos. Rev.* lxv (1956), 328.

[5] 'On Rational Philosophy of Language: the Programme in Plato's *Cratylus* Reconsidered', *Mind* lxxvi (1967), 6.

he moved towards a more satisfactory theory of the relation between names, statements, and truth.

Further discussion of the logical points at issue between Lorenz–Mittelstrass and Robinson would involve a critique of the modern reference-theory of names. I propose to confine myself to Platonic exegesis, and to ask which of their theories better fits the facts of Plato's thought about names, not only as it appears in the *Cratylus*, but as stated or implied in other dialogues. My general conclusion will be that Plato in practice regards names as functioning in the sort of way required by the Lorenz–Mittelstrass theory, though I would not be prepared to ascribe to Plato a theory of the proposition as sophisticated as that implied in their symbolism (p. 6). In section II of the paper I aim at showing in detail that the concept of 'stating a name', i.e. applying a name as a predicate to its nominate, is fully accepted and used by Plato throughout the *Cratylus*, that this implies that names may be vehicles of truth or falsity, and that there is no reason to suppose that Plato was unhappy or suspicious about the logical validity of the concept of truth/falsity in names. In section III I shall argue that Plato treated names as descriptive predicates in earlier dialogues, and continued to do so in late dialogues, notably in the *Sophist* and *Politicus*, and that this is not incompatible with the fact that a doctrine of propositional truth is developed in one section of the *Sophist* (261 d–263 d). In section IV I shall consider briefly how a doctrine of truth-names and lie-names fits into Plato's general conception of the relations between language, truth, and reality.

<div align="center">II</div>

To ensure a firm foundation for a study of truth-names and lie-names in the *Cratylus* it is necessary to establish the precise meaning of the sentence at 385 c 10, which contains a slight textual difficulty. I put it in context by quoting from c 1 to c 15:

> ΣΩ. Ὁ λόγος δ' ἐστὶν ὁ ἀληθὴς πότερον μὲν ὅλος ἀληθής, τὰ   0
> μόρια δ' αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀληθῆ;
> ΕΡΜ. Οὔκ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μόρια.
> ΣΩ. Πότερον δὲ τὰ μὲν μεγάλα μόρια ἀληθῆ, τὰ δὲ σμικρὰ οὔ·
> ἢ πάντα;   5
> ΕΡΜ. Πάντα, οἶμαι ἔγωγε.
> ΣΩ. Ἔστιν οὖν ὅτι λέγεις λόγου σμικρότερον μόριον ἄλλο ἢ
> ὄνομα;
> ΕΡΜ. Οὔκ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο σμικρότατον.
> ΣΩ. καὶ $\begin{Bmatrix} \text{τὸ ὄνομα (BW)} \\ \text{τοῦτο ὄνομα (T)} \end{Bmatrix}$ ἆρα τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λόγου λέγεται;   10
> ΕΡΜ. Ναί.
> ΣΩ. Ἀληθές γε, ὡς φῄς.
> ΕΡΜ. Ναί.
> ΣΩ. Τὸ δὲ τοῦ ψεύδους μόριον οὐ ψεῦδος;
> ΕΡΜ. Φημί.   15

Méridier in the Budé edition adopts the easier reading of BW. Burnet keeps τοῦτο and brackets ὄνομα. Burnet's solution appears preferable since it preserves τοῦτο, which is a natural resumption of the τοῦτο in Hermogenes' previous reply.[1] By τοῦτο is to be understood τὸ σμικρότατον μόριον. The

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[1] G. J. De Vries, 'Notes on some Passages of the *Cratylus*', *Mnem.* S. iv, viii (1955), 291, agrees.

'smallest part' of the λόγος is ὄνομα, as has been agreed by Hermogenes, so the reading ὄνομα at c 10 is easily explained as an explanatory gloss.[1]

The meaning of the sentence becomes clearer if commas are inserted as follows:

$$\text{καὶ τοῦτο ἄρα, τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λόγου, λέγεται;}$$

'And so this (smallest part), being part of the true statement, is stated, is it not?'[2] The stated ὄνομα constitutes, in Lorenz and Mittelstrass's terminology, an 'elementary sentence'. It can therefore be either true or false. Goldschmidt says that the name is true/false only as part of the *logos*, and not in isolation.[3] But this is belied by the exchange which follows almost immediately at c 16–d 1:

ΣΩ.   Ἔστιν ἄρα ὄνομα ψεῦδος καὶ ἀληθὲς λέγειν, εἴπερ καὶ λόγον;
ΕΡΜ. Πῶς γὰρ οὔ;

Socrates: 'So one can state a true name or a false, if one can also make a true or false statement?'
Hermogenes: 'Certainly.'

Stating a name is here accepted as a speech-act in its own right, parallel to stating a sentence. It is instructive to compare the forms of expression at b 10 and c 16:

Ἔστιν ἄρα τοῦτο, λόγῳ λέγειν τὰ ὄντα τε καὶ μή.

Ἔστιν ἄρα ὄνομα ψεῦδος καὶ ἀληθὲς λέγειν.

The independent status of the act of stating a name (ὀνομάζειν) is explicitly recognized at 387 c 9:

Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸ ὀνομάζειν πρᾶξίς τίς ἐστιν.

'Then naming also is a type of action.'

From this conception is developed the notion of a name as a 'tool for conveying information and discriminating reality' (ὄργανον διδασκαλικὸν καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας 388 b–c). Since information can be conveyed by names correctly or incorrectly we must allow that the general notion of truth-names and lie-names forms an integral part of Plato's whole argument from 385 a to 390 e.

To say that for Plato individual names have truth-value apart from statements is not to impute to him the view that they are significant *in vacuo*, so to speak. The name, to be a name, must be stated (λέγεσθαι), not merely uttered (φθέγγεσθαι μόνον), i.e. it must be used to indicate some object. Since λέγειν means 'mean' as well as 'say' the concept of saying or stating a name (ὄνομα λέγειν) inevitably implied for a Greek the meaningful application of a sound to a thing. Plato, I believe, took this for granted, and went on to argue that in this meaningful application of name to thing truth or falsity could arise. He did not, I suggest, require that the name must form part of a fully fledged subject–predicate *logos* in order to acquire truth-value. For example, Plato clearly thinks it legitimate to raise the question whether allocutions of the type 'Hello, Hermogenes' are true or false (*Cra.* 429 e–430 a). A name, by being

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[1] Compare the intrusive ῥῆμα at *Sph.* 237 d 2.
[2] Méridier's version (Budé *Cratylus*) is very

similar: *Alors, le nom qui fait partie du discours vrai, on l'énonce?*
[3] *Essai sur le 'Cratyle'*, 52.

uttered in a context, i.e. as a label for a person or a thing, acquires truth-value. To say 'Hello, Hermogenes' to Hermogenes is to say something true; to say it to Cratylus is to say something false. The two key definitions of name in the *Cratylus*, name as 'tool' (ὄργανον 388 b) and name as 'representation' (μίμημα 423 b), both strongly imply the notion of context or name–thing relationship. A tool is not a tool unless it is, or could be, used on some object; a representation must represent something. It is axiomatic for Plato that a name works in relation to a thing. Name and thing are linked together in the bond of truth-value.

A true name, then, for Plato, is the right or appropriate name for something, and a false name is the wrong or inappropriate name. To call a man a man is to indicate his essence (εἶδος or οὐσία) by the appropriate tool (*Cra.* 389 d–390 a), or, to change the metaphor, to show him a picture of himself, i.e. a picture which is *his* picture and so belongs to him (430 e–431 a). To call a man a woman is to use the wrong tool, to show the inappropriate picture. Throughout the *Cratylus* Plato maintains this position about truth-names and lie-names without prejudice to the main issue of the dialogue, namely, whether the correctness or appropriateness of names stems from nature or convention.

The Greek for 'lie-name' is ὄνομα ψεῦδος. In 385 c 16 Méridier follows W in reading ψευδές. Burnet retains ψεῦδος (BT), and this is more in keeping with classical Greek usage in which ψεῦδος is used instead of ψευδές as the neuter singular of ψευδής.[1] ψεῦδος in Plato is frequently opposed to ἀληθές, and its use here in the *Cratylus* is described by the lexicon as 'almost like an adjective'.[2]

In the opposition ἀληθές) (ψεῦδος we have the intriguing anomaly that the Greek for 'a truth' is ἀληθές, and for 'false' ψεῦδος. We should not try to strait-jacket the usage by a too rigid application of the grammatical categories of noun and adjective. The functions of noun and adjective merge in the concept of predicate. True names are truth-names, and false names are lie-names.

In the traditional Greek view proper names predicated qualities of their owners ἐτύμως or ψευδωνύμως. That is to say, they were viewed as truth-names or lie-names. The name told a story, or predicted a destiny. If its report fitted the person whose name it was, then it was a good, or correct, or true name. If not, then it became a bad, incorrect, lying name. In this spirit Aeschylus makes Kratos taunt Prometheus (*P.V.* 85–6):

ψευδωνύμως σε δαίμονες Προμηθέα
καλοῦσιν.

In this spirit the epitaph of a certain Eutychides proclaims the false promise of his name:[3]

οὔνομα δ' Εὐτυχίδης· ψευδώνυμον ἀλλά με δαίμων
θῆκεν ἀφαρπάξας ὠκύτατ' εἰς Ἀίδα.

In the detailed etymologies of the *Cratylus* Plato operates with this traditional Greek conception of proper names, and he extends it also to cover general names, which, so far as he is concerned, are indistinguishable in their logical function from proper names.[4]

The descriptive function of names is perhaps most obvious when they are

[1] In c 14 the variant ψεύδους presumably arose from ignorance of this idiom.

[2] *LSJ* s.v. ψεῦδος III. Cf. Ast, *Lexicon Platonicum*, s.v. ψεῦδος: *adjectivi instar ponitur*.

[3] *I.G.* iii. 1308. Plato was aware of this possibility! See *Cra.* 397 b 5.

[4] Lorenz and Mittelstrass, art. cit. 5.

seen to consist of a complex of elements as in 'blackbird' or 'roundabout'. In view of this it is interesting to find that almost 50 per cent of the names handled in the central portion of the *Cratylus* are analysed into elements which clearly constitute phrases or 'little sentences'. For example, Agamemnon is 'admirable for endurance' (ἀγαστὸς κατὰ τὴν ἐπιμονήν, 395 a–b); Pelops is 'short-sighted' (πέλας ὁρῶν (ὄψις), 395 c–d); Artemis 'hates intercourse' (ἄροτον μισήσασα, 406 b); Dionysus 'gives the wine' (διδοὺς τὸν οἶνον, 406 c); φρόνησις is 'understanding of movement and flux' (φορᾶς καὶ ῥοῦ νόησις, 411 d); ὄνομα itself is 'the reality yearned for' (ὂν οὗ μάσμα, 421 a). Plato remarks of this last etymology that it amounts to a 'compressed *logos*' (421 a 7. Cf. 409 c, 415 d, 416 b). This remark, coming at the climax of the main etymological section, serves to make explicit the principle on which so many of the names have been derived. They have turned out to be compressed or abbreviated phrases describing, and so revealing, the nature of their nominates. As phrases they clearly predicate qualities of the individuals they denote. There is an attractive economy of effort in making names do double duty in this way. For example, the name ἄνθρωπος indicates man's ability as a species to 'reflect on what he has seen' (ἀναθρεῖ ὃ ὄπωπεν, 399 c). We are told explicitly that this name 'derives from a phrase (ῥῆμα)' (399 b). Examples of what Plato means by ῥῆμα in this connection are to be found at 399 a–b: Διὶ φίλος is a ῥῆμα for which the name 'Diphilos' is substituted; and 421 b: ἀλήθεια is a ῥῆμα indicating the 'divine roaming' (θεία ἄλη) of the true cosmos.[1] The account of derivation at 421 d–e shows that these are not isolated instances, for, in general, word-analysis is envisaged as proceeding from the name back to its constituent ῥήματα. In these contexts ῥῆμα is used in its basic sense of 'something stated', i.e. predicate. In so far as names are constituted by ῥήματα they say something about their nominates and must be capable of possessing truth-value. The point is underlined by the two places where a name, or more precisely a doublet name, is said to be equivalent to a *logos*.[2]

The principle of predication by name is not confined to portmanteau terms which can be unpacked into a number of constituent items. Names which are interpreted as equivalent to a single word, e.g. Hestia (401 c–d), Hera (404 c), γυνή (414 a), are also treated as predicates which characterize their nominates. Their ὄνομα is an ἐπωνυμία, as is explicitly stated in the case of Atreus (395 b 5). Constantly throughout the dialogue ἐπωνυμία is used to indicate that the name by appropriate description serves to include its nominate in a wider class.[3]

The so-called 'primary names', e.g. ἰόν, ῥέον, δοῦν, are treated somewhat differently in that they are said to represent the nature of their nominates by the onomatopoeic qualities of their constituent letters. But the principle that name should reveal nature applies equally to all names. Every name from first to last is deemed correct in so far as it manifests the nature of each object. This is definitively stated at 422 c–d, and repeated in the summing-up at 428 e. For Plato it is axiomatic that the nature of the object is the truth about the object,[4] so a name which correctly reveals the nature of its object is a

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[1] These passages show that ῥῆμα in the *Cra.* is by no means restricted to the grammatical sense of 'verb', as defined at *Sph.* 262 a, though it could be so taken at 425 a and 431 b. Cf. p. 229 n. 1.

[2] 396 a 2: ἐστιν οἷον λόγος τὸ τοῦ Διὸς

ὄνομα. 410 d: ὁ δὲ ὅλος λόγος ἐστὶν τὸ "ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἐτάζον" (= ἐνιαυτός).

[3] *Cra.* 394 d, 398 c, 409 c, 412 c, 415 d. Cf. ἐπονομάζειν 403 a, 404 b, 406 a, 414 a.

[4] See, for example, *Cra.* 425 d, 438 d.

true name. Plato assures us that we need not be too particular about the correctness of the individual letters so long as the *character* (τύπος) of the object is displayed by the name.[1]

It may be objected that almost all the references and examples in the previous paragraphs are taken from the part of the dialogue where Plato is arguing in favour of the nature-theory of names, and that since in the end he appears to turn decisively against the nature-theory, he also rejects the principle on which its etymologies are justified. This objection can be met by reference to the section 430 a 6–431 c 3 where the general notion of degrees of truth/falsity in names is used in argument *against* Cratylus, the main proponent of the nature-theory. The section contains a crucial definition of the concept of truth/falsity in names:

> This sort of attribution (making a good likeness), my friend, I call correct in both types of representation, pictures and names, *and in the case of names I also call it true*; attribution of a bad likeness I call incorrect, and *in the case of names false* (430 d).

The name is here being treated as a 'picture' (εἴκων) which is placed beside its nominate and judged to be a 'true' or a 'false' representation (μίμησις). Uttering a name, then, amounts to stating a likeness, and this can be done aptly or ineptly. To assign an apt name is 'to tell the truth' (ἀληθεύεσθαι), and to do the opposite is 'to tell a lie' (ψεύδεσθαι) (431 b).

'Who is this?' 'Hermogenes.' In this exchange the answerer uses a lie-name because he names, i.e. describes, Hermogenes in an inappropriate way. To be called 'offspring of Hermes' suggests the possession of commercial ability or eloquence, but Hermogenes never makes any money and is not a ready speaker so he cannot really be Ἑρμο-γενης. This example of a lie-name, first mentioned at the very beginning of the dialogue (383 b, 384 c), recurs like a leitmotif (408 b, 429 b–e).

I conclude that throughout the *Cratylus* Plato accepts and works with the conception of names as predicates characterizing their nominates, and therefore capable of being true or false.

III

The concept of a name functioning as a predicate, and so as a vehicle for truth/falsity, is by no means confined to the *Cratylus*. It can be traced all through Plato's writings from early to late dialogues.

For example, in *Protagoras* 311 e we find Socrates asking what other *name* Protagoras has, as Homer is called a poet and Phidias a sculptor, and he is told: 'they call him (ὀνομάζουσι) a sophist'. Pursuing his questioning Socrates asks: 'What sort of person do you consider a sophist to be?' And the reply is: 'A man skilled in wisdom, *as the name states*' (ὥσπερ τοὔνομα λέγει 312 c).

Again, at *Apology* 23 a Socrates complains that the *name* 'wise' has been unfairly attached to him: ὄνομα δὲ τοῦτο λέγεσθαι σόφος εἶναι.[2] This is a

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[1] *Cra.* 432 d 11–433 a 2, with its 'tying-up' reference back to 393 d–e.

[2] See Burnet, edn. of *Euthphr. Ap. Cri.*, ad loc., on the 'redundant' εἶναι commonly added after verbs of naming, and Ast, *Lexicon Platonicum* s.v. εἶναι for examples.

εἶναι may be grammatically redundant, but it brings out the point that the name is conceived as stating what the object actually is. Cf. *Cra.* 400 c εἶναι οὖν τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦτο, ὥσπερ αὐτὸ ὀνομάζεται ... "σῶμα".

particularly clear example of a name functioning as a predicate, and should be compared with *Phaedrus* 278 d where 'wise' is treated as an ἐπωνυμία.

This type of usage is found equally in late dialogues. For instance, in *Philebus* 12 b we read:

> Yes, we must make the attempt: and plainly we shall begin with the goddess herself, who according to our friend is called Aphrodite, though her truest name, he tells us, is Pleasure. (tr. Hackforth)

As Hackforth well says in comment on this passage, Socrates is chary of relying on names given to gods and goddesses 'since these may be unacceptable to them as implying a falsification of their real nature (cf. *Cra.* 400 d)'.[1]

Again from the *Philebus*, in the account of Theuth's phonetic researches (18 b–d), we have a more subtle example of the concept of a name as a predicate conveying true information about its nominate:

> And since he said that none of us could learn any one of them [sc. the letters] without all the rest, he further devised a single bond which makes them all in a way into one thing, and gave it the name of a single art, that of letters. (tr. Taylor)

The pregnant Greek of the final clause is (18 d 1–2):

> μίαν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ὡς οὖσαν γραμματικὴν τέχνην ἐπεφθέγξατο προσειπών.

Here ὡς οὖσαν should be taken ἀπὸ κοινοῦ with μίαν and γραμματικήν. The general sense is that Theuth gave one name because it was a single science, and gave an appropriate name because the subject-matter consisted in γράμματα.

In the *Laws* (908 a) Plato recommends that his grimmest prison, situated in a lonely and rugged place, should be given a name suggestive of punishment (τιμωρίας ἔχων ἐπωνυμίαν φήμην τινά).

These are not isolated instances. I think it can be shown that they form part of a general and consistent attitude to name-giving and name-using which pervades all Plato's later dialogues.

If we examine Socrates' well-known 'dream' in the *Theaetetus* we find that one of the cardinal points is that the elements of things being simple can only be named, and cannot be known or described in any way (201 e). Compounds, however, can be known and described (202 b 7). In this distinction, considered from the point of view of logic, we seem to have something very like the distinction between names which merely refer, and statements which describe. Now Plato goes on to make it clear that the dream-theory is not in his opinion satisfactory or tenable. He subjects it to penetrating criticism, and in particular rejects the thesis that the element is unknowable and the compound knowable (206 b). It follows, I suggest, that he rejects the possibility of a merely referential name. If this suggestion is correct, the *Theaetetus* here provides indirect support for my thesis of Plato's continued adherence to the doctrine of the descriptive name.

Despite some appearances to the contrary, more positive support is also forthcoming from the *Sophist*. In this dialogue names are still conceived as 'revelations of reality' (περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν δηλώματα 261 e). This description,

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[1] R. Hackforth, *Plato's Examination of Pleasure*, 14.

I suggest, is not inconsistent with the view of names taken in the *Cratylus*, and indeed agrees very well with it. It is surely significant that the term δήλωμα is three times used of names in the *Cratylus* (433 b, d). In both dialogues generally names are viewed as manifestations of the nature (οὐσία) of their nominates. But at *Sophist* 262 a Plato goes on to define specific functions of ὄνομα and ῥῆμα more sharply than before.[1] He does so because the whole tenor of the central portion of the *Sophist* presupposes a solution of the problem of false statement in terms of a '*blending*' operation in which *different* 'kinds' are synthesized. So, for the purposes of a particular argument, the general class of names has to be clearly subdivided into the sub-classes of 'agent-names' and 'activity-names' (262 a). The blending of these sub-classes effects one particular type of 're-velation' of reality. This is the revelation accomplished by what Aristotle calls the ἀποφαντικὸς λόγος, i.e. the assertorial statement. The revelation in such a statement is a *conjoining* revelation. It tells us something *about* the subject of the statement, e.g. that the subject exists or does not exist, that it has or lacks certain characteristics, that it is performing or not performing certain actions. This is what Plato means when he says that such a λόγος 'does not merely name but accomplishes something' (262 d). He then goes on to explain how such λόγοι may be true or false as a whole, but it does not necessarily follow that this argument involves a denial of truth/falsity to names.[2] Within the asser-torial statement with its specific type of truth/falsity, the names preserve their own type of truth/falsity as δηλώματα περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν, i.e. as indicating a nature by describing a denoted individual. The two types of revelation are complemen-tary, not incompatible. Otherwise the *Sophist* must be regarded as speaking, like Eurycles (252 c), with two inconsistent voices in its general assumptions about language.[3]

In the passage of the *Sophist* discussed in the previous paragraph, the mean-ing of λόγος is temporarily, but atypically, restricted to assertorial statement. But Plato may not have wished to insist too absolutely on this restriction, for he qualifies with a softening σχεδόν his dictum that ὄνομα+ῥῆμα is the 'first and smallest *logos*' (262 c 6). This could be taken as ironical, but it is equally possible to regard it as a genuine reservation made with compound names in mind,[4] for, as we learnt in the *Cratylus*, these are equivalent to 'little

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[1] The definitions in 262 a are usually taken to mean that ὄνομα is to be equated with 'noun' and ῥῆμα with 'verb', but this may well be an over-grammatical inter-pretation. Stenzel (Pauly–Wissowa–Kroll, *R.-E.* s.v. Logik, vol. xiii, 1011, and *Plato's Method of Dialectic*, tr. D. J. Allan, 126–7) maintains that even in the *Sophist* ῥῆμα is not restricted to 'verb' but covers any kind of assertion. He points out that at *Sph.* 257 b the predicate 'not-big' is called a ῥῆμα, and refers to 251 a–b where ὀνόματα and ἐπονομάζειν are used of *predicates*. Runciman, *Plato's Later Epistemology*, 108, n. 3, also ques-tions whether 'noun' and 'verb' are legiti-mate translations.

[2] As, for example, Diès thinks (Budé *Theae-tetus* 3rd edn., *Notice* 145). *Contra*, Runciman, op. cit. 121.

[3] Lorenz and Mittelstrass, art. cit. 8: 'But

one has to be careful to discriminate clearly between the revelation achieved by names and the one achieved by sentences, because sentences always *reveal something about objects* (*Soph.* 262 d) whereas only "correct" names *reveal objects for what they are* (*Crat.* 422 d), i.e. place individuals under an appropriate concept'. We may add that the more in-timate relationship between name and nominate may be signalled by περί c. acc. (261 e 5) in contrast with the revelation of the assertorial statement where περί c. gen. is used (262 d 2).

[4] Aristotle in the *De Interpretatione* starts from the *Sophist's* distinction between ὄνομα and ῥῆμα, and, in connection with his de-finition of ὄνομα, introduces the problem of the significance of parts of compound names. He says that in the compound name (ὄνομα πεπλεγμένον) 'the part has a sort of meaning,

statements'. If it be argued that in the *Sophist* he has outgrown this 'error' of the *Cratylus*, I reply by quoting a revealing passage from the *Politicus* (265 c) which indicates that even in the latest stage of his thought Plato did not in practice recognize an absolute distinction between a λόγος and an ὄνομα. The passage runs (in Taylor's translation) :

> So you are now to subdivide the art of *herding footed creatures*, and assign the appropriate branch of it to either class. But you will have to use descriptive formulae [λόγῳ χρώμενος] ; if you try to find names for the branches the result will prove unduly complicated [ἂν γὰρ ὀνομάζειν αὐτὰ βουληθῇς, ἔσται σοι περιπεπλεγμένον μᾶλλον τοῦ δέοντος].

In this passage it is clear that the choice between a λόγος and an ὄνομα is to be made on grounds of convenience, and not because there is any absolute distinction between them. The complex name (ὄνομα περιπεπλεγμένον) will convey truth about the object just as well as the formula (λόγος), but will be more cumbersome to use. In another case the balance of convenience might favour the use of name rather than formula.

The account of λόγος in *Sophist* 262 ff. has attracted a great deal of attention because of the notion of propositional truth therein deployed with considerable clarity and rigour. The argument concentrates attention on λόγοι (in a restricted sense, as we have seen), and appears to depreciate ὀνόματα as 'mere names'. Not unnaturally commentators have suggested that Plato has advanced to something like the modern reference theory of names, and has given up the conception of them as vehicles of truth. 'He did not say [in *Sophist* 263 a–c] that names have a truth-value', comments Robinson (p. 329), with the strong implication that he no longer thinks it.

Excessive concentration on this one passage of the *Sophist* tends to distort the general outline of Plato's doctrine of names. A more balanced view of the complementary functions of λόγος and ὄνομα in the search for truth is given by a passage in the *Laws* (895 d–e), and this passage, together with the notorious digression in the *Seventh Letter* (342 a ff.), may fairly be regarded as Plato's last word on the subject. In the *Laws* passage the example of a λόγος is 'number divided into two equal parts', which is by no means the same in grammatical form as 'man learns' or 'Theaetetus sits'. It comes closer to what Aristotle called the λόγος ὀνοματώδης, e.g. the description of man as a 'two-footed animal'.[1] The passage uses its example of a λόγος to illustrate two types of inquiry which appear to be on an equal footing so far as Plato is concerned: (1) to put forward a name and ask for its *logos*; (2) to put forward a *logos* and ask for its name. Of these two types of inquiry we may say that (1) is exemplified in the Socratic search for definitions, while (2) in fact describes much of the procedure in the elaborate 'divisions' which occupy so much space in the *Sophist* and *Politicus*.

In the methodology of *diaeresis* 'onomastic' plays a reputable part side by side with 'dialectic'. If the division is to proceed, the problem is often to find,

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but not in isolation' (τὸ μέρος . . . βούλεται μέν, ἀλλ᾽ οὐδενὸς κεχωρισμένον 16ᵃ21–6). With βούλεται cf. the many places in the *Cra.* where the 'intended meaning' of a name is expressed by βούλεσθαι, e.g. 395 b 8, 401 c 2, 410 b 8, 414 a 3, 414 d 3, 418 d 5,

421 b 7. Aristotle covers the same ground in *Poet.* 20, 1457ᵃ10–14, but without the concept of βούλησις.

[1] ζῷον πεζὸν δίπουν: *An. Post.* 2, 10, 93ᵇ31. Ross, ad loc., takes λόγος ὀνοματώδης to mean 'noun-like phrase'.

or to coin, an appropriate name for a dimly discerned class.¹ Naming clarifies
the situation, and so helps to reveal the truth. There is even a special verb
διονομάζειν, 'to distinguish by name', which occurs in *Cratylus* 387 c 6 and
Politicus 263 d 5. At the conclusion of the division of the angler (*Sph.* 221 a–b)
the Stranger asks for the *name* of the activity revealed by the analysis, and
remarks, *Cratylus*-wise, that 'the name is copied from the activity itself' (ἀπ'
αὐτῆς τῆς πράξεως ἀφομοιωθὲν τοὔνομα: i.e. ἀσπαλιευτική = ἄνω πληγὴν
ἀνασπωμένη). And what we call the final definition of the sophist is in fact the
assignment to him of a many-stranded *name* indicating his race and lineage.²
The old motif of the eponymous name persists.

As correct names clarify, so misnomers obscure. In the *Politicus* (281 a)
we meet again the notion of a lie-name in a phrase exactly parallel to *Cratylus*
385 c. We are told that a person who applies the name ὑφαντική to the
process of carding 'utters a paradoxical and false name' (παράδοξόν τε καὶ
ψεῦδος ὄνομα λέγει).

IV

I conclude that the conception of truth/falsity in names, as it appears early
in the *Cratylus*, is no aberrant thesis, temporarily adopted by 'Socrates' for
the immediate purposes of his argument but fundamentally untenable, and
seen to be so by Plato in his later work. On the contrary, it is an integral part
of the whole texture of the *Cratylus*. But it is more than this. The notion of
truth-names and lie-names is intimately bound up with Plato's over-all con-
ception of language, truth, and reality. From first to last Plato regarded lan-
guage as a *mimesis* of reality. Within the *mimesis* of language the elements of
the vocabulary function like colours on an artist's palette, and should, ideally,
enable a true-to-life picture of reality to be composed.³ But here a deep-rooted
ambivalence in Plato's treatment of language makes itself felt. We often find
Plato the word-artist using all his verbal expertise to depreciate verbalization.
He will argue on epistemological grounds (as he does, for example, at the end
of the *Cratylus*, 439 a–b) that even at best a word-picture will be an inferior
copy of reality, and is all too likely to prove a deceptive distortion of it. This
distrustful attitude to language underlies Plato's attacks on poetry, rheto-
ric, and sophistic. He saw that in the hands of misguided or unscrupulous
practitioners language could be responsible for the production of much false
opinion.

People who accept current names at their face value exhibit a variety of
that state of mind, which, in the terminology of the Divided Line, is called
εἰκασία.⁴ At the conclusion of the *Cratylus* Plato warns against an excessive
trust in names. 'No intelligent man', he says, 'should commit himself to names
for the tendance of his soul' (440 c). Plato would probably have allowed that
some linguistic study is a reasonable, perhaps even a necessary, preliminary to
progress in philosophy.⁵ But he certainly believed that the mind must penetrate

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¹ *Sph.* 224 c, 225 a, 229 d, 267 b 1–2,
267 d 4–e 2; *Plt.* 260 e, 264 d, 275 d–e,
276 a–b.

² *Sph.* 268 c–d: τοὔνομα συμπλέξαντες ἀπὸ
τελευτῆς ἐπ' ἀρχήν. Cf. *Plt.* 267 a: συνείρων
. . . τὸν λόγον τοῦ ὀνόματος τῆς τοῦ πολιτικοῦ
τέχνης.

³ See *Cra.* 424 d–425 b; *Plt.* 277 c.

⁴ See Adam, edn. of *Republic*, vol. 2, 157–8,
and the instructive remarks of Cross and
Woozley, *Plato's Republic*, 220–4.

⁵ This suggestion is based on the indica-
tions of passages like *Euthd.* 277 e, *Phd.* 115 e,
Rep. 522 a, *Ep.* 7. 342 a–b. For word study
as a propaideutic to philosophy see the judi-
cious remarks of Goldschmidt, *Essai*, 194 9.

through the surface of language if it is to grasp truth in its fullness. To remain mesmerized by language is to rest in the condition of εἰκασία, which is the lowest stage of opinion. Opinion, however, can be true as well as false, and so a modicum of truth must be available even at this level, and can be embodied and conveyed in names.[1] Names conveying correct information will be truth-names. But much skill is needed in the establishment and use of such names if they are to be adequate vehicles of truth.[2] Current language easily degenerates into a mere source of falsity and illusion. The 'mirage of language' (τὰ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις φαντάσματα) is exploited by the sophist to cheat and deceive the young and impressionable (*Sph.* 234 c–d). In this passage of the *Sophist* the phrase 'exhibiting all things in a shadow-play of discourse' presents in a nut-shell the conception of language and vocabulary which pervades the *Cratylus*, namely, that names function as descriptive representations of objects, signifying reality by word-images which should be true but may prove illusory.[3]

The sophist trades in the illusory possibilities of language, and is not concerned with the realities which underlie the vocabulary. The philosopher seeks to purify and stabilize language by grasping and articulating the eternal realities of which names are reflections. If the philosopher cannot engage in real definition, rational conversation becomes impossible (*Prm.* 135 b–c). Moral and intellectual virtues have 'noble names',[4] and it is one of the chief justifications of philosophical insight that it safeguards the correct application of terms like 'noble', 'just', and 'good'.[5] If the citizens agree generally in their use of terms like 'mine' and 'not-mine' the unity of the community will be enhanced (*Rep.* 462 c). There is some justification for the common confusion of ὀνοματοθέτης ('name-giver') and νομοθέτης ('law-giver') in Plato manuscripts. The close co-operation which Plato envisages between the 'name-giver' and the 'dialectician' is a measure of the importance which he attached to the establishment of correct names, and their maintenance in use.[6] He was well aware that in the commerce of society name and thing must be properly yoked together if truth is to proceed and be conveyed from mind to mind.

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[1] Cf. the sophisticated account of δόξα in *Phlb.* 38 b ff., with its picture of the soul as a book in which true and false accounts may be written (39 a).

[2] See *Cra.* 388 e 7–389 a 3, and for a practical instance of the scientific approach to naming see *Tim.* 83 b–c.

[3] δεικνύντας εἴδωλα λεγόμενα περὶ πάντων (trans. by Cornford). In *Sph.* 234 b Plato exploits the ambiguity of γράφειν ('draw' or

'write') just as he does at *Cra.* 431 c–d.

[4] *Cra.* 411 a. Cf. *Phlb.* 59 c–d.

[5] *Rep.* 520 c. Contrast the misuse of terms arising from political opportunism, *Rep.* 493 b–c. Cf. also *Rep.* 560 c–d: οἱ ἀλαζόνες λόγοι . . . τὴν μὲν αἰδῶ ἠλιθιότητα ὀνομάζοντες κτλ.

[6] *Cra.* 390 b–e. Cf. *Laws* 816 c on the need for the νομοθέτης to co-operate with the νομοφύλαξ.