

A STUDY OF PLATO'S *CRATYLUS*

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By

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ABSTRACT

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In the last century, philosophers turned their attention to language. One place they have looked for clues about its nature is Plato's *Cratylus*, which considers whether names are naturally or conventionally correct. The dialogue is a source of annoyance to many commentators because it does not take a clear position on the central question. At times, it argues that language is conventional, and, at other times, defends the view that language is natural. This lack of commitment has led to a long-standing dispute over the outcome of the dialogue. I argue that the *Cratylus* provides no clear resolution to this problem because it presupposes certain unexamined metaphysical commitments about the nature of reality, which are in need of thorough investigation.

DEDICATION

For Jenny and Lucy

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Οὐκ ἔμοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα
εἶναι

-Heraclitus

Introduction

Plato's *Cratylus* is a source of constant irritation for commentators. The etymologies that occupy more than half of the dialogue are the principal causes of this because they appear to serve no purpose, except to tickle Plato's bizarre sense of humor. For this reason, most commentators have concentrated on the beginning and the end of the dialogue (see especially Robinson 1955, Kretzmann 1971, Fine 1977, Schofield 1982, Williams 1982, and Mackenzie 1986). The *Cratylus* opens with Socrates trying to arbitrate a dispute between Hermogenes and Cratylus over the correctness of names (ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα, 383a–391a), and closes with Socrates suggesting an alternative to Cratylus' view that learning about names is the best way to learn about nature (438a–440e).¹ The relationship, however, between these disputes is murky, and few commentators have tried to clarify it because they ignore the etymologies (cf. Ackrill 1997, 34).² Yet such neglect

¹ Commentators largely agree “name” should translate ὄνομα. They disagree about what ὀνόματα are. A few commentators think ὀνόματα are “predicates” (Sachs 1878, 63–4; Luce 1969, 222–3; Lorenz and Mittelstrass 1967, 4). Others restrict it to nouns (Robinson 1955, 101–3; Fine 1977, n. 14; Annas 1982, n. 26). I follow Ketchum 1979, 147, who argues that the meaning of ὄνομα expands and contracts over the course of the dialogue. However, Ketchum believes that Socrates' use of ὄνομα in his discussion with Hermogenes is incompatible with his use of it in his discussion with Cratylus. I suggest that the meaning of ὄνομα is gradually refined in the course of the dialogue (cf. 391b3). This refinement suggests that Socrates and Hermogenes broadly construed the meaning of ὄνομα and try to clarify it. This is most evident in Socrates' etymological demonstration, where ὄνομα comes to mean something like “predicate” (see Luce 1969, 222–3).

² It may be that there is no relationship between the opening and closing disputes. Instead, they may be two separate issues. If so, a different though similar problem would arise: it would become unclear why these disputes should appear in the same dialogue.

prevents them from learning how Socrates settles the dispute over the correctness of names.

Given their prominence in the *Cratylus*, the etymologies must play some part in Socrates' arbitration of the dispute between Hermogenes and Cratylus over the correctness of names. What role, then, do they play? Several commentators have recently studied the etymologies in an effort to discern their purpose (See Sedley 2003, Barney 2001, and Baxter 1992. For a summary and criticism of these interpretations, see Thomas 2007. For criticism specific to Sedley, see Verlinsky 2003, 75). Timothy Baxter 1992, §4, argues that the etymologies are meant to condemn the practice of etymology used by various pre-Socratics, sophists and poets. He thinks that the etymologies "attack a wide variety of targets because [Plato] is battling against what he sees as a culture-wide mistaken belief in the power of names." His long list of targets includes figures like Protagoras and Prodicus, whom Socrates mentions (385e–d; 383b; Cf. Weingartner 1970, 24). The chief success of Baxter's claim is that it explains the length of the analysis. Socrates examines so many names because there are so many sophists, poets, and naturalists who overvalue the importance of names (Baxter 1992, 87).

David Sedley offers us an entirely different kind of interpretation. He disagrees fundamentally with the premise that the etymologies are a parody. Instead, they represent an "exegetically" correct attempt to establish a science of etymology (2003, 28–30). Such etymologies would enable a person to learn about names. According to Sedley, however, the etymologies are not "philosophically" correct. If they were, they would enable a person to learn about the things named. The fact that the etymologies are "exegetically," but not "philosophically" correct means that they enable a person to learn about names,

but not about the things named. This argument fits nicely with Socrates' attack on the view that learning about names is the best way to learn about nature (435d ff.).

Nevertheless, it is unclear how the claim that the examination is "exegetically" correct fits with the overall argument of the dialogue.

Sedley does not try to show how this "exegetically" correct examination of names fits into the *Cratylus* as a whole. Instead, he builds a case for his interpretation by examining Socrates' analysis of names in other dialogues to show that they confirm his view (cf. 2003, 25–51). This approach may be enough to justify the claim that Plato takes etymology seriously enough to develop it into a science but it is not enough to explain what such a science might do for the *Cratylus*.

Barney's interpretation is the only one that tries to explain the role of the etymologies in terms of Socrates' arbitration of the dispute between Cratylus and Hermogenes.³ She agrees with Baxter that the intention behind the etymologies is to parody the practices of individuals who overvalue names. She, however, disagrees that the etymologies target anyone who overvalues names. She argues that the etymologies are a "rational reconstruction," "an inspiration episode," and an "agonistic" display of Cratylus' naturalism, which serves to strengthen Cratylus' position against Hermogenes and prepare it for refutation in the final part of the dialogue (Barney 2001, 52). Barney argues that, since Cratylus refuses to describe his position, Socrates and Hermogenes must provide a useful account of it on his behalf. Once Socrates and Hermogenes establish that names are correct, and that their correctness is anything but conventional,

³ Benardete 1980/1 also tries to explain the purpose of the etymologies in terms of the *Cratylus* but he focuses more on its influence on Cratylus and not on how it helps Socrates to arbitrate the dispute over the correctness of names (see chapter five).

they must consider what a natural correctness of names is (391b3). This is what they set out to do in the etymologies. According to Barney, Socrates exhibits in each etymology how names reveal the natures of things (Barney 2001, 71).⁴ In doing so, he shows how naturalism works and outdoes Cratylus in the effort to give an adequate account of naturalism (Barney 2001, 67–70). The reconstruction of naturalism will provide Socrates with the means of refuting Cratylus at the end of the dialogue (428aff. cf. Joseph 2000, 57). If Socrates can describe naturalism better than Cratylus can, then his refutation of it will be even more devastating.

There are two reasons why one ought to resist Barney's interpretation of the etymologies. One, Barney thinks that Cratylus' position is far more carefully defined than it actually is.⁵ She treats Cratylus' approval of Socrates' naturalism at 427d ff. as an invitation to read the results of the etymologies into Cratylus' original position. This reading would ascribe to Cratylus such views as that names are tools used to discriminate nature, and that a craftsman makes names for the use of the dialectician who supervised their construction. Cratylus' remarks about his naturalism, however, are scattered and few, leaving us far from sure about the exact nature of his position. We can only have confidence that he thinks names have some natural correctness, which cuts across different languages and dialects (383aff.).⁶ So an anachronistic reading such as Barney's

⁴ Joseph 200, 85, thinks the analysis complicates the relationship between nature and convention largely so as to render it impossible to judge how they influence the correctness of names.

⁵ Barney considers Cratylus a proponent of "strong etymology," the view that names provide insight into the natures of things. Because of this, Barney argues that Cratylus represents the practice of etymology, and is not the historical Cratylus; in this way, his etymological concern is prior to his Heracliteanism. Sedley 2003, 76, upholds this interpretation with some modification, while Baxter 1992, 111, flatly rejects the view that Socrates' etymologies are "Cratylan in content" for the reason that Cratylus' naturalism is ill defined.

⁶ In fact, Hermogenes provides this account of Cratylus' naturalism but Hermogenes does so in terms of conventionalism, the contrary view.

could inappropriately attribute a more definite position to Cratylus than he himself possesses, and take from Socrates a position that he devoted care to articulate. If Socrates' naturalism differs from Cratylus' then Socrates would seem not to "reconstruct" Cratylus' position, nor does he attempt to outdo Cratylus.

Another reason to resist Barney's interpretation is that it is unclear whether Socrates renounces his etymologies at the end of the dialogue.⁷ Like most other commentators, Barney assumes that when Socrates revises his analysis of ἐπιστήμη and σύνεσις at 436e–437a, he implicitly renounces the entire etymological enterprise (2001, 87).⁸ Socrates, however, does no such thing. His revisions show that etymology is an unreliable way of learning about nature because it shows that unexamined opinions about nature are the basis for names (Keller 2000, 299). To be sure that etymology does disclose nature we must first examine the opinions of those who made names. Only after we do this can we decide whether a name is correct or incorrect. If this interpretation is convincing, as I hope to show, then Socrates cannot be reconstructing Cratylus' naturalism in the sense that it is a position that belongs originally and inarticulately to Cratylus. Instead, Socrates is constructing his own view of naturalism, which, in the end,

⁷ Here Barney follows Baxter 1992, 119, who argues, "Plato will show that his piece-meal approach to etymology is mistaken, that etymologizing to support beliefs about the world presupposes some kind of theory about the relationship between names and things. It assumes that the name-giver was a dialectician and requires a systematic investigation of names if it is to be justified." Baxter and Barney fail, however, to consider how Socrates has fulfilled each of the claims he makes in the opening discussion. As I argued in the preceding chapters, Socrates and Hermogenes establish a theory about names and the things in the tool analogy (387e–391a). They insist that their theory requires an investigation of etymology (391b–e), and that the name-giver and the dialectician work together to coin the best names (390a). That they do establish Baxter's claims indicates that etymologies are not mistaken and do reveal something about the nature of things.

⁸ To my knowledge, every commentator of the *Cratylus* considers Socrates' revision of ἐπιστήμη and σύνεσις the beginning of a repudiation of the etymologies. But, as I will insist, commentators go too far. Socrates' revision suggests only that the etymologies depend on the opinion the original makers of names had about nature. And, to this extent, an examination of the truth of their opinions is needed to justify the etymologies (cf. 437d–440c).

will be inconclusive—but not refuted—because it will determine the natural correctness of names in the light of human opinions about nature rather than human knowledge of nature.

The present dissertation tries to account for the etymologies by disclosing their role in Socrates' arbitration of the dispute over the correctness of names. In order to show how Socrates settles this dispute, I argue that the etymologies present a fundamental challenge to the view that language can be independent of metaphysical commitments. The etymologies demonstrate that names disclose the opinions or beliefs that the original makers of names had about nature without revealing whether these opinions are true or false. On this interpretation, the problem of the correctness of names depends on the truth or falsehood of the opinions the original makers of names had about nature (my emphasis on opinion [δόξα] follows Levin 1995, 2001).

To show that the etymologies present a challenge to the view that language can be independent of metaphysical commitments, I provide a comprehensive interpretation of the dialogue that explores whether Socrates resolves the dispute about the correctness of names, and what his resolution might be. Ultimately, we see that Socrates cannot settle the dispute, but suggests that this must wait for an exhaustive investigation of nature to determine whether it is stable, in flux, or both. It is an investigation, I might add, that is itself incapable of completion.

My effort to prove this thesis consists of nine chapters. In the first, I examine Hermogenes' defense of conventionalism. Here I argue that Hermogenes advocates an extreme sort of conventionalism: any coined name is correct and anyone is qualified to coin a name. Moreover, if no one uses a name then the name ceases to be correct. In this

last claim, I insist that Hermogenes renders the distinction between correct and incorrect names meaningless. If names can only be correct when someone uses them then there is no such thing as an incorrect name. For an unused name is not genuinely a name.

In the second chapter, I investigate Socrates' discussion of truth and falsehood. Here I maintain that Socrates tries to prove that there is a distinction between correct and incorrect names for the very reason that there is a distinction between true and false statements. Names are parts of statements. If statements can be true or false, then names may be correct or incorrect.

In the third chapter, I take up Socrates' further refutation of conventionalism. I argue that Socrates challenges Hermogenes by showing that his conventionalism amounts to relativism. During Socrates' refutation, he introduces a version of naturalism. Names turn out to be naturally correct when they get at the natures of things. A special sort of artisan looks to the form of the thing he or she wishes to name and fashions the name according to it. Like all other kinds of artisans, however, the name-giver can make mistakes. A supervisor is necessary, then, to ensure that this maker of names suitably distinguishes the natures of thing. Socrates identifies this supervisor as a dialectician.

In chapter four, I consider Socrates' investigation of the craft of naming. Beginning with makers of names, I contend that Socrates demonstrates that poets such as Homer and Hesiod are examples of the earliest makers of names. They designed names to reveal the natures of things, and they did so according to their own conception of nature.

In chapter five, I study Socrates' etymologies and show that they justify three claims: (1) names can only reveal the beliefs or opinions of their makers; (2) the original makers of names, including poets such as Homer and Hesiod, believed that nature is in

flux; and (3) Socrates does not repudiate the view that nature is in flux at the end of the *Cratylus*, but only suggests that nature may in fact be stable. These claims imply that resolving the dispute over the correctness of names depends on whether nature is stable, in flux, or both.

In the sixth chapter, I turn to Socrates' investigation of how names reveal or distinguish the natures of things. I argue that, according to Socrates, names imitate the natures of things by means of the oral articulation of its letters. If stability and flux, or motion and rest, are the ultimate constituents of nature, then a name must imitate motion and rest to imitate the natures of things. This view is most evident, as we shall see, in the names of letters. The pronunciation of βῆτα requires a person to articulate the very sound that the name discloses—β. Letter names inescapably demonstrate that names can imitate the natures of things; that names can be naturally correct.

In the seventh chapter, I begin to examine Socrates' refutation of Cratylus. Here I argue that Socrates reveals that Cratylus' naturalism turns out to be identical to Hermogenes' conventionalism because Cratylus denies that some names are better imitations of nature than others are. He thinks that the original makers of names knew that nature is in flux and made names on this basis, as the etymologies demonstrate. His position is the same as Hermogenes' because they both reject the possibility of incorrect names. If no names are better imitations of nature than others are, then incorrect names will not be names at all.

In the eighth chapter, I consider the implications of Socrates' final defense of naturalism. I make a case for the view that Socrates' advocacy of conventionalism does not ultimately repudiate naturalism. He merely introduces his kind of naturalism as an

alternative to Cratylus' problematic naturalism. If some names are better imitations of nature than others, convention is necessary to explain how people can communicate when they employ incorrect names. Poor imitations must occasionally succeed in revealing and distinguishing the natures of things, if only by accident. Some names, such as the names of the letters, are inescapably naturally correct because they have the very natures they disclose in them. For this reason it will remain unclear whether the correctness of names in general is natural or conventional.

Finally, in the ninth chapter, I address the issue of Hermogenes' name. Cratylus claims that Hermogenes' name is incorrect because no one gave it to him. How can Cratylus assert this if he denies, as Hermogenes does, that incorrect names are possible? I argue that Hermogenes' name presents Socrates with another opportunity to refute Cratylus, and to some extent settle the dispute. Socrates refutes Cratylus in the same way he refutes Hermogenes. Only this time Socrates justifies Hermogenes' name by presenting a way of interpreting it that makes it correct. According to Socrates, names imitate the natures of things. Hermogenes imitates his namesake, Hermes, who escorts the souls of the dead into the afterlife, by escorting Cratylus out of Athens. For this reason, I insist, Hermogenes' name is naturally correct.

This argument is ultimately justified by the fact that the *Cratylus* is a dialogue. A dialogue situates arguments in the context of dramatic action.⁹ Though the setting of the *Cratylus* is unknown, its characters are not. Hermogenes was a member of an important

⁹ Reeve 1998, lii, argues that the drama and the argument of the dialogue are at odds because there is no immediate engagement with 'being' just a discussion, so to speak, of the verb 'to be'. Sachs 1878, 60, urges that the only responsible interpretation of a Platonic dialogue is to consider the circumstances in which an argument is given: "the much-vexed question of the Platonic philosophy, with its numerous subsidiary issues, is too apt to bias the judgment on the import of the single dialogue; and it seems to me incompatible with the nature and the purpose of these dialogues, that they should all represent one and the same line of thought, uninfluenced by the exigencies of a conversational exposition."

Athenian household associated with such notable politicians as Themistocles and Pericles. He was also a loyal Socratic. Plato includes him among the men present at Socrates' execution in the *Phaedo* (59b6), which suggests that he was a devoted follower of Socrates.¹⁰ Hermogenes' loyalty to Socrates will be on display throughout the *Cratylus*. We shall hear about how he asked Cratylus about the correctness of Socrates' name even before Socrates had arrived (383b), and observe how he defers to Socrates even at the expense of his own view (cf. 385eff.). As for Cratylus, Aristotle tells us that Cratylus was Plato's teacher before Socrates (*Metaphysics* 987a29).¹¹ He also tells us that Cratylus was a devoted Heraclitean, who eventually abandoned speech in favor of gesturing (*Metaphysics* 1010a7, cf. *Rhetoric* 1417b1). My argument takes seriously the fact that Socrates addresses his questions to a loyal disciple and a man on the path to extreme Heracliteanism, and that his arguments are constructed based on their answers.

¹⁰ Xenophon corroborates Hermogenes' loyalty by featuring him in his *Symposium*. Hermogenes may have even been Xenophon's source for Socrates' trial and execution (Cf. Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 1.2 48, IV, 8.4; for discussion see Nails 2002, 163).

¹¹ There has been a great deal of controversy about what Aristotle means by "before" (πρῶτον). The controversy seeks to answer three questions: (1) when the *Cratylus* takes place, (2) how extreme a Heraclitean was Cratylus, and (3) how much of Cratylus' Heracliteanism did Plato accept. On my view, Ketchum 1979, 237, puts it best: "one can hardly doubt that the historical figures whom Plato chose to be Socrates' respondents (many of whom may well have played this part in real life) had some connexion at least with the views which they are made to support, in the first place at all events, in the dialogues—and often an obvious connexion, otherwise the dialogues would lose much of their dramatic interest for those who read them." See Kirk 1951, Allan 1954, and Cherniss 1954 for further discussion of the historical Cratylus.

Part One: That it is

1: Conventionalism (383a4–385e3)

The *Cratylus* begins when Socrates joins a conversation between Hermogenes and Cratylus, two men who are engaged in a dispute over the correctness of names (ὀρθότητα τῶν ὀνομάτων).¹² Hermogenes believes that names are conventionally correct, and Cratylus maintains that they are naturally so (I follow Kretzmann 1971, 126, who labels Cratylus’ position “naturalism” and Hermogenes’ position “conventionalism”). Hermogenes, however, is not so clear about the nature of his dispute with Cratylus. He cannot tell if they differ on whether there is any correctness of names at all, or whether the correctness of names is natural or conventional (see 427d2–6; cf. Barney 2001, 27).¹³ I argue that Hermogenes ultimately advocates an extreme sort of conventionalism, where any name is correct insofar as someone has coined it and anyone will be qualified to coin a name. In embracing this position, Hermogenes may believe he is a good Socratic because he would be diminishing the significance of names.

¹² Neither Hermogenes nor Cratylus explains what “correctness” (ὀρθότητα) means anywhere in the dialogue. For this reason, commentators have generally neglected ὀρθότητα (but see Barney 2001, 24, who, in any case, does not defend her conclusions). Ὄρθότητα is a recent neologism. The first recorded use of it is in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* when Dionysius expresses his wish to learn from Euripides the “correctness of his opening lines” (ὀρθότητα τῶν ἔπων) during the contest between him and Aeschylus (1181). Aristophanes uses ὀρθότητα in an innovative way to indicate accuracy or correctness. Plato may borrow this use of ὀρθότητα to suggest an affinity between the *Cratylus* and Greek comedy. The reference foreshadows his remarks about tragedy and comedy at 408c–d. Plato’s use of ὀρθότητα presents an interesting counterpoint to much of what Socrates accomplishes in his examination of names. If ὀρθότητα is indeed a neologism—even one for which Plato is not responsible—then it serves to reinforce Socrates’ claim that convention plays some role in how names refer to things (434e–435c). Nevertheless, if Plato intends to play on Aristophanes’ entire expression—not just its innovative use of ὀρθότητα, he would be using ὀρθότητα to get at the nature of the correctness of names (ὀρθότητα τῶν ὀνομάτων) as well.

¹³ Contra Sedley 2003, 51, who thinks, “no one is likely to doubt that Cratylus, for all his reticence about explaining it, has a worked out theory of names, the one which has come to be known as linguistic ‘naturalism.’ It is an easy and regular assumption that Hermogenes is an adherent of the other wing, the ‘conventionalist’ party.” According to Sedley, Hermogenes and Cratylus have carefully thought out their respective views, although Sedley does not explain what, he thinks, counts as a “worked out” theory.

Hermogenes invites Socrates to arbitrate the dispute over the correctness of names. In the very first line of the dialogue, he asks Cratylus if he would have them explain their argument to Socrates (βούλει οὖν καὶ Σωκράτει τῷδε ἀνακοινωσώμεθα τὸν λόγον), and Cratylus responds, “if it seems best to you” (εἴ σοι δοκεῖ).¹⁴ Cratylus’ reply suggests that he is not eager to let Socrates join the conversation. The reason may be that Cratylus does not think that Socrates will prove to be much of an ally. Cratylus’ reluctance to join the conversation at the end of the dialogue—even when it becomes clear that the account of the correctness of names depends on his approval—demonstrates this point (427d1). When Cratylus is here invited to join the conversation, he seems enthusiastic about Socrates’ account of natural correctness since it appears to confirm his own view; but his comments are laced with reservation, indicating that he is reluctant to engage Socrates even when Socrates appears to share his view (428c; cf. chapter seven).

Hermogenes explains that he and Cratylus have been debating the correctness of names:

Cratylus says, Socrates, that there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by nature. A thing’s name isn’t whatever people agree to call it—some bit of their native language that applies to it—but there is a natural correctness of names, which is the same for everyone, Greek or foreigner. (Κρατύλος φησὶν ὅδε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὄνοματος ὀρθότητα εἶναι ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων φύσει πεφυκυῖαν, καὶ οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ ἂν τινες συνθέμενοι καλεῖν καλῶσι, τῆς αὐτῶν φωνῆς μόριον ἐπιφθεγγόμενοι ἀλλὰ ὀρθότητά τινα τῶν ὀνομάτων πεφθκέναι καὶ Ἑλλησι

¹⁴ Burnyeat 1997, 12, suggests that Hermogenes’ first words are an attempt to re-establish communication between himself and Cratylus on two levels: (1) it invites Socrates to mediate their dispute; and (2) it introduces the referential tool: Σωκράτει τῷδε, which serves as a condition later for the successful use of names. In general, Hermogenes’ initial remarks bear a conventional tone, the very position that Hermogenes wishes to defend. Whether Hermogenes and Cratylus should permit Socrates to join the conversation is a matter of agreement. If Cratylus agrees, he implicitly concedes that conventionalism must play some role in the correctness of names. Otherwise, communication will be impossible (cf. 434e3–b5). Cratylus, however, avoids Hermogenes’ trap by indicating that they should allow Socrates to join their conversation only if it seems to be good to Hermogenes.

καὶ βαράροις τὴν αὐτὴν ἄπασιν. 383a3–b1; Passages of the *Cratylus* are taken from Reeve 1998)

Here, Hermogenes tells Socrates about his dispute with Cratylus, but his explanation is confusing because he describes naturalism in highly ambiguous terms.¹⁵ One could render the expression ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα εἶναι ἐκάστω τῶν ὄντων φύσει πεφυκυῖαν to indicate that (a) there is a natural correctness of names, or (b) the correctness of names is natural. The difference between these expressions is significant for locating the dispute. If Hermogenes means (a), then his dispute with Cratylus rests on whether or not there is any correctness of names at all. If Hermogenes, however, intends (b), then they both grant that there is a correctness of names, but disagree about whether the correctness of names is natural or conventional.

Hermogenes tries to describe naturalism in terms of conventionalism in order to make sense of the dispute. Cratylus denies that a name is that which all people use, who agree to use it (οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ ἂν τινες συνθέμενοι καλεῖν καλῶσι). This statement denies that names are conventional (συνθήκη).¹⁶ Hermogenes is far less ambiguous in his description of conventionalism than he is in his account of naturalism. A name is correct because those who use the name agree to use it in a certain way; but it is unclear who is qualified to enter into such agreements. If Hermogenes requires entire

¹⁵ Many commentators have noted this disorder (e.g. Robinson 1969, Kahn 1973, and Ackrill 1997, 36). Reeve 1998 exacerbates the ambiguity by conflating φύσει and πεφυκυῖαν throughout his translation.

¹⁶ According to Barney 2001, 25–26, συνθήκη is the main term for conventionalism in the *Cratylus* (cf. 433e). Συνθήκη refers primarily to the composition of words and sentences, but it also refers to languages people agree to speak in common (cf. *Thucydides* 1.144, 1.78, 5.31, and 8.37). Συνθήκη alone, however, does not describe the sort of individual conventionalism to which Hermogenes is ultimately committed (cf. 385d), which is why he adds ὀμολογία at 384d1. It is not enough that Greeks agree to speak Greek; it is also necessary that individual Greeks agree about how to speak Greek. Hermogenes selects συνθήκη and ὀμολογία because they take into account individual as well as communal agreement. He does not, however, consider that individuals and communities may disagree about the correctness of names. Socrates will draw out the implications of such a conflict at 385a.

communities or groups of individuals to agree that names are correct then names can be correct only when individuals agree. How many individuals are needed to make a name correct? If Hermogenes allows one individual to decide for himself that a name is correct, then any and every name could be correct so long as there is at least one person who decides to use it.

Hermogenes admits that an individual may decide if a name is correct even when it is contrary to the use of his or her community (385b1). In doing so, he sheds some light on his account of Cratylus' naturalism. Since anyone is qualified to determine the correctness of a name, there cannot really be a correctness of names. If there were a correctness of names but any agreement sufficed to justify it, then any name could be correct so long as some individual decides to use it. Only those names that no one uses would be incorrect. On this view, therefore, every name must be correct because no one can use an incorrect name (cf. Barney 1997, 157).

Hermogenes' conventionalism, in this respect, will turn out to be identical to Cratylus' naturalism (Lorenz and Mittelstrass 1967, 6–7; Mackenzie 1986, 127). Cratylus denies that there are any incorrect names because it is impossible to speak falsely (429d). If someone could say something false then one could speak about something that does not exist, which is impossible because something that does not exist cannot have a name. Cratylus would have us believe that a name that seems to refer to a non-existent thing such as a "unicorn," or a "round-square" is meaningless noise (430a). Hermogenes shares this rejection of the possibility of incorrect names. Only he is unaware that his position requires him to do so.

Hermogenes hardly emphasizes the similarity between his conventionalism and Cratylus' naturalism because he ends up concealing this point when he returns to his description of naturalism. Cratylus believes, "what the correctness of names is naturally is the same for all Greeks *and* all Barbarians" (ὀρθότητά τινα τῶν ὀνομάτων πεφθκέναι καὶ Ἑλλησι καὶ βαράροις τὴν αὐτὴν ἅπασιν, 383a6, my translation). This statement tries to clarify the ambiguity in Hermogenes' first description of naturalism, but it fails to do so because it does not make clear whether it is saying that there is a natural correctness of names, or that it is natural for every Greek and Barbarian on the assumption there is a correctness of names.

Hermogenes tries to clarify the dispute again by using an example. Before Socrates' arrival, Hermogenes asked Cratylus if "Cratylus" is his name and Cratylus admitted that it was. Hermogenes then asked if Socrates' name is "Socrates" and, again, Cratylus confirmed that it was. Finally, Hermogenes asked Cratylus about his own name and, to his amazement, Cratylus denied that "Hermogenes" was his name. Cratylus alleged that "Hermogenes" is not his name even if everyone agreed to call him "Hermogenes."

Mackenzie 1986, 126 points out that Cratylus' allegation is paradoxical. If Hermogenes' name were incorrect then Cratylus could not call Hermogenes "Hermogenes." If he did, he would repudiate his own claim. Cratylus, however, never actually calls Hermogenes "Hermogenes" in the dialogue. He appears, therefore, to take seriously the view that Hermogenes' name is not correct. How is Hermogenes' name incorrect? Hermogenes' name could be naturally correct, but Cratylus refuses to explain why he thinks Hermogenes' name is incorrect, and it is not yet clear what a naturally

correct name could be. Hermogenes' name cannot be conventionally correct because Cratylus refuses to use it. Likewise, "Cratylus" and "Socrates" are correct because Cratylus admits that they are. Cratylus' refusal seems designed to provoke Hermogenes into admitting that convention cannot be a basis for the correctness of names. If so, Cratylus' ploy works to the extent that it compels Hermogenes to ask about naturalism. Unfortunately, Cratylus provides no hints beyond the vague claim that there simply is a natural correctness of names.

Hermogenes offers no further clues about Cratylus' naturalism to help us understand the nature of the dispute. When he turns to his own position at 384c9 ff., we learn that he implicitly denies that there is any correctness of names, and, in doing so, vindicates (a). He explains that no one—not even Cratylus—has been able to persuade him that the correctness of names consists in anything but convention (συνθήκη) and agreement (ὁμολογία, see n. 18 above):

- (1) I believe that any name you give a thing is its correct name. If you change its name and give it another, the new one is as correct as the old (ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ ὅτι ἂν τίς τῷ θῆται ὄνομα, τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ὀρθόν: καὶ ἂν αὖθις γε ἕτερον μεταθῆται, ἐκεῖνο δὲ μηκέτι καλῆ, οὐδὲν ἦττον τὸ ὕστερον ὀρθῶς ἔχειν τοῦ προτέρου).
- (2) For example, when we give names to our domestic slaves, the new ones are as correct as the old (ὥσπερ τοῖς οἰκέταις ἡμεῖς μετατιθέμεθα).
- (3) No name belongs to a particular thing by nature, but only because of the rules and usage of those who establish the usage and call it by that name (οὐ γὰρ φύσει ἐκάστῳ πεφυκέναι ὄνομα οὐδὲν οὐδενί, ἀλλὰ νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει τῶν ἐθισάντων τε καὶ καλούντων). (384d1–8)

Here Hermogenes pushes his conventionalism to an extreme. Any name that is coined (θῆται)¹⁷ is correct. This statement indicates that arbitrarily coining a name is enough to

¹⁷ Liddell and Scott indicate that θῆται has more affinity with ποιέω than δίδωμι. Thus, I will translate θῆται "coin" in order to capture the sense of making something for some purpose. Socrates vindicates this translation at 389d6 where he speaks of "setting up" names in sounds and syllables (καὶ τὸ

make it correct (Levinson 1957/8, 29). When someone decides to change (μεταθῆται) something's name, the fact that one can do so is enough to justify the change.

Hermogenes illustrates this last point using the Greek custom of changing the names of domestic slaves. In antiquity, the winners of a war often enslaved the losers along with their wives and children. When the Greeks defeated the Trojans at the end of the Trojan War, the survivors, their wives, and their children were enslaved and taken home with the Greeks as spoils. The Trojans were probably not Greek and did not speak Greek; so, their new masters changed their names.¹⁸ The practice probably consisted either of replacing a slave's previous name with a Greek one, or of translating the meaning of a slave's existing name into Greek.

The illustration exhibits two ways of understanding the claim that changing a name justifies itself. This again suggests that Hermogenes is not very clear about his own position. First, he may simply mean that changing something's name involves replacing an old name for something with a new one. Nearly every commentator accepts this interpretation. There is, however, another possibility. According to Joseph 2000, 61, Hermogenes may mean that changing a name does not involve replacing an old name with a new one. Changing something's name may establish a new one on top of the old one without upsetting its legitimacy.

That the change does not dispose of the old name's legitimacy seems an odd position to hold. If people agree to change a name, then the new name should supersede

ἐκάστῳ φύσει πεφυκὸς ὄνομα τὸν νομοθέτην ἐκεῖνον εἰς τοὺς φθόγγους καὶ τὰς συλλαβὰς δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι). See 390d5, d8, 411b4–5, 401a5, b7, 414c4, 436b5, and 439c2 for further evidence.

¹⁸ Homer depicts the Trojans in the *Iliad* as a Greek culture, which spoke Greek, worshiped Greek gods and goddesses, and bore Greek names (e.g. “Astyanax” and “Alexander”). It is unlikely, however, that the Trojans were Greek or that they spoke Greek. In all likelihood, Homer conferred Greek language and culture to the Trojans much in the same way filmmakers often bequeath British culture on the Romans.

the old one. Yet for Hermogenes this may not be so. A new name may not override an old one because changing (μεταθῆται) a name may require a previous coinage (θῆται) to justify the change. If this were the case, Hermogenes could not maintain that any name is correct insofar as someone has coined it. The old name would somehow lose its coinage, and coining a new name would be equivalent to coining the old name. This interpretation, however, leads to absurdity. If changing a name needed prior justification in an established one then nothing could have a name. To name anything would require a pre-existing name to justify naming it.

Still the absurdity of this interpretation may not keep Hermogenes from accepting it. He may allow old names to remain correct after they are changed. In terms of the previous example, Hermogenes would understand the practice of changing slave-names as translating the meaning of a slave's name into Greek, done to reflect the fact that they are now enslaved (Joseph 2000, 18).¹⁹ In this case, the correctness of the new name would depend upon the correctness of the original. This understanding conflicts, however, with the claim that there can only be correct names. If an older name falls out of use then it is no longer correct. Yet, on the interpretation that an old name is necessary to justify a new name, the old name would remain correct though no one uses it anymore.

One might find evidence for Joseph's interpretation in Hermogenes' positive answer to the question at 385d4–6 that "however many names someone says there are for each thing, it will really have the number at whatever time he says it." This remark seems to vindicate Joseph's interpretation because it appears to indicate that things accumulate names in the way a slave might get a new name on top of an older one, both of which are

¹⁹ Joseph observes that not all speakers are equal, "since slaves cannot change their names, let alone the names of their masters."

correct. The question, however, may also support the opposite interpretation. Things may have multiple names insofar as they may have different names at different times. As Sedley alleges, if “Plato” were a nickname, “Aristocles” would be no less correct. The difference is that one can only use one name at a time.

Hermogenes’ description and illustration of his conventionalism leave room for the interpretation that the correctness of an original name forms the basis for the sort of correctness of names belonging to a new one. Hermogenes is not yet aware of this problem because the acceptance of names occupies his attention. He reveals this in his final statement that names do not belong naturally to any particular thing (384d5). A person can assign a name to something merely because anyone who uses a name happens to agree with everyone else who uses the same name. Again, Hermogenes overlooks the glaring contradiction that, for a person to change a name, that person must rely upon a pre-existing agreement in the form of a pre-established name or, as he indicates, an existing rule and habit (νόμος καὶ ἔθει). Otherwise, it is not a change. In short, conventions fall back upon themselves. Hermogenes provides no account of the origins of convention. In doing so, he leaves room for naturalism because he cannot explain how people establish conventions in the first place.

Hermogenes is clearly confused about his dispute with Cratylus. He is not sure if it rests on whether there is any correctness of names, or, granting that there is such correctness, on whether the correctness of names is natural or conventional. His confusion requires Socrates to clarify the dispute before he can arbitrate it (contra Barney 1997, 142; 2001, 30; Ackrill 1997, 34; Baxter 1992, 8; and Chen 1982, who argues that 385bff. constitutes a refutation of conventionalism). From the ensuing line of

questioning, it will emerge that Hermogenes implicitly denies that there is any correctness of names because he allows anyone to coin a name. This will force them to investigate whether or not there is a correctness of names before they evaluate whether it is natural or conventional (see chapter two).²⁰

In order to clarify Hermogenes' position, Socrates asks,

Perhaps you're on to something, Hermogenes, let's see. Are you saying that whatever anyone decides to call a particular thing is its name?—I am.—Whether it is a private individual or a community that does so?—Yes.—What about this? Suppose I call one of the things that are—for instance, the one we now call 'man'—suppose I give *that* the name 'horse' and give the one we now call 'horse' the name 'man'. Will the same thing have the public name 'man' but the private name 'horse'? Is that what you mean?—Yes. (Ἴσως μέντοι τι λέγεις, ὦ Ἑρμόγενης; σκενωόμεθα δέ. ὁ ἄν φῆς καλῆ τις ἕκαστον, τοῦθ' ἐκάστῳ ὄνομα;—Ἐμοιγε δοκεῖ.—Καὶ ἐὰν ιδιώτης καλῆ καὶ ἐὰν πόλις;—Φημί.—Τί οὖν; ἐὰν ἐγὼ καλῶ ὅτιοῦν τῶν ὄντων, οἷον ὁ νῦν καλοῦμεν ἄνθρωπον, ἐὰν ἐγὼ τοῦτο ἵππον προσαγορεύω, ὁ δὲ νῦν ἵππον, ἄνθρωπον, ἔσται δημοσία μὲν ὄνομα ἄνθρωπος τῷ αὐτῷ, ἰδίᾳ δὲ ἵππος; Καὶ ἰδίᾳ μὲν αὖ ἄνθρωπος, δημοσία δὲ ἵππος; οὕτω λέγεις;—Ἐμοιγε δοκεῖ; 384e3–385b1)

Hermogenes admits that names belong to things simply because of use (καλῆ).²¹ He also grants that use determines the correctness of names for individuals and communities, even in cases where the individual use of a name might conflict with its communal use.

Names are incorrect only when they are not in use. If Socrates were to call human beings

²⁰ On the contrary, Silverman 2001, 34, argues, “the very fact that the topic of the *Cratylus* is the *correctness* of names indicates that his concern with *how* naming (knowledge) is possible, not *whether* it is possible. (As mentioned, the very fact that they are conversing with one another shows that it is possible).” Silverman fails, however, to notice the ambiguous way Hermogenes characterizes Cratylus' position (cf. 383a3–384a6), which makes it necessary for Socrates to establish that there is a correctness of names in order to arbitrate the dispute.

²¹ The manuscripts vary. Burnet 1922 and Duke et al 1995 print φῆς καλεῖν at 385a2, while Meridier 1931 reads ὁ ἐὰν θη καλεῖν, which Reeve 1998, 2, follows. Much depends on the reading adopted. Reeve 1998 and Barney 1997, 2001 follow Meridier because they believe that Socrates accepts Hermogenes' distinction between coining a name and using a name. Barney 1997, 149, argues that Hermogenes' use of συνθήκη matches his use of ἐθέμην at 385d9, which suggests that Hermogenes drew a distinction between coining a name and using a name as early as 384c10–d1. I will argue in what follows that there is reason to doubt the similarity of these words. Socrates, therefore, cannot be adopting any distinction. Moreover, it is unclear that θη καλεῖν draws such a distinction. Καλεῖν complements θη, which suggests that there no distinction between them.

“horses” and horses “human beings,” he would be just as correct to do so as Athenians generally are when they call human beings “human beings” and horses “horses.” Since use justifies the correctness of a name, individual and communal uses of names are equally correct, even though they might be contrary to one another.

Conflict between individual and communal use serves to expose the extremism of Hermogenes’ position. He allows anyone to coin whatever name one pleases. Individuals can decide for themselves when a name is correct (cf. 385e, 435a8). Thus, Hermogenes’ conventionalism amounts to a kind of linguistic anarchy. All names are correct because there cannot be an incorrect name. Moreover, since it is possible to change names, *all* names are correct because someone has at some time decided to use it. The view that anyone can coin a name and the argument that coining a name justifies its use, therefore, undermine the distinction between correct and incorrect names. If anyone is qualified to name things, and coining a name is enough to justify its use, then anyone can make a correct name.

Barney 1997, 150; 2001, 28–29, disagrees. She argues that Hermogenes distinguishes between two kinds of naming: baptism and use (cf. 384dff.).²² Baptism involves assigning a name to something that establishes a norm for subsequent use. Thus, baptism determines the correct use of a name *a priori*.²³ So long as the use of a certain name is in accordance with its relevant baptism, it is correct. Baptism, however, rules only as long as no new baptisms occur to replace it. In Hermogenes’ example, when

²² Barney does not label the second kind of action “use,” though her subsequent remarks make it clear that “use” is precisely what she means.

²³ She admits that the “clearest expression” of this distinction emerges in Hermogenes’ second account of conventionalism at 385d7–e3, which is the only place he draws such a distinction explicitly (cf. Barney 1997, 151).

people are enslaved, their owners baptized them with new names. The use of these names replaces the use of the older ones because the baptism of the new names overrides the baptism of the older names. Each baptism establishes a normal use of names until another baptism occurs to replace it.

Barney supposes that the distinction between baptism and use allows Hermogenes to escape extremism. If baptisms are necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of names then they establish norms for the correct use of a name. The distinction, however, does not save Hermogenes from the charge of extremism. Since he allows anyone to coin names, he allows anyone to establish the correct use of a name. This makes the distinction between coining a name and using a name unintelligible.²⁴ When Hermogenes argues that coining a name justifies its use, he does so based on the assumption that a deliberate announcement of the future use of a name is necessary to justify its correct use. Any use of a name, on his view, might also count as coining.

Nevertheless, Barney 1997, 152, 2001, 31–32, argues that Hermogenes' position is not extreme. She objects to Socrates' line of questioning on the ground that it makes Hermogenes seem to be an extremist when he is quite moderate (cf. Sedley 2003, 51–54). She alleges that Socrates collapses the distinction between baptism and use at 385a1 when he asks Hermogenes whether a name belongs to something whenever a person decides to use it (ὁ ἐὰν θῆ καλεῖν).²⁵ Barney considers the possibility that Socrates may

²⁴ Baxter 1992, 47, and Robinson 1956, 134, have attacked the distinction between baptism and use on similar lines. Baxter argues that there is no need for the distinction because every use provides an opportunity for a new coining. Moreover, Robinson denies that coining a name and using a name are ever distinguished in the *Cratylus*. In defense of this distinction, Barney 1997, 149, argues that baptism does not require an “explicit, observable, discrete performance of dubbing.” Even so, the difference between baptism and use for Hermogenes remains unintelligible so long as he allows anyone to coin names.

²⁵ Barney 2001, 30, argues that Socrates gradually elides Hermogenes' distinction between baptism and use (385a4 and 385d2–3). She does not understand why Hermogenes accepts these elisions.

only be clarifying Hermogenes' position (which is my view), but she considers Socrates' elision of the distinction intentional in light of the fact that Socrates asks Hermogenes at 385d2 whether naming consists in whatever names a person uses (φῆ). According to Barney, Socrates uses φῆ here in the same way that he used θῆ καλεῖν at 385a1. By eliding Hermogenes' distinction, Socrates denies him an objective ground on which to establish a correctness of names. If there is no distinction between baptism and use, then there can be no conventional correctness of names. The use of a name suffices to justify the correctness of a name.

Barney's claim, however, that Hermogenes distinguishes between baptism and use in his first account of conventionalism is anachronistic. Hermogenes drew no such distinction explicitly at 383a ff., or 384d ff. (contra Barney 2001, 31). He only does so explicitly at 385dff. (cf. Ackrill 1997, 36) when the fact that there is a distinction between correct and incorrect names forces him to revise his previous position:

I call a thing by the name I gave it; you call it by the different name you gave it. In the same way, I see that different communities have different names for the same things—Greeks differing from other Greeks and Greeks from foreigners (ἐμοὶ μὲν ἕτερον εἶναι καλεῖν ἐκάστῳ ὄνομα, ὃ ἐγὼ ἐθέμην, σοὶ δὲ ἕτερον, ὃ αὖ σὺ. Οὕτω δὲ καὶ ταῖς πόλεσιν ὁρῶ ἰδίᾳ ἐκάσταις ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς καίμενα ὀνόματα, καὶ Ἑλλησι παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἑλληνας, καὶ Ἑλλησι παρὰ βαρβάρους; 385d8–e3)

Here, Hermogenes distinguishes between coining a name and using a name (ἐθέμην καὶ καλεῖν). He employs this distinction to justify the difference between the individual and communal use of names, making the preceding discussion of true and false names irrelevant (Joseph 2000, 22). Coining a name is sufficient to justify its use. Any name that any individual coins justifies one's use of it. Similarly, any name that a community coins is sufficient to justify its use. According to Hermogenes, this explains different dialects.

Different Greek-speaking communities use different names for the same things because they coined a certain name for something. This also explains why there are different languages. Different cultures use different names to refer to the same things because they made a certain name for something. In short, someone must coin a name before anyone can use it, and anyone is qualified to coin a name.

This description of Hermogenes' view is much richer than the previous one.²⁶ He integrates the three claims of his position with Socrates' questions about individual and communal use of names, and escapes from denying the distinction between correct and incorrect names. Hermogenes had previously argued that coining a name for something is sufficient to determine its correctness (384d1–2). Now he clarifies that coining a name for something is sufficient to determine its correct use. He had also maintained that nature does not determine the correctness of a name. Instead, the custom and habit of those people who name things justifies their use. Now Hermogenes argues that his own customs and habits, those of Socrates, the Greeks, and foreign peoples help to determine which names each of them coin. Such customs and habits also determine which things they name. Thus, custom and habit are enough to determine the correct use of names.

In the end, Hermogenes' conventionalism may seem moderate to the extent that it tries to provide an objective ground for the use of names in coining them. It may also seem moderate because it tries to avoid rejecting the distinction between correct and incorrect names (contra Mackenzie 1986, 126, and Lorenz and Mittelstrass 1967, 6). Hermogenes, however, cannot save his conventionalism from extremism while he insists that anyone can coin a name. So long as he accepts this view, he will not be able to claim

²⁶ Barney 1997, 148–149, agrees, but she argues that this account of conventionalism has been in play all along, which is not obvious.

any objective ground for, first, the difference between coining a name and using a name; second, the possibility of incorrect names; and third, the distinction between correct and incorrect names. According to Hermogenes, there cannot be an incorrect name.

2: Truth and Falsehood (385b2–d1)

To establish that there is a correctness of names Socrates appears to argue that names have truth-value. Critics have almost universally condemned the argument as fallacious. Most accuse it of committing a fallacy of division (Sedley 2003; Reeve 1998; Baxter 1992; Robinson 1956; Ryle 1960); but others charge it with equivocation (Fine 1977; Barney 1997, 2001). These allegations have proven so compelling that they have driven some editors to move the argument from its universally received position in the manuscripts (see Schofield 1972, 246–253; cf. Reeve 1998, 6; and Duke et al. 1995), while others propose deleting the argument from the text altogether (Sedley 2003, 13).²⁷ A close reading of the argument, however, reveals that it commits neither fallacy, and that its purpose in the dialogue justifies its original position. I wish to vindicate the manuscript tradition on this passage by showing that Socrates and Hermogenes establish in it that there is a correctness of names (cf. Annas 1982, 106).

After Hermogenes presents his conventionalism, Socrates initiates the following exchange:

Tell me this. Is there something you call speaking the truth and something you call speaking a falsehood?—Indeed, there is.—Then some statements are true, while others are false?—Certainly.—And those that say of the things that are that they are, are true, while those that say of the things that are that they are not, are false?—Yes.—So it is possible to say both things

²⁷ Schofield gives two reasons for relocating 385b2–d1: first, Socrates uses ἦν at 387c12–d1 to remind Hermogenes of a conclusion reached only six lines beforehand. Only if some intervening discussion has gone missing, he argues, is this necessary. The second reason is that Socrates uses “part” (μέριον) ambiguously in 385b2–d1. Naming could be “part” of speaking either in the sense that naming is an element of speaking, or in the sense that naming is one way of speaking. Relocating 385b2–d1 to 387c5–6 vindicates the first of the two options because the move fits with the conclusion of 385b2–d1 that names are elements of statements. Nothing, however, suggests that μέριον should mean anything other than a part of a whole. Nor is there any reason to suppose that some intervening discussion is missing. Socrates could simply use ἦν to refer to the previous conclusion. Baxter 1992, 33 agrees. The supposed obscurity of 387c6–7 is “unlikely to trouble anyone after reading 385b2–d1 even in its received position.”

that are and things that are not in a statement?—Certainly.—Is a whole true statement true but not its parts?—No, the parts are also true.—Are the large parts true but not the small ones, or are all of them true?—In my view, they are all true.—Is there a part of a statement that’s smaller than a name?—No, it is the smallest.—In a true statement, is this smallest part something that’s said?—Yes.—And, on your view, this part is then true.—Yes.—And a part of a false statement is false?—That’s right.—So isn’t it possible to say a true and a false name, since true and false statements are possible?—Certainly. (Φέρε δὴ μοι τόδε εἰπέ· καλεῖς τι ἀληθῆ λέγειν καὶ ψευδῆ;—Ἐγωγε.—Οὐκοῦν εἴη ἂν λόγος ἀληθῆς, ὁ δὲ ψευδῆς;—Πάνυ γε.—Ἄρ’ οὖν οὗτος ὅς ἂν τὰ ὄντα λέγη ὡς ἔστιν, ἀληθῆς· ὅς δ’ ἂν ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ψευδῆς; —Ναί.—Ἔστιν ἄρα τοῦτο, λόγῳ λέγειν τὰ ὄντα τε καὶ μὴ;—Πάνυ γε.—Ὁ λόγος δ’ ἔστιν ὁ ἀληθῆς πότερον μὲν ὅλος ἀληθῆς, τὰ μέρη δ’ αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀληθῆ;—Οὐκ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μέρη.—Πότερον δὲ τὰ μὲν μεγάλα μέρη ἀληθῆ, τὰ δὲ μικρὰ οὐ· ἢ πάντα;—Πάντα, οἶμαι ἔγωγε.—Ἔστιν οὖν ὅτι λέγεις λόγου μικρότερον μέρος ἄλλο ἢ ὄνομα;—Οὐκ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μικρότατον.—Καὶ τοῦτο [ὄνομα] ἄρα τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λόγου λέγεται;—Ναί.—Ἀληθές γε, ὡς φῆς.—Ναί.—Τὸ δὲ τοῦ ψεύδους μέρος οὐ ψεύδος;—Φημί.—Ἔστιν ἄρα ὄνομα ψεύδος καὶ ἀληθές λέγειν, εἴπερ καὶ λόγον;—Πῶς γὰρ οὐ; 385b2–d1)

Socrates appears here to argue that names have truth-value. Socrates and Hermogenes begin by establishing that it is possible to say true and false things, which suggests that individual statements can be true and false.²⁸ The next question makes this clear when Socrates asks whether a statement is true that asserts things that are about something, and false that asserts things that are not.²⁹ Hermogenes admits that this is the case; in doing so, he concedes that individual statements can be true or false. This question further implies that it is possible for statements to pick out things that are or things that are not. After Hermogenes grants this premise, Socrates divides statements into parts. He asks

²⁸ Pfeiffer 1972, 90, and Richardson 1976, 135, imply that to construe λόγος as “statement” in this context is anachronistic because it imposes a logical distinction between statements and arguments not found in Plato. Even if we construe λόγος as “statement,” however, I will show that Plato still avoids a fallacy of division and equivocation.

²⁹ This sentence resembles the claim Socrates attributes to Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*: “πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν” (152a2–4). The similarity between these claims prefigures discussion of Protagoras’ claim later in the *Cratylus* that humans are the measure of all things. This similarity also undermines Sedley’s view that 385b2–d1 does not belong in the *Cratylus* (2003, 6–16).

whether a statement as a whole can be true when its parts are false.³⁰ Hermogenes insists that the parts of a statement must also be true in order for the statement to be true. This goes for names and verbs that are respectively the smallest and largest parts of a statement (see 431b6). If it is possible, therefore, to make true and false statements, it is also possible to utter true and false names. The names in a true statement must be true while only one name in a false statement must be false. Recent commentators have generally condemned the argument for committing a fallacy of division.³¹ It hardly seems that names can be true and false, however, because speech can be true and false.³²

Some commentators try to avoid the fallacy of division by arguing that Plato considers names to be predicates (Lorenz & Mittelstrass 1967; Luce 1969; Bestor 1980, and Demos 1964). There is good evidence for this. Many of the names for which Socrates gives etymologies later in the dialogue are shown to be contracted statements or phrases (ρήματα, cf. 386e, 431b; also see Demos 1964, 599). Socrates even argues that predicates are names (386e; 399b; 431b). This is illustrated, for example, at 385b7–10 when Socrates uses τὰ ὄντα (things that are) to highlight the existence of definite things. While I grant that Socrates does treat names as predicates later in the dialogue, I do not think ὄνομα must be restricted to predicates in the argument at 385b2–d1. None of the

³⁰ Reeve 1998, 7, obscures Socrates' use of μὲν...δέ to contrast the truth of the *whole* statement with the truth of its parts.

³¹ The condemnation originates in Robinson 1956, 123. He rejects Socrates' conclusion because "names have no truth-value, and the reason given for saying that they do is a fallacy of division." Ryle 1960, 445, also misreads 385b2–d1, although he is inclined to believe that Socrates' is "pretending" that names can be true or false rather than mistaken. Gallop 1963, 375, argues "the truth of a *logos* depends on the attainment of truth in the use of its constituent names and verbs" based on *Cratylus* 431b.

³² Fine 1977, 296, argues that 385b2–d1 does not insist that names and statements are true in the exact same way. Names can be true or false when they are parts of statements, but not by themselves. This makes good sense of the portrait analogy later in the dialogue where names appear to have correctness but statements truth (430d–431a). Fine acknowledges that her reading forces Socrates to equivocate. She fails, however, to observe that Hermogenes is responsible for the equivocal use of "truth," as I will argue shortly.

interlocutors has suggested at this point in the dialogue what counts as a name or what sort of thing a name is. Because of this, we are not entitled to limit the meaning of ὄνομα in any definite way. We cannot assume, therefore, that names are predicates at this point.

The greater problem is that to suppose a fallacy of division is to ignore the context of the argument. Careful attention to the passage reveals that Plato has Hermogenes—not Socrates—committing the fallacy of division.³³ To make matters worse, Socrates gives Hermogenes three opportunities to avoid the fallacy and, on each occasion, Hermogenes insists upon the view that names can be true or false. Socrates first asks whether a statement can be true when its parts are not true. Hermogenes denies that this can be the case and adds positively that the parts of a true statement must also be true. Socrates then gives Hermogenes two further options: can a statement be true when its large parts are true and its small parts are not, or must every part of a statement be true. Hermogenes replies that every part of a statement must be true if the entire statement is true. Finally, Socrates assumes that names are the smallest parts of statements but gives Hermogenes the chance to say that the smallest part is something else. Hermogenes not only denies that it is anything other than a name but states positively that names are the smallest parts of statements.

One might argue that Socrates prompts Hermogenes to commit a fallacy of division by suggesting that the parts of a true statement could also be true. Socrates' questions, however, clearly emphasize the independent truth-value of statements.³⁴ The

³³ Barney 1997, 152, observes that Hermogenes is guilty of conceding the fallacy. She mistakenly thinks, however, that Socrates prompts him to make the mistake, which, she argues, to some extent vindicates him of his guilt.

³⁴ I am following Goldschmidt 1940, 52, who observes that Socrates emphasizes the dependency of names on statements for their truth-value. Luce 1969, 224–225, objects that the conclusion of 385b2–d1 indicates that Socrates thinks it possible to say a name independent of a statement. Luce's argument is,

first question, which hints at the possibility of names possessing truth-value at 385c1–2, implies that it is possible for a statement to be true independently of the truth-value of its parts. If a statement as a whole can be true regardless of whether its parts are true, then obviously the truth-value of a whole statement would not depend on the truth-value of its parts. This question, therefore, invites Hermogenes to affirm or to deny that a statement can be true regardless of whether or not its parts are true. In the end, Hermogenes denies that an individual statement can be true unless all of its parts are also true. In fact, he insists every part of a true statement must also be true.³⁵

One might also suppose that Socrates endorses Hermogenes' mistake, but he does not (Weingartner 1970, 15–16). Socrates repeatedly emphasizes the role that names play in statements and, until the end of the argument, refuses to state outright that names can be true or false. At the point in the discussion where the implicit claim that names can be true or false becomes obvious, Socrates continues to stress the role that names play as parts of statements. When Hermogenes insists that every part of a true statement must be true and that names are the smallest parts of statements, it becomes clear that he is committed to the view that names have truth-value. Socrates does not draw this out immediately. Instead, he leaves the implicit claim unstated and speaks only of the role that names play as parts of statements.

however, doubtful. The discussion at 385b2–d1 proceeds by dissection. Hermogenes agrees to divide speech into statements and statements into names. This procedure recommends interpreting the possibility of saying true and false names as included in the possibility of making statements and the possibility of speaking in general.

³⁵ Berman 1993/4, 44, claims that the converse, i.e. that every part of a false statement is false, must also be true because “it parallels what *is* explicit in the text and it allows for there to be a valid argument.” That every part of false statement must be false, however, does not follow from the concession that every part of a true statement must be true. To claim that it does is to assert more than Socrates or Hermogenes does and forces an error upon them that they do not obviously commit.

Socrates continues to emphasize the role that names play in statements until the end of the discussion, when he asks Hermogenes to admit that names have truth-value. Even his formulation of the final question as a condition, however, emphasizes the role that names play in statements. The question sets the truth-value of statements as a necessary condition for the truth-value of names. Names can be true or false only if (εἴπερ) statements can be true or false. This formulation implies that names possess truth-value only insofar as they are parts of statements.³⁶

Socrates may not be responsible for Hermogenes' mistake and he may avoid endorsing it by emphasizing the role that names play in statements. Yet Socrates seems to equivocate on the truth-value of names and the truth-value of statements.³⁷ If names can be true or false, i.e. correct and incorrect, because of the role that they play in statements, and statements possess truth-value, then the use of "true" and "false" is equivocal.

Nevertheless, Socrates does not equivocate. His emphasis on the role names play in statements and his formulation of the final question as a condition implies that truth-value belongs to statements. Names are true only insofar as they are parts of true statements and one applies them correctly to what they name. In addition, nowhere in the dialogue do Socrates and Hermogenes agree that names have truth-value by themselves. Socrates consistently emphasizes the role of names as part of statements when speaking of the truth-value of names. This suggests that names can be true or false only if they are

³⁶ cf. Ackrill 1997, 37: The statement 'Callias is a man' is "*true* if and of if 'Callias is *true* of something and 'a man' is also *true* of that thing. The truth of such statements is not subject to analysis or understanding without the notion of *true of* which applies to names. And conversely, this notion of a name's being *true* (or *false*) *of* requires an understanding of the whole speech-act (e.g. the statement) of which naming forms a part."

³⁷ Fine 1977, 296, suggests that the argument could have avoided this fallacy if it had replaced 'true or false' with 'correct or incorrect'. Her suggestion, however, would beg the question so long as the purpose of 385b2–d1, as I argue, is to establish that there is such a thing as a correctness of names.

parts of true or false statements. Thus, statements bestow correctness on their parts. Only in this limited way are names true.

Still, Socrates does not attempt to inform Hermogenes of his mistake. He may avoid doing this because he wishes to refute Hermogenes' position (see Fine 1977, 295). More importantly, however, Hermogenes' mistake will prove useful in establishing that there is such a thing as a correctness of names.³⁸ If Socrates can somehow show that there is such a thing as a name and that names have truth-value in certain circumstances, then he has established that there is such a thing as a correctness of names.³⁹ This has the incidental effect of refuting Hermogenes' extreme conventionalism, as many commentators have noted.⁴⁰ In Hermogenes' account of his own conventionalist view of the correctness of names, he argues that the mere coining of a name for something is sufficient to justify its correctness (384d1–2; cf. 385a1–2, 385d1–2).⁴¹ Human beings, for

³⁸ Sedley 2003, 56, agrees: “the current issue between Hermogenes and Socrates is precisely whether there is any such correctness.” Baxter 1992, 33–34, rightly suggests that 385b2–d1 prepares Hermogenes for refutation rather than actually to refute him.

³⁹ Barney 1997, 152; 2001, 32, complains that no connection is made between correctness and truth. At 383b, however, Hermogenes reports that he had asked Cratylus earlier if his name is *truly* Cratylus (εἰ αὐτῷ Κρατύλος τῆ ἀληθείᾳ ὄνομα) in order to learn how names could be naturally correct. Hermogenes' use of truth in this context suggests that he considers it synonymous with correctness.

⁴⁰ See Gosling 1970, n. 2; Lorenz and Mittelstrass 1967, 7. Barney 1997, 148, doubts that the argument succeeds because she thinks Socrates mainly directs it against Hermogenes' position. The argument, however, shows that there is a correctness of names. Only to this extent does it attack Hermogenes' extreme conventionalism.

⁴¹ As I have indicated, commentators disagree about the nature of Hermogenes' position. Some argue that Hermogenes' conventionalism is extreme because he indicates several times that using a name for something is enough to justify its correctness (Baxter 1992, 18–19; cf. 383a, 384c8–e) while others think it is more moderate because Hermogenes establishes a standard for determining the correctness of names by distinguishing between coining a name and using a name (Ketchum 1979, Barney 1997, 2001, and Sedley 2003, 53; cf. 385d7–e2). This saves Hermogenes from the charge of extremism by requiring someone to coin a name before anyone can use it. These arguments, however, depend on the location of 385b2–d1. If we follow the received position, as I do, the distinction falls after 385b2–d1, in which Hermogenes refines his position over the course of the dialogue. It starts out extreme because it looks at first as if any name can be correct so long as people agree to use it, but becomes more moderate when he makes coining a necessary condition for use.

example, could easily be called ‘horses’ if someone simply decided to do so. This is true, according to Hermogenes, even were a community to call human beings “human beings” and a lone member of the community to call them “horses” (384e–d). That the community and the individual are at odds in their use of such names makes no difference. Their use is equally correct insofar as they have each coined their own names.

If coining a name for something justifies the correctness of the name, however, then it is impossible for any name in use to be incorrect. The distinction between correct and incorrect names becomes rather meaningless. Any name can be correct, on this account, so long as someone coins it for something. Hermogenes’ conventionalism effectively denies the distinction between correct and incorrect (Mackenzie 1986, 127). Thus, it becomes necessary for Socrates to establish *that* there is a correctness of names—to show that there is a distinction between correct and incorrect names—before attempting to arbitrate the dispute between Hermogenes and Cratylus. If there is no subject matter for debate then there can be no dispute about it.

Socrates must also establish that there is correctness of names before trying to understand what it is. Socrates insists that at present he does not know about any correctness of names (384b). Whether serious or ironic, Socrates’ ignorance extends beyond the nature of the correctness of names to its existence. It becomes, consequently, necessary for him to investigate whether or not there is a correctness of names before he can begin to investigate what it is.

Plato, therefore, does not commit a fallacy of division or equivocation in the argument at 385b2–d1. Instead, the purpose of the argument is to establish that there is a correctness of names. Such correctness comes from the role that names play in

statements. The argument proceeds by dissection. It establishes first that there is such a thing as statements and they have truth-value. Then, the argument establishes that there are names and that names are the smallest parts of statements. This shows that names possess truth-value to the extent that they are parts of statements. It does not prove that names have truth-value by themselves. To establish that names derive truth-value from the truth-value of statements is the sole intention. It is necessary for Socrates to show that names have truth-value insofar as they are the smallest parts of statements because it establishes that there is a correctness of names. It is necessary to establish that there is a correctness of names because Hermogenes' conventionalism denies this very possibility. Moreover, in order for Socrates to arbitrate the dispute between Hermogenes and Cratylus over whether the correctness of names is natural or conventional, he must first establish that there is a subject matter for investigation.

3: A Craft of Naming (385e3–390e3)

Hermogenes now sees that his dispute with Cratylus rests on whether the correctness of names is natural or conventional. To show that he understands the dispute better, he distinguishes between coining a name and using a name to avoid denying that there is any correctness of names (385d6–e2). This distinction, however, is nonsense as long as Hermogenes insists that anyone can name things. In this part of the *Cratylus*, Socrates will refute the view just anyone can name something. Instead, he will show that it takes a special artisan with expertise in naming to coin a name correctly. The need to save conventionalism will force Hermogenes to give up the claim that anyone can name things. The result of this sacrifice will be the preservation of some kind of conventionalism, admissible at the end of the dialogue (cf. 434eff. Joseph 2000, 24).

Socrates decides to test Hermogenes by examining his position on beings:

Let's see, Hermogenes, whether the same also seems to you to hold of the things that are. Is the being or essence of each of them something private for each person, as Protagoras tells us? He says that man is "the measure of all things," and that things are to me as they appear to me, and are to you as they appear to you. Do you agree, or do you believe that things have some fixed being or essence of their own?—There have been times, Socrates, when I have been so puzzled that I've been driven to take refuge in Protagoras' doctrine, even though I really don't believe it. (Φέρε δὴ ἴδωμεν, ὦ Ἑρμόγενης, πότερον καὶ τὰ ὄντα οὕτως ἔχειν σοὶ φαίνεται, ἰδίᾳ αὐτῶν ἢ οὐσία εἶναι ἐκάστῳ, ὥσπερ Πρωταγόρας ἔλεγεν λέγων "πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον" εἶναι ἄνθρωπον—ὡς ἄρα οἷα μὲν ἂν ἐμοὶ φαίνηται τὰ πράγματα εἶναι, τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί· οἷα δ' ἂν σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ σοί—ἢ ἔχειν δοκεῖ σοὶ αὐτὰ αὐτῶν τινα βεβαιότητα τῆς οὐσίας;—Ἦδη ποτὲ ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀπορῶν καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἐξηνέχθην εἰς ἅπερ Πρωταγόρας λέγει· οὐδὲ πᾶν τι μέντοι μοι δοκεῖ οὕτως ἔχειν; 385e3–386a6)

Socrates asks if Hermogenes agrees with Protagoras, who teaches that human beings are “the measure of all things.”⁴² According to Socrates, this claim advocates relativism.

How something appears to human beings determines they judge its nature.⁴³ The manner in which each thing appears to Socrates differs from the manner in which it appears to Hermogenes. Neither perspective is more correct than the other is. The alternative to Protagoras’ doctrine is the view that everything has its own being regardless of how it appears. Appearance does not determine being. Hermogenes is skeptical of Protagorean relativism, but perplexity has often driven him to accept it. This implies that Hermogenes’ hasty acceptance of relativism has not put an end to his perplexity.

In an effort to put aside Hermogenes’ perplexity and secure his rejection of Protagorean relativism, Socrates interrogates Hermogenes:

Have you actually been driven to believe that there is no such thing as a bad man?—No, by god, I haven’t. Indeed, I’ve often found myself believing that there are *very* bad ones, and plenty of them.—What? Have you never believed that there are any who are very good?—Not many.—But you did believe that there were *some* good ones?—I did.—And what do you hold about such people? Or is it this: the very good are very wise, while the very bad are very foolish?—Yes, that’s what I believe.—But if Protagoras is telling the truth—if it *is* the *Truth* that things are for each person as he believes them to be, how is it possible for one person to be wise and another foolish?—It isn’t possible.—You strongly believe, it seems to me, that if wisdom exists, and foolishness likewise, then Protagoras cannot be telling the truth. After all, if what each person believes to be true is true for him, no one can truly be wiser than anyone else.—That’s right. (386b1–d2)

⁴² Cf. *Theaetetus* 152a. Sedley 2003, 54, speculates that the historical Protagoras probably had groups of people such as a jury in mind rather than individuals when he made this claim (ἄνθρωπος is a collective noun). Socrates is probably extending Protagoras’ doctrine to apply to individuals.

⁴³ This is the first mention of ἡ οὐσία in the dialogue and it is hard to translate the term in this context. Ross 1951, 18–21, argues that οὐσία means “being” in the broadest possible sense. This is surely wrong. Chen 1982, 96, rightly points out that at 423e1–2 Socrates contrasts οὐσία with color, shape, and sound, suggesting that it refers specifically to the nature of something. 388b10–11 will make this explicit when ἡ οὐσία becomes an important criterion for deciding whether a name is correct or incorrect. Thus, Reeve translates ἡ οὐσία as “being and essence.” This translation, however, is cumbersome. I will translate ἡ οὐσία as “nature” to emphasize the importance of Chen’s point.

Socrates infers from Hermogenes' interest in Protagorean relativism that he has occasionally doubted the existence of bad men. Hermogenes strongly denies this. He believes that there are many very bad men. He also believes that there are a few good men. Good men are wise and bad men are foolish; but how can this be if Protagoras is right that humans judge being based solely on its appearance? Hermogenes denies that it is possible. Therefore, the person who upholds Protagorean relativism cannot permit any distinction between good and bad, wise and foolish.

We can already see how Hermogenes' interest in Protagorean relativism undermines his conventionalism. The claim that coining a name determines its use may work for names, but it cannot work for beings. When a person coins a name, it determines the way a person can use the name. Likewise, according to Protagoras, appearance determines the way something *is* for a person. Because Hermogenes denies that appearance determines being (386a6), he cannot maintain that coining a name determines its use and that appearance determines being, if he is willing to consider names and beings analogous. Hermogenes could simply deny that his conventionalism is comparable to Protagorean relativism. If he were to do so, he would avoid contradiction. He cannot deny, however, this comparison because his position allows some kind of relationship between names and things. So long as there is such a relationship—even if the relationship is determined only on the side names or only the side of nature—Hermogenes must explain the connection on the other side. Such an explanation would require him to apply his claim to the side of things.

Sedley 2003, 54–56, rejects this argument on the grounds it is possible for Hermogenes to hold a relative view of names without accepting a relative view of nature.

Sedley fails, however, to see that this is the very problem that Socrates addresses. It is possible for Hermogenes to hold a relative view of the correctness of names without accepting a relative view of being so long as there is no connection between names and beings. Hermogenes has implicitly defended the relative view of being (cf. 385a1). He cannot maintain, however, such a position if he grants that naming is a kind of action with its own unique nature that it gets from the nature of the beings it concerns.

Hermogenes will accept that actions have their own natures, which derive from the natures of the things they concern (387a1). Actions must have independent natures because it is possible to act inappropriately. It is possible to try to cut meat by smashing it with a hammer. If actions did not have their own nature, or simply borrowed the nature of things they concern, it would be impossible to act in this way. The nature of meat would prevent one from trying to cut it with a hammer. Thus, Hermogenes must concede that there is a connection between names and beings, such that he cannot take a relative position on names without also taking a relative position on beings. He could argue, as Sedley suggests, that actions have natures completely independent of the beings they concern. However, such an argument would deny that actions could ever be appropriate. On this view, it would impossible to cut meat.

Hermogenes admits that appearance does not determine being, which implies that human beings can be separated into good and bad, wise and foolish groups (386a6). This admission, however, does not eliminate the possibility that someone could be good and bad, wise and foolish at the same time but in different respects (cf. *Republic* 436bff.). In this case, appearance still fails to determine being because such a person may appear

neither good nor bad, neither wise nor foolish, but both simultaneously. In order to address this possibility, Socrates turns to the teachings of the sophist Euthydemus.

Euthydemus denies the principle of non-contradiction, which states that nothing can be and not be in the same way at the same time. Instead, he teaches that everything possesses every possible attribute simultaneously (386d3–4).⁴⁴ A person can be good and bad, and wise and foolish at the same time. If Hermogenes accepts Euthydemus' view, he must reject the principle of non-contradiction, making it impossible for a person to be good or bad, wise or foolish. Otherwise, he must accept the principle, which precludes the possibility that someone may be both good and bad, and wise and foolish. In the end, Hermogenes rejects Protagorean and Euthydemean relativism, and accepts the alternative. Each thing has its own being. Socrates asks,

But if neither is right, if it isn't the case that everything always has every attribute simultaneously or that each thing has a being or essence privately for each person, then it is clear that things have some fixed being or essence of their own. They are not in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature. (386d9–e4; cf. 385e1–3)

Hermogenes' rejection of relativism implies that he accepts the view that everything has a being of its own, which is neither dependent upon its appearance nor capable of possessing contrary attributes at the same time. The being of each thing belongs to each thing as its nature, which reveals for the first time that his position must tolerate some kind of naturalism.⁴⁵ If things have being *by nature*, nature must play some part in

⁴⁴ Euthydemus explicitly defends this view in the dialogue named for him (*Euthydemus* 290c), but it is not clear that Euthydemus actually defended the position Plato ascribes to him. No fragment of Euthydemus' writing indicates that he held this position.

⁴⁵ This is the first time in the dialogue that Socrates uses φύσις. Here he connects it with ἡ οὐσία (being), and implies that they are synonymous. Cf. 386e.

determining the correctness of names. Otherwise, Protagoras will have his way. How things appear to each person will determine what they are.

What does this discussion of relativism accomplish? It tries to show that Hermogenes' conventionalism is incoherent while he maintains that anyone is qualified to name things and that coining a name justifies its use. The view that anyone can name something, and in so doing, justify its subsequent use, cannot hold for things. If appearance determined reality then contraries cannot exist as such. Hermogenes, however, grants that contraries do exist as such. He must deny, therefore, that appearance determines reality. The result of this denial is that everything must have its own nature—including names—and tries to show that Hermogenes' position cannot cohere.⁴⁶ If coining a name sufficed to determine its use then the nature of the name would reside simply in its production. This would destroy the relationship between names and things. If names and things possess their own natures that are independent of one another, nothing would connect them—not even a conventional connection.

The investigation of relativism also establishes an alternative to conventionalism (Mackenzie 1986, 130). If things have their own natures, the nature of things might serve as a useful criterion for determining the correctness of names. To this end, Socrates and Hermogenes turn to a discussion of action (*πράξις*). Robinson 1956, 124 complains that this discussion is vague and unconvincing, but, according to Baxter 1992, 39 and Kretzmann 1971, 128, it is intentionally so because Socrates wishes to show Hermogenes

⁴⁶ Is it obvious that names are things? Berman 1993/4, 48–49, argues that whether names are things is crucial to Socrates' refutation. Only as things can names have a nature, a standard for determining their correctness. According to Berman, however, Socrates never argues that names are things, although an argument could be easily assembled (from e.g. *Phaedo* 74a, *Republic* 476e, *Parmenides* 132b–135c, *Theaetetus* 188c–189b, *Sophist* 236d–239c), which Berman proceeds to construct on Socrates' behalf. Yet the argument resembles the discussion of true and false names, which, I have argued, tries to justify that there is a correctness of names.

that his distinction between coining and using a name is unintelligible so long as he thinks that anyone can name things. Hermogenes admits that actions must be some kind of things (ἐν τι εἶδος τῶν ὄντων). Actions have their own nature; and this nature must fit with the nature of the object of the action, not with someone's opinion (δόξαν) of it.⁴⁷

Socrates uses cutting and burning to illustrate the relationship between the nature of actions and the nature of things:⁴⁸

Suppose, for example, that we undertake to cut something, should we make the cut in whatever way *we* choose and with whatever tool *we* choose? Or, if in each case we choose to cut in accord with the natural tool for cutting, will we succeed and cut correctly? Whereas, if we try to cut contrary to nature, we'll be in error and accomplish nothing?—That's my view, at least.—So, again if we undertake to burn something, our burning mustn't accord with every belief but with the correct one—that is to say, with the one that tells us how that thing burns and is burned naturally, and what the natural tool for burning it?—That's right.—And the same holds for all other actions?—Certainly. (387ae1–387b9)

Socrates argues that a person cannot act based on just any opinion (πᾶσαν δόξαν); he must follow the correct (ὀρθήν) one, which takes into account the nature of the action, the object, and the tool used to perform the action. When someone wishes to cut meat, he must consider the kind of meat he wants to cut in order to determine how to cut it. Then, he must decide on the best tool for the job. He may use a cleaver or a knife. Both will cut

⁴⁷ Sedley 2003, 57, argues that Socrates does not really think that actions have their own natures. Things have natures and actions that derive whatever nature they have from things. Yet Socrates asserts that actions have natures (386e9). If they did not have their own natures, but simply took them from things, it would defeat Socrates' point. It is possible to act contrary to the nature, e.g. it is possible to try to burn things that are not combustible. Actions must have their own nature if it is possible to perform an action on an inappropriate or unreceptive object.

⁴⁸ Socrates has several reasons for selecting cutting and burning as examples to make this point. One is because they are analogous to naming. Names distinguish things (388b10). When I shout "Lucy" into a crowd of people, it distinguishes people named "Lucy" from the rest of the crowd. Cutting and burning separates things. Cutting a branch off a tree separates it from its trunk, and burning gold separates impurities from it. Another reason is that cutting and burning are analogous to dialectic. The ideal user of names is a dialectician (390a5–d8), who is qualified to use names because he knows how to ask and answer questions. A dialectician might ask what a name is and, in doing so, he would separate names from other things. Another reason is that burning anticipates Heraclitean flux introduced in the examination of names (401bff. and 411bff.).

meat, but one might be better suited for the task than the other. He could try to cut meat with a club, but he will probably fail because a club is ill suited to cut meat. Likewise, if someone wished to burn something, he would need to consider the kind of wood he wants to burn in order to determine how to burn it. Burning meat differs from burning wood. Meat will incinerate before the fire is hot enough to consume wood. A small flame will scorch wood, but it will do no more than warm meat. In the case of a bonfire, the heat would consume the meat before it could incinerate the wood.

The same argument applies to speaking (λεγεῖν). Someone will speak correctly if one speaks in the natural way to speak about something and for something to be spoken of (λέγειν τε καὶ λέγεσθαι) in speech (λέγη) rather judging for oneself how to speak. No one can speak in whatever way one wants. Speaking must take into account the nature of its object and the nature of its tool.⁴⁹

Naming must also bear in mind the nature of its object and the nature of its tool:

Now using names is a part of saying; since it is by using names that people say things.—Certainly.—And if speaking or saying is a sort of action, one that is about things, isn't using names also a sort of action?—Yes.—And didn't we see that actions aren't in relation to us but have a special nature of their own?—We did.—So if we are to be consistent with what we said previously, we cannot name things as we choose; rather, we must name

⁴⁹ That naming is a part of speaking suggests that people make statements by naming (Οὐκοῦν τοῦ λέγειν μῶριον τὸ ὀνομάζειν; διονομάζοντες γάρ που λέγουσι τοὺς λόγους). This is the first occurrence of ὀνομάζειν in the dialogue (Ὀνομάζειν appears five times in the *Cratylus*. All of these instances occur in the present discussion of action). It should come as no surprise that Socrates is now referring to naming after he has just argued that speech is an action. If names are in any way involved in speech then naming must likewise belong to speaking. Nonetheless, it is not clear what sort of action naming is (Robinson 1956, 134–38). Commentators disagree about this. Naming could mean coining a name (e.g. Sedley 2003, 59; Ackrill 1997, 39; and Ketchum 1979, 133–47), or it could mean using one (e.g. Kretzmann 1971, 128). Neither side is obviously right. Whether naming implies coining a name or using one is not important so long as anyone can name things. Every time we use a name in such circumstances, we reaffirm its coinage. When someone speaks, he or she confirms the use of the name through his or her use of it and simultaneously harks back to that coining. The use of a name reminds us of its coining. On the other hand, if only certain people are capable of naming things then it becomes clear that only certain people can coin names, while anyone can use them. So long as ὀνομάζειν is part of λεγεῖν, anyone who can speak can use a name (cf. 387c).

them in the natural way for them to be named and with the natural tool for naming them. In that way we'll accomplish something and succeed in naming, otherwise we won't.—So it seems. (387c62–7)

Naming is a part of speaking because speaking assumes previous acts of naming in order to make statements. If naming is to be undertaken, the opinion of the person engaged in it must not serve as the basis for naming. Rather, the nature of its object must underlie naming. Without taking the nature of the action and the object into account, naming will fail to be correct.

Now that Hermogenes admits that the nature of naming depends on the nature of its object, he must explore how the nature of an object shapes its name. Socrates will help him by extending his cutting and burning analogy to crafts (τέχναι). An artisan who uses special instruments to make products practices a craft. The analogy between naming and other crafts will show that naming is not simply an action that anyone can perform, but a craft that requires expertise, contrary to Hermogenes' assertion that anyone can name something. Robinson 1956, 124–25, challenges this craft-analogy by arguing that Socrates' entire account of naming (388–90) rests on the “easily deniable assumption that a name is a tool like a shuttle.” Nonetheless, Hermogenes grants that a name is a tool (ὄργανον) based on the analogy (388a8), which allows Socrates to ask about the purpose of a name:

Suppose I ask, “What sort of tool is a shuttle? Isn't the answer, “One we weave with”?”—Yes.—What do we do when we weave? Don't we divide the warp and woof that are mixed together?—Yes.—And you'd be able to speak in the same way about drills and other tools?—Certainly.—So you can speak this way about names? If a name is a tool, what do we do when we name?—I can't say.—Don't we instruct each other, that is to say, divide things according to their natures?—Certainly.—So just as a shuttle is a tool for dividing warp and woof, a name is a tool for giving instruction, that is to say, for dividing being.—Yes. (Εἰ οὖν ἐγὼ ἐροίμην “Τί ἦν ὄργανον ἢ κερκίς;” οὐχ ᾧ κερκίζομεν;—Ναί.—Κερκίζοντες δὲ τί

δρῶμεν; οὐ τὴν κρόκην καὶ τοὺς στήμονας συγκεχυμένους διακρίνομεν;—
Ναί.—Οὐκοῦν καὶ περὶ τρυπάνου ἕξεις οὕτως εἰπεῖν καὶ περὶ τῶν
ἄλλων;—Πάνυ γε.—Ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικὸν τί ἐστὶν ὄργανον καὶ
διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας ὥσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος.—Ναί; 388a10–c2)

Socrates suggests that names are teaching tools that divide things.⁵⁰ Weaving uses shuttles as tools in the process of separating warp and woof, and drilling employs drill to divide things.⁵¹ If names were tools then it would appear that their users employ them to divide things in the same way weavers, drillers, and others employ shuttles, drills, and other tools to divide things.⁵²

Hermogenes acknowledges that weavers use shuttles to weave cloth (388c).

Anyone who wishes, therefore, to use a shuttle correctly must use it in the way a weaver would. Likewise, anyone who wishes to use a name correctly must use it in the way a teacher would. Since weaving and naming are both actions that have their own nature, experts in these fields will use their tools correctly. Tools may be capable of performing various tasks, each with varying degrees of success, but Socrates argues that each tool is

⁵⁰ Robinson 1956, 131–2, objects that statements (λόγοι) not names are tools that distinguish things. To support his argument, he compares names to carburetors. A carburetor is part of a car, which has the purpose of transporting people. Similarly, a statement has the purpose of teaching and names do not. This analogy, however, fails because one can use a name independently of a statement, which Robinson admits, while no one can use a carburetor independently of a car.

⁵¹ Many commentators mistake the purpose of a shuttle. They say that the purpose of a shuttle, according to Socrates, is to separate warp from woof (Ackrill 1997, 40). Socrates is careful, however, never to make such a mistake. The purpose of a shuttle in weaving is to join the warp and the woof after it has been segregated (388a5).

⁵² Commentators disagree about the purpose of names. Most of them think names have one purpose: to distinguish things (cf. Sachs 1878, 65), although a few dissent from the prevailing opinion (Chen 1982, 96; Silverman 1992, 33, n. 20; 2001, 28; and Joseph 2000, 28). The more common view rests on the argument that καὶ is explanatory (cf. Fine 1977, 296–297; Reeve 1998, 10, hence his translation: “Don’t we instruct one another, *that is to say*, divide things according to their natures?” at 388b10. He points to 393d and 422d in support of the exegetical reading). Commentators, however, disagree in their emphasis. Some emphasize division (Kretzmann 1971, 128; Schofield 1982, 61–82; Chen 1982, 91; Berman 1993/4, 41). Most emphasize pedagogy (Sedley 2003, 60–61; Barney 2001, 45; Reeve 1998, xxi–xxiii; Ackrill 1997, 41–42; and Baxter 1992, 40–41), but however much they may emphasize teaching, discrimination ultimately triumphs as the purpose of names. The concession that pedagogy is reducible to discrimination forces them to admit that names mainly distinguish nature.

suited for a particular task and performs this task better than any other tool (389d1). As a result, one uses a tool correctly, when he employs it for its specific purpose. A weaver uses shuttles correctly because the purpose of a shuttle is to make cloth. A shuttle is not necessarily used well simply because it is used in weaving. A person can use a shuttle poorly if a person employs it to cut meat.

Socrates now argues that artisans must have expertise (τέχνη), which implies that not just anyone can name things, as Hermogenes claimed. Only carpenters can make the shuttles weavers use, and only people who have expertise in carpentry can be carpenters (388c11–13). Likewise, only blacksmiths can make the drills that drillers use and only people who have expertise in blacksmithing can be blacksmiths. Hermogenes can neither say who makes the names teachers use, nor can he say who is qualified to make names. His difficulty stems from the fact that it is not clear what one should call such an artisan. Hermogenes does not know what to call the makers of names, which is unfortunate because his failure to name the makers of names falsifies his claim that anyone can name something. Hermogenes cannot name things (cf. 408a–c).

Socrates suggests that law (ὁ νόμος) supplies us with names:

Don't you think that rules provide us with [names]?—I suppose they do.—So, when an instructor uses a name, he's using the product of a rule-setter.—I believe he is.—Do you think that every man is a rule-setter or only the one who possesses the craft?—Only the one who possesses the craft.—It follows that it isn't every man who can give names, Hermogenes, but only a name-maker, and he, it seems, is a rule-setter—the kind of craftsman most rarely found among human beings.—I suppose so. (Ἄρ' οὐχὶ ὁ νόμος δοκεῖ σοι ὁ παραδιδούς αὐτά;—Ἔοικεν.—Νομοθέτου ἄρα ἔργῳ χρήσεται ὁ διδασκαλικὸς ὅταν ὀνόματι χρήται;—Δοκεῖ μοι.—Νομοθέτης δέ σοι δοκεῖ πᾶς εἶναι ἀνὴρ ἢ ὁ τὴν τέχνην ἔχων—Ὁ τὴν τέχνην.—Οὐκ ἄρα παντὸς ἀνδρός, ὃ Ἐρμόγενης, ὄνομα θέσθαι, ἀλλὰ τινος ὀνοματούργου: οὗτος δ' ἐστίν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὁ νομοθέτης, ὃς δὴ τῶν δημιουργῶν σπανιώτατος ἐν ἀνθρώποις γίγνεται.—Ἔοικεν; 388d12–389a4)

How does a law supply us with a name?⁵³ Sedley 2003, 70–71, points out that ὁ νόμος is an etymological pun on ὄνομα, which suggests that laws create names in the same way ὁ νόμος contracts into ὄνομα. Such an etymology of ὄνομα as ὁ νόμος (though probably spurious) playfully demonstrates how one might make a name. Names are laws about how to combine and separate names (cf. 397a ff.).

Socrates also proposes that a lawmaker (ὁ νομοθέτης) establishes law, which implies that lawmakers coin names.⁵⁴ Demand 1975, 107, points out that ὁ νομοθέτης reinforces the previous pun: Ὁ νομοθέτης is an etymological pun on ὄνομα θέσθαι. A maker of law is also a maker of names. The pun (though again spurious) suggests that politics and naming are similar in that they both require experts (Cf. Barney 2001, 44–49). We have already seen this in Hermogenes’ distinction between coining and using a name. A legislator promulgates laws to distinguish just and unjust actions. Similarly, a

⁵³ Νόμος is a rich term with many connotations, including “law” and “custom.” Hermogenes has used νόμος this way to characterize the correctness of names in seeming contrast to Cratylus who uses φύσις (384d5). As Robinson 1955, 110, rightly points out, however, there is no direct conflict between νόμος and φύσις in the *Cratylus* (contra Demand 1975, 106). Reeve translates νόμος “rule” because of the context of a discussion of names. “Rule” has the advantage of reminding the reader that the discussion concerns names because a rule suggests a method or guide for establishing the use of a name. Yet a rule is often pre-established to govern a specific set of actions. I follow Jowett and Fowler, who translate νόμος as “law” because “law” captures, for us, a sense of the conventional and natural that Socrates advocates at this point in the dialogue (cf. such expression as “natural law” or “the laws of nature”).

⁵⁴ No commentator considers the lawmaker a real person (Robinson 1969, 103–6; Kretzmann 1971, 128–129; Demand 1975, 108; Chen 1982, 149; and Silverman 1992, 39; 2001, 31). Sedley 2003, 68, points out that a νομοθέτης was an established and common Greek assumption about the origins of names in the fifth century because of the sophistic practice of etymology (cf. *Charmides* 175b; see Robinson 1955, 103–6, who contends that the *Cratylus* is not concerned with the origin of names, an error that he attributes to the idea of the νομοθέτης). One result of such etymological practice would have been a connection between names (ὀνόματα) and law (ὁ νόμος), which Sedley denies of the *Cratylus*. To argue that the earliest makers of names were lawmakers begs the question. Lawmakers need language to promulgate law, which in this case is the very thing that they wish to establish. On this view, lawmakers are only trendsetters of name-use; people who establish the use of a name, which other people adopt simply on their authority. The lawmaker is unique not insofar as he can make names, but insofar as he can make names that “will actually catch on” (Sedley 2003, 72–73).

legislator coins names to determine their subsequent use. Socrates continues to reinforce this pun throughout the dialogue (cf. 427a–c).

Chen 1982, 96, considers this entire argument flawed because it trades on an equivocation of Hermogenes' view of νόμοι. For Hermogenes, νόμοι are customs or conventions that determine how words are used. As such, νόμοι are implicit practices governing speech. Socrates elevates νόμοι from convention to rules, set down for regulating practice. In doing so, he brings νόμοι closer to nature, and invites Hermogenes to accept naturalism. Chen, however, does not inquire into the reasons behind Hermogenes' acceptance of this equivocation. Hermogenes has prepared himself to accept this stronger form of νόμοι through his admission that an expert is needed justify the present use of words. Thus coining a word justifies its subsequent use.

Not just anyone can be a lawmaker. Only those who have expertise in lawmaking can be lawmakers (388e5; cf. Plutarch's lives of Lycurgus and Solon). Nor can just anyone can make names. Only expert name-makers are equipped to make names. Hermogenes' denial that all people (πάντες) are qualified to be carpenters, blacksmiths, and lawmakers emphasizes this point (389a). Only people with expertise in carpentry, blacksmithing, and law are qualified to practice these crafts.

Socrates and Hermogenes conclude that not everyone can name things. Only a name-maker (ὀνομάτουργον) can make names because he has the expertise to do so. Lawmakers are rare artisans (δημιουργῶν, 389a2). Unlike a teacher, who merely uses names, a lawmaker can make names. Anyone who uses names seems to qualify as a teacher because, just by using the name, they distinguish things. Not just anyone, however, can name things because not everyone has expertise in naming. There can only

be a few artisans of naming because the qualification for practicing this craft is to use its tools correctly. If names are teaching tools then what are the tools of the lawmaker? How do lawmakers make names?

Socrates suggests that lawmakers make names by putting the form of a name into sounds and syllables:

Come now, consider where a rule-setter looks in giving names. Use the previous discussion as your guide. Where does a carpenter look in making a shuttle? Isn't it to that sort of thing whose nature is to weave?—Certainly.—Suppose the shuttle breaks while he's making it. Will he make another looking to the broken one? Or will he look to the very form to which he liked in making the one he broke?—In my view, he will look to the form.—Then it would be absolutely right to call that what a shuttle itself is.—I suppose so.—Hence whenever he has to make a shuttle for weaving garments of any sort, whether light or heavy, linen or woolen, mustn't it possess the form of a shuttle? And mustn't he put into it the nature that naturally best suits it to perform its own work?—Yes. (389a4–c1)

Given the options of looking to a broken shuttle or the form of a shuttle, Hermogenes would choose the form.⁵⁵ No carpenter should look to a broken shuttle for guidance on how to make a shuttle because the broken shuttle does not serve its purpose. Carpenters should look to the form of a shuttle because the form is the very nature of weaving (contra Calvert 1970, 28, who argues that the lawmaker does not consider the form when making a tool, only its nature or function).

Hermogenes affirms that the carpenter must put the form into his shuttle so that the shuttle can function, but this affirmation entails more than Socrates or Hermogenes let

⁵⁵ There is much controversy about Socrates' mention of form (τὸ εἶδος, see below for further discussion). One dispute concerns the relationship between the *Cratylus* and other dialogues. Most commentators consider the present discussion and the final one at 439bff. evidence that the *Cratylus* depicts an early stage in the development of Plato's theory of forms, before the *Republic* (Grube 1935, 13–15; Ross 1951, 18–23; Luce 1964, 143–145). Mackenzie 1986, 14, however, has cited Socrates' remarks about false speech and elements as evidence that the *Cratylus* is part of Plato's "critical" period after the *Republic*. Because I am interested only in the arguments of the *Cratylus*, I will not weigh in on this debate.

on. Socrates asked if the carpenter ought to put the form of shuttle into the shuttle, but he restates this question and asks if the carpenter must embody the appropriate nature (φύσις) in his shuttle. Thus Socrates implies that form and nature are the same (contra Reeve 1998, xxii–iii); and since a form was agreed to be what something is (τὶ ἐστὶ, 389b4–5), it appears that what something is and its nature are the same as well (cf. 389a7). Moreover, Socrates and Hermogenes have agreed that the nature of each thing is its function (cf. 388e1).⁵⁶ Thus, “nature,” “form,” and “what something is,” refer to function (for further evidence see Chen 1982, 96n14). Socrates will switch between “form,” “nature,” “being,” and “what something is” at crucial points in the rest of the *Cratylus*. In each case, because the meanings of “form,” “nature,” “being,” and “what something is” are ambiguous, the shift will mark only a change in emphasis.

Now Socrates generalizes:

And the same holds of all other tools. When a craftsman discovers the type of tool that is naturally suited for a given type of work, he must embody it in the material out of which he is making the tool. He mustn't make the tool in whatever way he happens to choose, but in the natural way. So it seems that a blacksmith must know how to embody in iron the type of drill naturally suited for each type of work.—Certainly.—And a carpenter must embody in wood the type of shuttle naturally suited for each type of weaving.—That's right.—Because it seems that there's a type of shuttle that's naturally suited to each type of weaving. And the same holds of tools in general.—Yes. (Καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων δὴ ὀργάνων ὁ αὐτὸς τρόπος: τὸ φύσει ἐκάστῳ πεφυκὸς ὄργανον ἐξευρόντα δεῖ ἀποδοῦναι εἰς ἐκεῖνο ἐξ οὗ ἂν ποιῆ, οὐχ οἷον ἂν αὐτὸς βουλευθῆ, ἀλλ' οἷον ἐπεφύκει. τὸ φύσει γὰρ ἐκάστῳ, ὡς ἔοικε, τρύπανον πεφυκὸς εἰς τὸν σίδηρον δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι.—Πάνυ γε.—Καὶ τὴν φύσει κερκίδα ἐκάστῳ πεφυκυῖαν εἰς ξύλον.—Ἔστι ταῦτα.—Φύσει γὰρ ἦν ἐκάστῳ εἶδει ὑφάσματος, ὡς ἔοιξεν, ἐκάστη κερκίς, καὶ τᾶλλα οὕτως.—Ναί. 389c2–d3)

⁵⁶ Robinson 1956, 128, denies that ἔργον” ever means “function” in the *Cratylus*, it means only “product.” If this were the case, the craft-analogy would break down. It would be clear that a shuttle contributes to the production of cloth but not that names contribute to the production of anything.

Socrates' account of making shuttles holds for all tools. Artisans cannot make tools in whatever way they choose, they must put the appropriate nature into matter in order to make a tool. A blacksmith knows how to put the appropriate nature into iron in order to make a drill, and a carpenter knows how to put the appropriate nature into wood in order to make a shuttle.

Likewise, it appears that a lawmaker must embody the function of a name into sounds and syllables when he makes a name.⁵⁷ Moreover, because the function of a name is to distinguish things, the lawmaker must somehow embody the function of distinguishing things into sounds and syllables in order to make a name. How is a lawmaker to do this? Socrates describes the process:

Mustn't our rule-setter also know how to embody in sounds and syllables the name naturally suited to each thing? And if he is to be an authentic giver of names, mustn't he, in making and giving each name, look to what a name itself is? And if different rule-setters do not make each name out of the same syllables, we mustn't forget that different blacksmiths who are making the same tool for the same type of work, don't all make it out of the same iron. But as long as they give it the same form—even if the form is embodied in different iron—the tool will be correct, whether it is made in Greece or abroad. Isn't that so?—Certainly. (389d4–390a3)

In the same way, a carpenter or a blacksmith knows how to put the nature of a shuttle or the nature of a drill into wood or iron, the lawmaker knows how to put the nature of a name into sounds and syllables.⁵⁸ Moreover, if the lawmaker is genuine, he must be able

⁵⁷ Joseph 2000, 89, argues rightly that form and art are the ultimate principles of names.

⁵⁸ Ryle, 1960, 441–442, argues rightly that there is no passage in the *Cratylus* where γράμματα or στοιχεῖα refers to a written character: “Plato regularly thinks of letters not as things written and read, but as things pronounced and heard. ‘Syllable’ is, for Plato, as for Aristotle and Sextus Empiricus, a regular phonetic term, and when letters are mentioned in association with syllables, they are in these contexts phonetic elements and not characters, no matter whether they are called *grammata* or *στοιχεῖα*.” Gallop 1963, 369, agrees that γράμματα and στοιχεῖα refer to phonemes and not to characters, and that the names of letters also refer to phonemes rather than characters. Nevertheless, he disputes Ryle’s claim that there is no passage in the *Cratylus* where the name of a letter refers to written characters. He cites *Cratylus*’ remark at 432a that the γραμματική τέχνη involves writing a name correctly as evidence against Ryle’s claim. This argument, however, belongs to *Cratylus* and Socrates roundly refutes it in following passage (cf. 432a–b).

to make *and* coin (ποιεῖν τε καὶ τιθέσθαι) names by looking to what a name is, i.e. its nature, form, and function (see Chen 1982, 95n13). Finally, assuming that different artisans take the function of a tool into account when making one, they may not use the same kinds of material to make the tool. Different carpenters use different pieces and kinds of wood to make shuttles, and blacksmiths use different pieces and kinds of metal to make drills. Similarly, lawmakers use different syllables and sounds to make names. So long as each of these artisans takes into account the function of the tool they are making, the artisan will make the tool correctly.

Pretty much every commentator considers the remarks about “what a name itself is” (αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν) and the “name naturally suited to each thing” (τὸ ἐκᾶστω φύσει πεφυκὸς) as a sign that Socrates is drawing some distinction between “generic” and “specific” forms (Sedley 2003, 66; Reeve 1998, xxi; Barney 2001, 138–139; Baxter 1992, 44; Chen 1982, 89; Ketchum 1979, 137, 146, n8; Calvert 1970, 29). The craft-analogy explains the difference between generic and specific forms. Because the function of each shuttle depends on the type of cloth it is designed to weave, shuttles must possess two different forms: the form of shuttle and the form of the product, e.g. wool or linen. To make a shuttle for weaving linen a carpenter must put not only the form of shuttle into wood, he must put the form of linen into it as well. On this account, when a lawmaker wishes to make a name, he must put the form of the thing he wishes to name into sounds and syllables and the form of a name in general. The lawmaker who wished to name Hermogenes, for example, puts not only Hermogenes’ nature or form into sounds and syllables; he also puts the form of name into the same sounds and syllables.

Yet Socrates does not distinguish αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν and τὸ ἐκᾶστω φύσει πεφυκὸς because it is unnecessary (Silverman 1992, 2001). If, in general, weaving requires a shuttle to make cloth then a carpenter is required to put only the form of shuttle into wood in order to make a shuttle. In reality, however, weaving always produces a specific kind of cloth such as wool or linen. It, consequently, requires a specific kind of shuttle. The carpenter, therefore, puts the form of linen into wood to make a shuttle suited for weaving linen if he wishes to make such a shuttle. To say that a carpenter puts the form of linen into wood to make a shuttle suited to produce linen may seem to strain the craft-analogy. It is not easy to see how putting the form of linen into wood should yield a shuttle. This is the reason why most commentators introduce the distinction between αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν and τὸ ἐκᾶστω φύσει πεφυκὸς. It is, however, much easier to see how names work without the distinction. In general, when a lawmaker makes names, he puts the form of a name into sounds and syllables. This applies to all names. When a lawmaker coins the name “Hermogenes,” he puts the form or nature of Hermogenes into sounds and syllables. The name “Hermogenes” is like a portrait (cf. 430e11). A portrait is a kind of imitation of a person. A painter takes the form of a person and puts it into paint on canvas. The form on canvas is the same form in Hermogenes. The difference is the material to which the form belongs. Names are the same. Like portraits, names possess the form of their object in sounds and syllables. Hermogenes’ form usually occupies his body, which serves as matter for his form, but a painter or sculptor can put his form into different kinds of matter, producing sculptures and portraits of Hermogenes.

How do we know when lawmakers have made names correctly? If it is possible for some lawmakers to make better names than others, some names will be more correct

than others. Socrates argues that dialecticians ensure that names are correct by asking lawmakers about the function of the names they make. So long as lawmakers take into account the function of a name when making and coining one, their work will prove successful and the names correct no matter if the lawmakers are Greek or foreigner:

Don't you evaluate Greek and foreign rule-setters in the same way? Provided they give each thing the form of name suited to it, no matter what syllables it is embodied in, they are equally good rule-setters, whether they are in Greece or abroad.—Certainly.—Now, who is likely to know whether the appropriate form of shuttle is present in any given bit of wood? A carpenter who makes it or a weaver who uses it?—In all likelihood, Socrates, it is the one who uses it.—So who uses what a lyre-maker produces? Isn't he the one who would know best how to supervise the manufacture of lyres and would also know whether what has been made has been well made or not?—Certainly.—Who is that?—A lyre player.—And who will supervise a ship-builder.—A ship's captain.—And who can best supervise the work of a ruler-setter, whether here or abroad, and judge its products? Isn't it whoever will use them?—Yes.—And isn't that the person who knows how to ask questions?—Certainly.—And he also knows how to answer them?—Yes.—And what would you call someone who knows how to ask and answer questions? Wouldn't you call him a dialectician?—Yes, I would.—So it's the work of a carpenter to make a rudder. And if the rudder is to be a fine one, a ship-captain must supervise him.—Evidently.—But it's the work of the rule-setter, it seems, to make a name. And if names are to be given well, a dialectician must supervise him.—That's right. (390a4–d7)

Here, Socrates convinces Hermogenes to invert the distinction between coining a name and using one.⁵⁹ Instead of coining a name to justify its subsequent use, the user of names supervises their production to ensure that the makers of names have coined them correctly. In the same way, a weaver supervises the production of a shuttle because he can best judge whether the shuttle will serve its purpose, a lyre-player supervises the production of the lyre because he can best judge whether the lyre will serve its purpose,

⁵⁹ Mackenzie 1986, 127, protests that Socrates never accepts the distinction between coining and using names. She believes that Socrates cannot maintain the view that there is any connection between names and things while upholding a distinction between coining and using a name. It is not clear to me, however, why the distinction is incompatible with the sort of naturalism Socrates has presented.

and the captain of a ship supervises the construction of a ship because he can best judge whether it will serve its purpose, a dialectician supervises naming because he knows how to ask and answer questions (ἐρωτᾶν καὶ ἀποκρίνεσθαι ἐπιστάμενον).⁶⁰

Knowing how to ask and answer questions qualifies someone to supervise lawmakers because the nature of each thing is its purpose. Socrates and Hermogenes have already agreed that the purpose of names is to distinguish things. They agree that the nature of each thing is its function. The nature and function of each thing, however, is also its form and what it is (τὶ ἐστὶ; see Ackrill 1997, 45). Thus if a teacher were to ask about what a name is generally, the answer to this question would necessarily be the function of a name, which is the nature that distinguishes it. Hence, when a teacher asks a lawmaker about a specific name that he has coined, say “shuttle,” the answer to the teacher’s question will be the shuttle’s function, namely, to weave. So then, while a lawmaker is busy making and coining names for things, his supervisor is busy asking what each name means, expecting the legislator’s answer to explain the function of the thing named (Ackrill 1997, 46).

Many commentators assert that this lawmaker is different from the lawmaker spoken of at 388d (Allan 1954, 283; Kretzmann 1971, 133; Ketchum 1979, 145, Chen 1982, 89, Silverman 1992, 39; Baxter 1992, 4; Sedley 2003, 62–63; cf. 388e4–6). They contend that the lawmaker and dialectician are experts in the same field and their

⁶⁰ We might have expected the teacher to be the lawmaker’s supervisor instead of the dialectician because Socrates indicated at 388d7 that teachers are the users of names. Baxter 1992, 46, and Sedley 2003, 62–63, argue that dialecticians and teachers are the same insofar as they use names. The only difference is that the dialectician asks and answers questions, which, according to Sedley, is an “ancillary consideration.” Yet asking and answering questions makes all the difference. While teachers can use names, this does not qualify them to supervise the work of lawmakers. Anyone can be a teacher so long as anyone can use names. Only a dialectician, who knows how to ask lawmakers about the purpose of the names they coin, is qualified to supervise them. Dialecticians use names because of their knowing how to ask and answer questions (Thomas 2008, 345; cf. *Republic* 533b3–4).

expertise allows the lawmaker to name things and the dialectician to evaluate the correctness of these names. This claim, however, makes nonsense of the distinction between the lawmaker and the dialectician. If they are the same then there is no point in distinguishing the two. Baxter 1992, 4, tries to save the distinction by making the dialectician the genuine name-maker and the lawmaker an ideal one. He offers, however, no textual evidence to support this claim. Moreover, there is reason to think that the lawmaker and the dialectician differ considerably. The dialectician knows how to ask and answer the question “what is it” (τὶ ἐστὶ, 390c6–7). Because of this, he is in a unique position to evaluate whether a name such as “beauty” distinguishes the nature of beauty, or, in other words, what beauty itself is. The lawmaker need not possess this knowledge, and this fact implies that he is ill equipped to name things based on nature. Nevertheless, lacking this knowledge does not prevent him from coining names that distinguish things. This is evident in the fact that the original name-makers in the examination of names may have been wrong to base their names on their opinion that nature is in flux. The fact that lawmakers based their names on a view of reality that is perhaps inaccurate shows that it is possible to coin names without knowledge of reality. For this reason, it is necessary for a dialectician to supervise the coining of names to ensure that they disclose and distinguish nature.

The same commentators have thought that the fact that the dialectician knows how to answer the question is a sign that he knows the answer but this cannot be right because it does not follow that if a person knows *how* to answer a question, a person must know the answer. Socrates himself demonstrates the difference when he asks what kind of tool a shuttle (τί ἦν ὄργανον ἢ κερκίς) is, and answers that a shuttle is a tool by which

we weave (ὅ κερκίζομεν, 388a10–c2). These questions serve not only to anticipate the present discussion of the dialectician, but also to exhibit Socrates' dialectical qualifications. He will need them when he undertakes an examination of names (397a1 ff.). That Socrates knows how to ask and answer questions qualifies him to evaluate the correctness of the products of the name-maker.

Socrates concludes that not just anyone can name things:

It follows that the giving of names can't be as inconsequential a matter as you think, Hermogenes, nor can it be the work of an inconsequential or chance person. So Cratylus is right in saying that things have natural names, and that not everyone is a craftsman of names, but only someone who looks to the natural name of each thing and is able to put its form into letters and syllables. (390d8–e3)

Socrates implies that Cratylus has not only claimed that names are naturally coined for things, but also that their natural assignment is a consequence of the lawmaker, who coins names for things by looking to the form of each thing, i.e. its function, and makes and coins a name by endowing the purpose in letters and syllables. Cratylus, however, has not yet made such a claim nor agreed to it. It may be that Cratylus agrees that this is how names are naturally correct, but we have yet to learn of his agreement.

Furthermore, Hermogenes was mistaken to assume that anyone could name things. He failed to see that naming requires expertise. In fairness to Hermogenes, Socrates' censure is not a condemnation of conventionalism. The discussion has revealed that Hermogenes was mistaken only in his insistence that anyone can name things without regard for the nature of things, and in his insistence that anyone is qualified to coin names. Only a lawmaker can coin a name; and he can only do so because he has expertise in the craft of naming. While coining names plays a role in their subsequent use, it does not follow from this role that coining and using names are identical. It is clear

enough in the many examples Socrates and Hermogenes have examined. There is significant difference between a carpenter and a weaver, a lawmaker and a dialectician. This difference underlies nature's role in the correctness of names. In addition, this difference underlies convention's role in the correctness of names. Cratylus will attack convention later. For now, it is clear that nature must play some role in the correctness of names because the nature of things is the foundation of names.

Part Two: What it is

4: Poetry and Inspiration (391a–397a)

Now that Socrates and Hermogenes have established that nature plays some role in the correctness of names, they turn to an investigation of this role in order to learn how it affects naming (391b3). In other words, they will explore how names distinguish natures. Their investigation will show that names somehow reveal nature, and that naming depends on one's knowledge of nature (cf. Joseph 2000, 43). If one knows the nature of something, one will be able to name it correctly. If one relies, however, on an opinion, one may not name it correctly.

Despite his concessions, Hermogenes remains unconvinced. He tells Socrates that he could be persuaded of the natural correctness of names if Socrates were to show him what it is (τὸ ἐστὶ, 390e3–391a3). Hermogenes, however, has forgotten that Socrates does not know about the correctness of names. Earlier Socrates had said,

Hermogenes, son of Hipponicus, there is an ancient proverb that “fine things are very difficult” to know about, and it certainly isn't easy to get to know names. To be sure, if I'd attended Prodicus' fifty-drachma lecture course, which he himself advertises as an exhaustive treatment of the topic there'd be nothing to prevent you from learning the precise truth about the correctness of names straightway. But as I've heard only the one-drachma course, I don't know the truth about it. Nonetheless, I am ready to investigate it along with you and Cratylus. (384a8–c2)

Socrates argues that he is ignorant of the correctness of names because it is difficult to know about names. Citing the authority of an ancient proverb, Socrates implies that names are fine things and fine things are difficult to know about. For this reason, Socrates knows nothing of names and nothing of their correctness. He adds that a proper investigation of names requires the help of someone like Prodicus, who is the authority

on their correctness (cf. 391b ff.).⁶¹ Socrates is willing to teach Hermogenes what he has learned about the correctness of names from Prodicus, but, being a poor man, he could not afford the sophist's fifty-drachma course. Instead, he settled for the one-drachma course. Socrates is of course speaking facetiously. Prodicus probably did not offer a one-drachma course. If he did, the only lesson Socrates would have learned in such a course would have been that he knows nothing about the correctness of names (Kretzmann 1971, 127 and Sallis 1975, 192).⁶² His ignorance even extends to whether or not there is such a thing as the correctness of names. This is part of the reason why Socrates sets out to establish that there is such a thing before he can investigate what it is (cf. *Posterior Analytics* II, 1); he knows only that he does not know anything about it (385b2–d1; cf. *Apology* 19c). Socrates' eagerness to investigate the correctness of names demonstrates that he is neither averse to Hermogenes' conventionalism nor committed to Cratylus' naturalism (contra Robinson 1955, 1956; Kretzmann 1971; and Annas 1982).

We might be inclined to think that Socrates is ironic, that he is merely playing the fool. After all, he has successfully shown that Hermogenes fails to take seriously the important role nature plays in determining the correctness of names, and the expertise necessary to name things (see chapter three). It would appear that Socrates refutes Hermogenes' view in order to replace it with his own. Yet Socrates has presented no such

⁶¹ We know very little about Prodicus and most of what we do know comes from Plato. Plato mentions him in the *Protagoras* (337a1–c4), *Meno* (75e), *Laches* (197d), *Charmides* (135a–b), and *Euthydemus* (277e3–4). Plato tells us that Prodicus was a sophist from Ceos, who was a contemporary of Socrates (Nails 2002, 255). He is reputed to have been one of the first sophists to take an interest in etymology and develop courses in it. Aristotle reports that he liked to dazzle people with some of the fifty-drachma lecture (*Rhetoric* 1415b15). Like most sophists, Prodicus sold his knowledge for a fee (Nails 2002, 255). Plato abhorred this practice and Socrates disavowed it in the *Apology* (#). In any case, Prodicus seems to have come to Athens on several occasions, offering courses in etymology similar to the one to which Socrates refers.

⁶² Another lesson of the one-drachma course might be that Socrates knows how to use names in order to investigate their correctness.

view. He refutes Hermogenes because his position is self-contradictory. He cannot maintain that there is a correctness of names at the same time as he holds that anyone is qualified to name something. If anyone can name things then there cannot be any correctness or incorrectness of names. Thus, one should take seriously Socrates' ignorance of the correctness of names.

Moreover, Socrates' ignorance serves a purpose. It emphasizes how he can beat etymologists at their own game (Barney 2001, 67). Socrates will demonstrate that he somehow has great skill at etymology (397a ff.; see chapter five). By denying expertise in etymology while at the same time showing great skill in it, Socrates' claim to be ignorant of the correctness of names puts some distance between him and his etymologies. It frees him from responsibility for their results, and allows him to outdo etymologists who claim to be experts because he does not really know what he is doing.

Socrates explains that they must search for the natural correctness of names if Hermogenes desires to know what it is (ἐπιθύμεις εἰδέναι). Barney 2001, 47 thinks that the natural correctness of names will turn out to be a function of the sounds and letters of which the name consists. Hermogenes wants to know what the correctness of names is, but he is unsure how to proceed. Socrates suggests that the most correct way (ὀρθότατη) to investigate the correctness of names is with the help of the people who know about it (μετὰ τῶν ἐπισταμενῶν, 391b9–10). These people, Socrates explains, are the sophists:

So our next task is to try to discover what this correctness is, if indeed you want to know.—Of course I do.—Then investigate the matter.—How am I to do that?—The most correct way is together with people who already know, but you must pay them well and show gratitude besides—these are the sophists. Your brother Callias got his reputation for wisdom from them in return for a lot of money. So you had better beg and implore him to teach you what he learned from Protagoras about the correctness of names, since you haven't yet come into any money of your own.—But it would be

absurd for me to beg for Protagoras' "Truth," Socrates, as if I desired the things contained in it and thought them worthwhile, when I totally reject them. (391b8–c4)

Socrates advises Hermogenes to beg his brother, Callias, to teach him Protagoras' view of the correctness of names.⁶³ This advice assumes that Protagoras has a view of the correctness of names, but no one has presented such a view. If Protagoras does take a position on the correctness of names, Socrates' advice implies that Callias would have knowledge of it and could teach it to Hermogenes. Hermogenes considers Socrates' advice absurd. He has already rejected Protagorean relativism. It would be unseemly, therefore, to beg Callias for a view that he rejects.⁶⁴

Since Hermogenes rejects Protagoras' view, he must consult someone else about the correctness of names. Socrates suggests that they consult the poets, specifically Homer (391d1).⁶⁵ The fact that the sophists and the poets are alternative sources suggests that they both have knowledge of the correctness of names. While it is not clear how the sophists came to know about the correctness of names, Socrates' appeal to Homer suggests that inspiration is the source of the poets' knowledge (396e–d). Poets get their knowledge from the muses, who inspire them. Socrates will confirm this when he appeals

⁶³ Callias was a wealthy and prominent political figure in fifth century Athens, who inherited his wealth from his father Hipponicus, reputed to be the richest man in Greece (Nails 2002, 162–3). He spent a large part of his money on education and his home became a meeting-place for sophists, especially Protagoras. Plato set *Protagoras* at Callias' home. Both Hermogenes and Prodicus make appearances in this dialogue (315e).

⁶⁴ This exchange calls into question Socrates' ignorance of the correctness of names. Socrates confessed at 394b–c that his ignorance of the correctness of names originates in his inability to afford Prodicus' course on etymology. For Hermogenes to shun Prodicus' expertise in etymologies implies that Socrates does not have any knowledge of the correctness of names after all—not even knowledge of his ignorance of it.

⁶⁵ Homer is an obvious alternative to the sophists. His *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the oldest source of information about Greek language and constituted the better part of classical Greek literary education (see *Oxford Classical Dictionary* q.v. Greek Education; cf. Xenophon *Symposium* 4.6). His work, therefore, seems an excellent source of information on the subject of the correctness of names.

to Euthyphro as the source of his own knowledge (396c–397a), but he will never say conclusively whether the poets are inspired to know about the correctness of names. Uncertainty about the source of the poets' knowledge of the correctness of names will leave such knowledge dubious. Their knowledge of the correctness of names may turn out to be nothing more than their opinion.

If the poets are inspired to know about the correctness of names, then such inspiration suggests that Socrates and Hermogenes cannot learn the basis on which names are naturally correct and incorrect. The reason is that the basis of the poets' view of correctness of names is inaccessible. The alternative between the sophists and the poets suggests that Hermogenes must choose between people who seem to know about the correctness of names and people who are divinely inspired about the matter. Because he denies that sophists like Protagoras have knowledge of the correctness of names, he must consider poets, such as Homer, whose knowledge may be entirely inaccessible to them so that they have no way of evaluating its truth. The poets may have divine knowledge of the correctness of names, but they may not be able to explain why certain names are correct. We shall soon see Socrates and Hermogenes establish that some names are more correct than others because they are divine and try to discover what precisely makes such names more correct. Nevertheless, they will fail when they discover that the foundation of the correctness of names is ultimately the shaky ground of Heracliteanism.

Hermogenes is not aware that Homer has much to say about the correctness of names:

What does Homer say about names, Socrates, and where does he say it?—
In lots of places. The best and most important are the ones in which he distinguishes between the names human call things and those the gods call them. Or don't you think that these passages tell us something remarkable

about the correctness of names? Surely, the gods call things by their naturally correct names—or don't you think so?—I certainly know that if they call them by any names at all, it's by the correct ones. (391d2–e3)

Socrates informs Hermogenes that Homer speaks of the correctness of names in many places, the “best and most beautiful” of which are where he distinguishes between divine and human names: the names that the gods use and the names that human beings use.

Homer thinks divine names are naturally correct names because they are the names that the gods use. If the gods use names at all, theirs are surely correct.

Hermogenes is not sure to which passages Socrates is referring (391e4). Socrates reminds him of a passage where Homer indicates that the gods call a certain Trojan river Ξάνθος while human beings call it Σκάμανδρος (391e5–7). Ξάνθος means “yellow” and refers to the color of hair. Based simply on the meaning of these names, the gods appear to call the river Ξάνθος because it has the look of flowing, yellow hair. Σκάμανδρος means “man's trench” (σκάμ- + ἄνδρος), which says nothing specific about the kind of river it is other than the fact that it runs along a trench. The contrast between Ξάνθος and Σκάμανδρος proves the point that the correct name is the one the gods use.

This illustration supplies us with an explanation of the correctness of the names the gods use. Ξάνθος is correct because it separates the fundamentally different nature of this river, the look of yellow hair, from the nature of rivers in general (Joseph 2000, 40). Ξάνθος must be able to describe the true nature of the river or else it would fail to satisfy the function or purpose of a name (cf. 388b). The look of yellow hair, however, may not be unique to the river. It is possible that other rivers share the same nature. This leaves us with the vague criterion that whatever names the gods happen to use must be correct *ipso facto*.

Description justifies the correctness of σκάμανδρος as well. If Σκάμανδρος means “man’s trench” in the sense that the river is manmade, then Σκάμανδρος describes the nature of a certain kind of river. Few rivers at the time were man-made. Σκάμανδρος, therefore, appears to be correct because it distinguishes the artificial nature of certain rivers from the nature of rivers in general. “Man-made” describes the nature of a certain kind of river, but it may not describe the nature of the kind of river Ξάνθος happens to be. For this reason, σκάμανδρος would be incorrect. Moreover, Socrates indicates that the river is divine—not man-made (391e5–9). It once fought with Hephaestus, as well as Achilles, which Homer describes late in the *Iliad* (XXI).⁶⁶ So it is doubtful that Σκάμανδρος describes the nature of the kind of river Ξάνθος is.

Socrates offers two more passages to support the claim that divine names are more correct than human names (14.291, 2.813 ff.). He asks Hermogenes if he considers it trivial to learn that Homer also thinks that it is more correct to call a certain bird χαλκίς, which the gods call it, instead of κυμίνδις, which men call it (392a5–6). The word χαλκίς means “copper” and the word κυμίνδις means “cumin.” This example is more difficult to explain because it does not fit Socrates’ evidence as precisely. Χαλκίς is more correct than κυμίνδις because it describes the nature of the kind of bird Χαλκίς happens to be, and distinguishes it from other kinds. He provides further support by suggesting that it is

⁶⁶ Riley 2005, 20 emphasizes the significance of the struggle between Hephaestus and Scamander. He points out it pre-figures the contest between the craft of naming that Socrates and Hermogenes have already explicated, and Heraclitean flux in the examination of names (397aff.). Thus, in a way, it also pre-figures the dispute between Socrates and Cratylus. This dispute will center on the issue of whether nature is fixed or in flux. Ostensibly, Socrates will argue that nature is fixed, and names can therefore be more or less correct (438cff.), while Cratylus will insist that nature changes, and names, consequently, cannot be more or less correct; either names are correct or they are not (429b6–8). The significance of the struggle between Hephaestus and Scamander serves to show that Socrates is aware of the debate over stability and flux much earlier than Sedley 2003, 151–153, claims (cf. 410e–421c).

also more correct to call a certain hill Μυρίνη than Βατίεια (392a8). Βατίεια means “thicket of brambles” and describes the nature of the kind of hill Βατίεια happens to be; Μυρίνη is the name of an Amazon woman who is buried under the hill (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, q.v. Myrine). It could also come from μυρίνης (sweet wine).

Another reason ξάνθος, χαλκίς, and μυρίνη might be correct is because the river, the bird and the hill are divine. Besides ξάνθος, which describes the divine nature of the river, Benardete 1980/81, 132, observes that the god Sleep takes the shape of χαλκίς at *Iliad* XIV.286–91. This suggests that χαλκίς is more correct than κυμίνδις because it discloses the divine nature of Χαλκίς and distinguishes it from the nature of birds in general. Μυρίνη is much the same. The name distinguishes the hill as the burial mound of the Amazon queen Myrine. The gods honored this woman for her bravery. The name μυρίνη, therefore, reveals the divine nature of the hill and separates it from the nature of ordinary hills insofar as it is final resting place of a divine woman. Each of these names is correct because it discloses the divine nature of the thing it names and separates it from the nature of the kind with which such a thing might be confused.

Reeve 1998, xxv, rightly argues that ξάνθος, χαλκίς, and μυρίνη are not divine because they come from Homer. Since Homer is a human being and he reports that the gods use these names while human beings use σκάμανδρος, κυμίνδις, and βατίεια, we trust him to have knowledge of divine nature, when he may have only an opinion about it. To name Athena correctly, Homer must know the nature of Athena. If he does not know Athena’s nature, then he cannot give her a correct name. Yet Homer can name Athena based only on his own opinion of her nature. We have seen evidence of this in ξάνθος, χαλκίς, and μυρίνη, which are correct because they describe the divine natures of

Xanthos, Chalcis, and Myrine, and separating them from the natures of the sort of kinds with which they might be confused. These names, however, may not be correct if Xanthos, Chalcis, and Myrine are not divine. Homer must have knowledge of nature in order to name things correctly.

Socrates has concerns about the difficulty involved in learning whether or not these names are in fact correct because knowledge of the correctness of a name depends on one's knowledge of nature (392b1). Thus, it is hard to discern whether divine names are correct because it requires knowledge of divine nature. Homer may have such knowledge. If he does, his knowledge of divine nature will be the foundation for the correctness of names. If, however, he does not, his opinion of it will form the basis of his account. Socrates and Hermogenes cannot verify Homer's knowledge of divine nature. To do so, they would need to share Homer's knowledge of divine nature (cf. 401a, 407d).

As an alternative, Socrates proposes that they focus on human names like Σκαμανδρίος and Ἀστυάναξ, which are the names Homer gives to Hector's son:

It is easier and more within human power, I think, to investigate the kind of correctness Homer ascribes to 'Skamandrios' and 'Astyanax', which he says are the names of Hector's son. You know, of course, the lines where you'll find what I'm talking about.—Certainly.—Which of the names given to the boy do you suppose Homer thought was more correct, 'Astyanax', or 'Skamandrios'?—I really can't say.—Look at it this way. If you were asked who gives names more correct, those who are wiser or those who are more foolish, what would you answer?—That it is clearly those who are wiser.—And which class do you think is wiser on the whole, a city's women or its men?—Its men.—Now you now, don't you that Homer tells us that Hector's son was called 'Astyanax' by the men of Troy? But if the men called him 'Astyanax', isn't it clear that 'Skamandrios' must be what the women called him?—Probably so.—And didn't Homer also think that the Trojans were wiser than their women?—I suppose he did.—So mustn't he have thought that 'Astyanax' was a more correct name for the boy than 'Skamandrios'?—Evidently. (392b2–d10)

Here, Hermogenes admits that Ἀστυάναξ is more correct than Σκαμανδρίος because Trojan men use Ἀστυάναξ and Trojan women use Σκαμανδρίος. Hermogenes believes that the wiser use the more correct name. He also believes that men are generally wiser than women are. Socrates points out to him how Trojan men called Hector's son Ἀστυάναξ, which would imply that Trojan women called him Σκαμανδρίος. If this is right, it follows that Ἀστυάναξ is more correct than Σκαμανδρίος. Hermogenes accepts this inference. He believes that Homer thinks Ἀστυάναξ must be more correct than Σκαμανδρίος.⁶⁷

Sedley 2003, 77, draws attention to the fact that Socrates misreads Homer. When Socrates introduced the names of Hector's son, he disregards the passage in Homer's *Iliad* when Hector's son first appears:

She came to him there, and beside her went an attendant carrying the boy in the fold of her bosom, a little child, only a baby, Hektor's son, the admired, beautiful as a star shining, whom Hektor called Skamandrios, but all of the others Astyanax—lord of the city; since Hektor alone saved Ilion. (vi 399–410; cf. xxii 484–515, Lattimore's translation)

This passage turns the table on the argument that Ἀστυάναξ is more correct than Σκαμανδρίος. Homer makes it clear here that Hector himself calls the boy Σκαμανδρίος while everyone else—men and women—calls him Ἀστυάναξ. There is even a passage where Aphrodite calls the boy Σκαμανδρίος, which further upsets the argument. Socrates could have avoided this mistake by simply providing the passage. Instead, he merely asks Hermogenes if he recalls the lines. This makes their argument depend on Hermogenes'

⁶⁷ Joseph 2000, 42, points out that Socrates goes out of his way to emphasize men "as a class in general" to show that they are wiser than women: "the implication being that individual women may be wiser than individual men." To qualify the claim in this way anticipates Socrates' positive claim later in the dialogue that they preserve the original pronunciation of words (418b8). In doing so, women would seem to exhibit how they are wiser than men. The preservation of the original pronunciation of words, however, may be the result of stubborn sense of conservatism rather than wisdom.

memory, which is apparently not so reliable because Hermogenes agrees to the mistaken view. Nevertheless, Socrates seems aware of the mistake because he gives Hermogenes the opportunity to answer positively instead of merely assenting or dissenting. Socrates, for instance, asks Hermogenes if the men or the women of a city seem to him more prudent (Πότερον οὖν αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν φρονιμώτεραί σοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι ἢ οἱ ἄνδρες, ὡς τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν γένος. Note the emphasis on Hermogenes' judgment).

Hermogenes could have answered that the women of Troy seem to him more prudent, in which case no mistake would have arisen, but he answers that men seem generally more prudent to him than women. Moreover, if Hermogenes did not remember the lines, Socrates might have had to quote the passage. Were he to have done so, they could have avoided the mistake of arguing that Trojan men call Hector's son Ἀστυάναξ.

The mistake does serve a purpose. It allows Socrates to suggest that Ἀστυάναξ describes the nature of the boy while Σκαμανδρίος does not. Σκαμανδρίος is an obvious derivation from σκάμανδρος, which Socrates and Hermogenes contended was the human name for the local Trojan river (391e7).⁶⁸ Socrates and Hermogenes agreed that this name was incorrect because it is not the divine name for the river. Socrates, therefore, may be appealing to this fact in suggesting that σκαμανδρίος is not the name of Hector's son. If σκάμανδρος had been the correct name for the river then perhaps it could have been the correct name for the boy. Additionally, I argued that σκάμανδρος is incorrect because it confuses the divine nature of the river with the nature of rivers in general. Σκάμανδρος means "man's trench," which does not distinguish the divine nature of the river from the

⁶⁸ Joseph 2000, 41, is the only other commentator to note the significance of the relationship between these two names. He emphasizes the difficulty by asking how Skamandrios could be correct if Σκάμανδρος, its source is not (42). Joseph takes this to be evidence of irony and satire in Socrates' analysis.

nature of a man-made river. Σκαμανδρίος means “from the river Skamander” and Hector’s son is presumably called Σκαμανδρίος because he is from the area around the river, i.e. Troy. This name also fails to satisfy the criteria reserved for a naturally correct name. Σκαμανδρίος confuses the nature of the Astyanax with the nature of any other Trojan child. Astyanax appears to belong to an entirely different kind than the ordinary Trojan boy.

If Ἔκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ are meaningfully equivalent, Ἔκτωρ could just as easily describe the nature of Astyanax, and Ἀστυάναξ describe the nature of Hector. Since Hector and Astyanax share the same nature and belong to the same kind, they can share any name that describes that nature. For names describe the nature of the kind to which the things they name belong.⁶⁹

As with the divine names, the fact that the men of Troy use Ἀστυάναξ cannot explain its correctness. Their use might be enough to justify which name is more correct, but it cannot explain why it is correct. Socrates gives an etymology of Ἀστυάναξ by dividing it into ἄστυ and ἄναξ. Ἄστυ means “town” and ἄναξ means “lord.” Combined into Ἀστυάναξ, these words mean “lord of the town.” Socrates discovers this etymology in yet another passage from the *Iliad* (22.507): “He alone defended their city and long walls.” The context of this passage indicates that Hector is the subject of this sentence. Socrates deduces from this line of argument that Ἀστυάναξ is the correct name for Hector’s son. Since Hector defends Troy, “lord of the town” (Ἀστυάναξ) is the correct

⁶⁹ One might wonder how Ἔκτωρ manages to describe Hector but not Astyanax and how ἄστυάναξ manages to describe Astyanax but not Hector. If they are different people then, to some extent, they must have different natures. Socrates will address this problem at 427c1ff. when he argues that some names are better imitations of nature than others. For now, he confesses that he does not yet understand how ἄστυάναξ could be correct (392e6).

name for Hector's son. Socrates' deduction satisfies the criteria for a naturally correct name. Ἀστυάναξ is the correct name for Hector's son because it is able: first, to disclose the boy's nature as a young lord of Troy and the son of its pre-eminent defender, and second, to distinguish him from every other Trojan boy as the son of Hector, who shares in his nature.

Yet such a name does not seem to distinguish Astyanax uniquely. Although Hermogenes accepts the argument that the name of Hector's son describes his nature and distinguishes him from everything else, it confuses Socrates. He does not yet understand how the names of Hector or his son could be correct because it is not yet clear how these names distinguish between Hector and his son. Socrates' deduction depends on the meaning of Hector's name. As with the correctness of Σκάμανδρος and Σκαμανδρίος, only when they establish that Hector's name is correct can they determine if his son's name is correct. In order to do this, Socrates asks if Homer gave Hector his name. Hermogenes admits that he did, which establishes that Hector's name is human and that it is correct because Homer, a man, uses it. Based on their agreement that Homer considers Ἀστυάναξ more correct than Σκαμανδρίος, Socrates argues that Hector's name is correct because it discloses the nature of the man and distinguishes him from the other Trojans. Ἕκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ are similar in that they both appear to be Greek and both names mean "king" (βασιλεύς). Socrates claims that Ἕκτωρ is similar to the verb ἔχειν, which means "possessor." Anyone who possesses something must be lord (ἄναξ) of it because the person "rules (κρατεῖ), owns (κέκτηται), and simply has (ἔχει) it" (393a6–b1). Since Hector defends Troy, he must possess it. Hector's name, therefore, is correct because it discloses the nature of the kind to which he belongs. Hector is one of the pre-eminent

defenders of Troy much like his father who belongs to the same kind. Now it should be easier to see how Astyanax' name is correct. Because Hector's name means "king" and Astyanax is Hector's son, his name must also mean "king." Socrates and Hermogenes have already agreed that this is the case. Astyanax's name, therefore, is correct not only because it discloses and distinguishes Astyanax as Hector's son, whose name discloses and distinguishes his kingly nature; it also discloses and distinguishes the kingly nature of Astyanax and the fact that he gets it from Hector.

How can we be sure that Astyanax shares Hector's nature? After concluding that Ἔκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ have the same meaning, Socrates claims to have found a clue (ἵχνος) to Homer's view of the correctness of names:

Perhaps you think I'm talking nonsense, and that I'm wrong to suppose that I've found a clue to Homer's beliefs about the correctness of names.—No, I don't think you're wrong. You may well have found a clue.—At any rate, it seems to me that it is right to call a lion's offspring a 'lion' and a horse's offspring a 'horse'. I'm not talking about some monster other than a horse that happens to be born from a horse but one that is a natural offspring of its kind. If, contrary to nature, a horse gave birth to a calf, it should be called a 'calf', not a 'colt'. And if something that isn't a human offspring is born to a human, I don't think it should be called a 'human'. And the same applies to trees and all the rest. (393b1–c4)

Socrates explains that the kind of thing something is determines its name (cf. 394d). It is just, for example, to call Hector's son Ἀστυάναξ in the same way that it is just to call the natural offspring of a lion a "lion," of a horse a "horse," and of a tree a "tree." Because they share the same nature, they share the same name.

Socrates proceeds to distinguish between natural and unnatural offspring.

Hermogenes agrees that Homer's clue cannot apply to unnatural offspring or monsters (τέρας, 393b8). Horses occasionally give birth to monsters instead of horses. Horses are

the natural offspring of horses because the parent and the child are both of the same kind. If a horse were to give birth to a calf, contrary to nature, one should call the calf a “calf” and not a “colt.” The same argument applies to trees and human beings. If a human being gives birth to something other than a human being, one should not call it a “human being.” Its kind should determine its name.⁷⁰

Socrates warns Hermogenes against thinking that the natural offspring of a kind will share the same name. The son of a king will not necessarily also be called a king. A king may occasionally produce unnatural offspring. A king’s son may not possess the same qualities that make his father a king. In such a case, one should not call the king’s son a “king” because he belongs to a different kind.

Socrates and Hermogenes agree that paternity should decide the name of natural offspring. This conclusion, however, does not take into account unnatural offspring. What happens when a pious father begets an impious son? Should the father name his son according to the father’s own kind or according to his son’s kind? Socrates suggests that if the son does not share the nature of his father then he should not share his name; the son should be named for his kind (394d); just as, Socrates explains, a calf should not be called a “horse,” even if it is the offspring of a horse. Since the calf does not share the same nature as its parent, one should not name it as though it did. Hermogenes agrees that an impious son should not share the name of his pious father. Since they do not share the same nature, they should not share the same sort of name. Therefore, the impious son of a

⁷⁰ Socrates carefully selects his examples. He chooses plants, animals, and human beings because they represent every natural living being. By choosing these examples, Socrates applies his argument to everything that bears a human name. The kind of thing something is should determine its name. One might object that Socrates leaves out the gods and goddesses (which *πάντα* would implicitly include). He has, however, already said that they must focus on examples that are within human powers of investigation (392b1–3). This excludes the gods because their names are beyond human comprehension.

pious father should not be called Θεόφιλος (God beloved) or Μνησίθεον (Mindful of the God) or any similar name because he does not have a pious nature as these names suggest (394e). His impious nature should determine his name. The nature of each thing, argues Socrates, must determine its name, regardless of the nature of its parent, if its name is to be correct.⁷¹

Socrates and Hermogenes now test the claim that the nature of each thing should determine its name by giving etymologies of the names of the members of the house of Pelops who do not share the same nature. Beginning with Orestes, who murdered his own mother in retribution for killing his father, Agamemnon, Socrates argues that Ὀρέστης is correct because it discloses his brutal and savage nature and distinguishes him from everyone else. There is, however, another explanation. While his father was at Troy, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus exiled Orestes from Argos. He lives in the nearby mountains. Ὀρέστης, meaning “mountain man,” is, therefore, correct because it discloses Orestes’ upbringing in the mountains of Argos.⁷²

Agamemnon’s name is also correct because it discloses his stubborn nature and distinguishes it from the nature of everyone else. Ἀγαμέμνων comes from ἀγαστός (admirable) and ἐπιμονήν (remaining). “Agamemnon”, therefore, means “one who is admirable for remaining.” Socrates argues that such a name suits Agamemnon because he insisted on remaining at Troy, despite an incredibly long stalemate and recalcitrant

⁷¹ Socrates stresses how nature must determine the names of beings only if (ἐάνπερ) names happen to be correct. The weight of this statement presses upon the inference that if there is a correctness of names, it lies in the fact that things *should* be named for nature. Since they agree that there is a correctness of names, this inference forces them to admit that the nature of things determines their names.

⁷² Joseph 2000, 48, suggests another interpretation: “if we follow Socrates in ignoring the distinction between unaspirated t (*t*) and aspirated t (*th*), we see that all the sounds of *Orestés* are distributed across the three suggested source words: *thēriōdes*, *agrion*, *oreinon*; actually the first and the third words suffice to cover them all.”

colleagues. The Greeks' victory over the Trojans was due in part to Agamemnon, whose stubbornness victory ultimately justified.

The name of Agamemnon's father, Atreus, is also correct because it discloses his nature and distinguishes him from other people. Socrates argues that Ἀτρεὺς comes from ἀτειρές (stubbornness), ἄτρεστον (boldness) or ἀτηρόν (destructiveness). He does not, however, make it obvious how each of these etymologies or all of them correctly describe Atreus' nature. Socrates seems to favor ἀτηρός because Atreus murdered his nephew Chrysippus and served him to his brother Thyestes.⁷³ According to Socrates, Atreus' cruelty was in both cases destructive (ἀτηρά) to him, and it was from his destructive cruelty that Atreus received his name. Yet the fact that Atreus' name could come from any of these etymologies shows that it is correct. Each etymology discloses Atreus' nature. That Atreus' name could come from any of these etymologies suggests that they corroborate the correctness of the name.

After Atreus, Socrates turns to Pelops, whose name is correct because it discloses his shortsighted nature. Πέλοψ, which combines πέλας (near) and ὄψις (sight), means "nearsighted." Socrates explains that Pelops did not foresee the consequences of murdering Myrtilus.⁷⁴

⁷³ Socrates' etymology of Ἀτρεὺς, especially the derivation of Ἀτρεὺς from ἀτηρός relies on a source other than Homer. Speaking of the royal scepter of the house of Pelops, Homer reports that, upon his death, Atreus gave the scepter to Thyestes, who in turn entrusted it to Agamemnon. That Atreus gave the scepter to Thyestes suggests that they were *not* enemies. Aeschylus tells us that Atreus served Chrysippus to Thyestes when Atreus learned of Thyestes' adultery with his wife, Aerope. So it seems that the analysis of the names of the house of Pelops rely on the testimony of later poets like Aeschylus instead of on Homer. This shift indicates a broader consideration of the correctness of names. While for Homer paternity decides the names of things, for later poets, their kind determines their names, regardless of their paternity. We shall see this criterion clarified in the examination of names, where Socrates relies more on the testimony of Hesiod (cf. 396c2 and 402b5).

⁷⁴ Pindar is the source for Socrates' etymology of Πέλοψ (*Olympian Ode* I. Myrtilus was the charioteer of Oenomaus, whose daughter, Hippodameia, Pelops sought to marry. Myrtilus, however, loved Hippodameia and hoped to marry her himself. When Pelops arrived, intending to marry Hippodameia, her

Socrates does not rest his case with Pelops' name; he also considers Pelops' ancestors: Tantalus, Zeus, Kronos, and Ouranos. The punishment that Tantalus suffers in Hades provides him with his name. Socrates argues that ταντάλος is a corruption of τάλαντατον (most weighed upon). This great weight gives Tantalus his name because, over the course of his life, Tantalus suffered many terrible misfortunes, the chief one occurring in Hades, where a stone was suspended over his head.⁷⁵ Tantalus' name comes from τάλαντεία, which refers to the weight suspended over his head.⁷⁶

father Oenomaus insisted on testing Pelops in a chariot race. Afraid that he might lose, Pelops promised Myrtilus a night with Hippodameia if he would sabotage Oenomaus' chariot. Myrtilus accepted the offer because he secretly loved Hippodameia. Oenomaus died during the subsequent race. Pelops learned of Myrtilus' affection for Hippodameia and killed Myrtilus before he could fulfill his promise. Nevertheless, Myrtilus cursed Pelops' descendants as he lay dying. The suicide of Hippodameia and the murder of Agamemnon fulfilled this curse. According to Socrates, Pelops did not consider any alternatives to murdering Myrtilus. He was shortsighted because he failed to foresee the curse that Myrtilus would call down upon his entire family. Thus, Πέλοψ is his name because he saw no alternative to killing Myrtilus.

⁷⁵ Pindar's first Olympian Ode seems to be Socrates' source for the etymology of ταντάλος:

If ever mortal was honored by the gods who look down from Olympus,
Tantalus was that man. But his great good fortune he could not digest,
And surfeiting, he brought down a great curse,
In the form of a hideous stone the father of the gods hung just above him
All ease of mind eludes him, in his vain incessant straining to get out from
Under its shade. (*First Olympian Ode*, 54–58, Mullen, translation)

Pindar tells us that Zeus suspended a stone over Tantalus' head as punishment for his transgressions against the gods. Yet Homer gives an altogether different account. He indicates that Tantalus' punishment suits his crime. Homer tells us that Zeus punished Tantalus for murdering Pelops and surreptitiously presenting his remains at a banquet for the gods (see *Odyssey* 11. 583ff). Thus Tantalus was condemned to suffer unbearable hunger and thirst while standing by a pool of water, which recedes when he reaches down to drink, and under a tree, whose fruit withdraws when he reaches up to eat it. Nevertheless, this description does not provide an etymology of Ταντάλος, unlike Pindar's description.

⁷⁶ Socrates describes the etymology of Tantalus' name as wondrous (θαυμαστώς). His use of this word suggests that the myth of Tantalus is a doorway to philosophy, since philosophy begins in wonder (cf. *Theaetetus* 151d). The wonder found in the myth invites one to consider the possibility that the poets intentionally named Tantalus. Socrates indicates such a possibility in his subsequent remark (395e2). The wonder of the myth also provides a pathway to the names of the gods, which Socrates had earlier claimed to be too difficult for him. Socrates has been prepared to consider the correctness of the gods' names by his examination of human names, which has yielded the principle that nature should determine the names of beings. Borrowing the inspiration of poets like Homer, Pindar, and Hesiod, Socrates examines the names of the house of Pelops and ascends to the names of the gods.

Socrates turns to Zeus, whose name is hard to figure out for two reasons. First, Socrates and Hermogenes agreed earlier that divine names are more difficult to understand than human names because the etymologies of divine names require knowledge of divine natures. So in order to explain why Zeus' name is correct, that is, how it discloses and distinguishes his nature, one must know the nature of Zeus. Since Zeus is a god, however, Socrates and Hermogenes do not have knowledge of his nature. Later Socrates will argue that the presumption to know is impious (400d–401a).

The second reason is that Ζεύς is not one name but two. Socrates argues that Ζεύς is a contraction of Ζῆνα and Δία. Some Greek dialects prefer Ζῆνα while others prefer Δία.⁷⁷ Ζῆνα comes from ζῆν (life) and δία is either the preposition δία, or a contraction of δία ὄν. In either case, Socrates alleges that the combined meaning of ζῆνα and δία is “cause of life.” Zeus—more than any other god—is the cause of life because he governs everything.⁷⁸ Hence, Ζεύς is correct because it discloses and distinguishes Zeus' nature as the source of life.

After Zeus, Socrates turns to Zeus's father, Kronos. Socrates suggests that it might be offensive to learn that Kronos is Zeus' father because Zeus would appear to be the son of a child rather than some august titan. By this, Socrates implies that Κρονός may come from κόρος (child). It might be more reasonable to say, Socrates suggests, that

⁷⁷ Reeve 1998, 23, points out that Attic Greek preserves two declensions for the word Ζεύς. One of these declensions has Ζῆνα in the accusative case while the other has δία. Reeve adds that poets tend to use Ζῆνα while ordinary Greeks generally use δία. In considering a poetic form as equal to a more commonly used one, Socrates gives weight to the poetic form. Both declensions, however, share Ζεύς in the nominative, and this supports Socrates' claim that Ζεύς is a contraction of Ζῆνα and Δία. Together, they pick out Zeus' nature.

⁷⁸ In his etymology of “Zeus,” Socrates employs a technique he used in his etymology of “Hector.” Hector's name derives from the fact that he rules the city (393a6–8). Zeus' name comes from the fact that he rules life. Ζῆνα and δία reveal the nature of Zeus, who is the ruler and king of everything through his being the cause of life (ζῆν). The poets named Zeus in the same way they named Hector.

Zeus is the son of a great intellect. It is more reasonable and more true to say that Κρονός refers to the intellect because it conveys a clean (καθαρόν) and pure (ἀκήρατον) mind. Thus the name Κρονός combines καθαρόν and ἀκήρατον, both of which suggest that Kronos' character and mind are pristine.⁷⁹

Lastly, Socrates gives an etymology of Οὐρανός (heaven). Socrates indicates that Οὐρανός is correct because οὐρανία (heavenly) denotes the act of looking up. Οὐρανός comes from ὀρῶσα τὰ ἄνω (to look at things above, 396b7–c2). Thus, Οὐρανός is correct because it is upon him that people gaze when they look up. Socrates adds that astronomers say that when someone looks up (οὐρανία), the vision of heaven (οὐρανός) purifies his mind. When one looks upon Ouranos, therefore, one enters the same mental state as Kronos, Ouranos' son.

Socrates implies that Kronos receives his name from his father. Since Ouranos' names comes from the act of looking up and Kronos gets his names from the purity of his mind, which is produced by looking up, it is as a consequence of Ouranos' nature that Kronos gets his name. This follows from Homer's clue, but is incomplete. A complete account would also explain how Zeus and Tantalus get their names from Ouranos and Kronos. Socrates does not give such an explanation. Nor can we explain at this point how Zeus' name originates in Kronos and how Tantalus' name originates in Zeus.

How is Socrates able to analyze the names of Zeus, Kronos, and Ouranos without knowing their natures? If he denies having any knowledge of nature then his analyses must rely on someone who has such knowledge. It is not clear that the poets have any

⁷⁹ Reeve 1998, 23, takes καθαρόν and ἀκήρατον to imply that Κρονός comes ultimately from κορεῖν (to sweep). While κορεῖν fits κρονός and the meaning of καθαρόν and ἀκήρατον, Socrates does not mention κορεῖν explicitly as he has done with the etymologies of Kronos' descendants. Thus, we may accept κορεῖν with hesitation and be ready to abandon it if this etymology interferes with any others.

knowledge of the nature of these gods; they seem to have only an opinion about their nature. According to Socrates, Euthyphro, the namesake of Plato's dialogue, is responsible for his knowledge of divine nature—Zeus, Kronos, and Ouranos, as well as the rest of the gods. Euthyphro, however, will prove to be a no more reliable source of knowledge about divine nature than the poets were.

Socrates intimates that he has been somehow inspired to give an account of the correctness of Zeus, Kronos, and Ouranos (396c2–d1). Unfortunately, he does not know the source of this inspiration. Hermogenes recognizes Socrates' inspiration: "Indeed, Socrates, you do seem to me to be exactly like a prophet who has suddenly been inspired to deliver oracles" (Καὶ μὲν δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀτεχνῶς γέ μοι δοκεῖς ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐξαίφνης χρησμοφδεῖν. 386d2–3). Hermogenes suggests that Socrates seems to be just like men who are suddenly inspired to divine. To characterize Socrates as inspired invites comparison with Hermogenes' early portrayal of Cratylus. Cratylus refused to explain how Hermogenes' name was incorrect, which led Hermogenes to describe Cratylus' claim as an "oracle" (μαντείαν, 384a5). This implies that Hermogenes believes himself to have consulted Cratylus about the natural correctness of names much in the same way any other Greek would have consulted the oracle at Delphi.⁸⁰ Like the Delphic oracle, who would often give a mysterious and puzzling pronouncement without interpreting its meaning, Cratylus asserts that Hermogenes' name is incorrect without explaining why. Socrates' inspiration, however, suggests that he is able to interpret his own pronouncements (contra Sallis 1975, 226).

⁸⁰ Greeks frequently consulted oracles in order to learn how to act in certain situations. Such oracles could not explain their pronouncements because they spoke on behalf of the gods who inspired them. See *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, q.v. Oracle.

Cratylus may be the source of Socrates' inspiration. After all, it was his claim that Hermogenes' name was incorrect that led Hermogenes to ask Socrates to intervene in their debate. Socrates, however, dismissed Cratylus' oracle as a joke made at Hermogenes' expense, which diminishes Hermogenes' assertion that Cratylus' claim was an oracle. Hermogenes describes Cratylus' claim as an oracle because Cratylus had refused to interpret his claim. Nevertheless, Socrates dismisses the idea that Cratylus' silence was prophetic (cf. 384c). Cratylus simply refused to entertain Hermogenes' request and provoked him into admitting that names are naturally correct. If Hermogenes is in any way attached to his name then it must be naturally correct. The difference, then, between Cratylus and Socrates is that Socrates appears to be genuinely inspired while Cratylus is not. Cratylus, therefore, cannot be responsible for Socrates' inspiration.

If neither Cratylus nor the poets are responsible for Socrates' inspiration, then who is? Socrates explains where he thinks he received such inspiration:

Yesm Hermogenes, and I, for my part, mostly blame Euthyphro, of the deme of Prospalta, for its coming upon me. I was with him at dawn, lending an ear to his lengthy discussion. He must have been inspired, because it looks as though he has not only filled my ears with his superhuman wisdom but taken possession of my soul as well. (Καὶ αἰτιῶμαί γε, ὦ Ἑρμόγενης, μάλιστα αὐτὴν ἀπὸ Εὐθύφρονος τοῦ Προσπαλτίου προσπεπτωκέναι μοι: ἔωθεν γὰρ πολλὰ αὐτῷ συνῆ και παρείχον τὰ ὄτα μου ἐμπλήσαι τῆς δαιμονίας σοφίας, ἀλλὰ και τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπειλήφθαι. 396d4–9)

Socrates blames Euthyphro for inspiring him.⁸¹ They met at dawn, and shared a long discussion, which not only filled Socrates with divine wisdom, but also took hold of his

⁸¹ Euthyphro will be a familiar character to readers of Plato's dialogues. Plato names one of his dialogues after Euthyphro, whom Socrates encounters on his way to meet the charges brought against him by Meletus and Anytus at the Athenian court (*Euthyphro* 2b). Euthyphro intends to bring a lawsuit against his father for the murder of a servant and he claims that his lawsuit is just because it is pious (4a–e). In the course of their ensuing discussion, however, Euthyphro fails to explain what piety is, and he is unable to explain how piety justifies his bringing a lawsuit against his father. Socrates offers to investigate piety with

soul (ἐμπλῆσαι τῆς δαιμονίας σοφίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπειλῆφθαι). It was this wisdom that enabled Socrates to verify the correctness of “Zeus,” “Kronos,” and “Ouranos.” Through Euthyphro’s influence, Socrates has gained some access to the nature of the gods.

Commentators dispute whether the Euthyphro Socrates mentions here is the same Euthyphro that appears in Plato’s dialogue. Almost as many commentators think that Socrates is referring to the same Euthyphro (Allan 1954, 273, Reeve 1998, 24, Barney 2001, 57) as believe he is not (Baxter 1992, 28; Sedley 2003, 3; Joseph 2000, 49). What is at stake in this dispute is the nature of Socrates’ inspiration.⁸² Those who think Socrates is referring to another Euthyphro contend that this other Euthyphro was a known etymologist who furnishes Socrates with tremendous skill at analyzing words (e.g. Sedley 2003, 145). Those who think Socrates is referring to the same Euthyphro hold that this Euthyphro imparts to Socrates a knowledge of the nature of Zeus, Kronos, and Ouranos, a claim which Euthyphro makes in the dialogue (*Euthyphro* 4e–5a. 5e–6a). Such

Euthyphro; but Euthyphro proves unwilling to do so and leaves Socrates to defend himself against his accusers (15e3ff.).

⁸² Another issue is the relation of the *Cratylus* to other dialogues. Allan 1954, 273, argues that Socrates’ mention of an early morning (ἔωθεν) conversation with Euthyphro suggests a dramatic link between the *Cratylus* and the *Euthyphro*, which would situate the *Cratylus* after the *Euthyphro* and before the *Sophist* around the time of Socrates’ trial. Sedley 2003, 3, and Baxter 1992, 28, object that the remark about an early morning conversation denies any dramatic link between the *Cratylus* and the *Euthyphro*. There is no indication that the *Euthyphro* occurred precisely at dawn. If the *Theaetetus* dramatically precedes the *Euthyphro*, the *Euthyphro* could not have occurred at dawn. It must have occurred later in the morning. This implies at the very least that Socrates is referring to a different conversation. Furthermore, they argue, Euthyphro gives no etymologies in the dialogue that Plato named for him. This fact too suggests that it is at least a different conversation if not an entirely different Euthyphro. However, Sedley’s argument makes a big assumption: that the *Theaetetus* did not occur overnight. Seeing as how the *Theaetetus* is the fourth longest dialogue, it is conceivable that it occurred late enough in the day preceding Socrates’ arraignment that its conclusion meets the beginning of the *Euthyphro*, as the finale of the *Theaetetus* suggests (210d). If the *Theaetetus* had occurred overnight, the *Euthyphro* could have very easily occurred at dawn or even later in the morning.

knowledge allows Socrates to verify the correctness of each name by comparing the nature of each god with his own analysis of each name.

I think that this Euthyphro is the same one that appears in Plato's dialogue. I take this position because the sort of knowledge that Euthyphro is said to have imparted to Socrates is highly ambiguous. It may be that Euthyphro has endowed Socrates with enough skill to analyze names, or with knowledge of the nature of the gods such that he can verify the correctness of their names, or both. The evidence of the *Cratylus* very clearly suggests that Euthyphro provides Socrates with knowledge of divine nature, which enables him to analyze the names of the gods.

The purpose of the subsequent examination of names is to see if "names testify [...] that they are not given by chance, but have some sort of correctness" (397a6–b1). This requires not only some skill in the analysis of names but also knowledge of the natures, which will measure the success of the analysis. If Socrates does not have knowledge or at least an opinion about nature, he will not be able to determine whether a name testifies to its correctness. Euthyphro, therefore, must provide Socrates with some kind of knowledge, or opinion, about the nature of the gods.

That Euthyphro grants Socrates knowledge of nature instead of skillful analysis can be easily seen in Socrates' analysis of ἄνθρωποι (399c), ψυχή (399c–b), πῦρ and ὕδωρ (409d–410a). Socrates treats Hermogenes' eagerness to hear him analyze ἄνθρωποι as a sign of his faith in Euthyphro's inspiration. This faith is a belief in Socrates' ability to evaluate the correctness of ἄνθρωποι, which relies on knowledge of the nature of human beings, not a confidence in Socrates' ability to analyze names. Human beings are

correctly named ἄνθρωποι because they alone think about what they have seen (ἀναθρόων ἃ ὄπωπε, 399c6).

Socrates' analysis of ψυχή comes "off the top of [his] head," meaning that he will rely on Euthyphro's inspiration to help him determine the correctness of his name. Of the two etymologies he gives, Socrates judges that the "followers" of Euthyphro would consider the first one to be crude (400a1). Ψυχή cannot come from ἀναψύχοντος (revitalization) because it accounts only for the body's ability to breathe (ἀναπνεῖν); it does not account for the ability that supports and sustains all of nature. This would be called the "natural support" (φυσέχη), or, more elegantly, ψυχή. This etymology is more appealing to the followers of Euthyphro because it takes into account all of nature and not just the nature of the body.

Socrates is unable to analyze πῦρ and ὕδωρ because he is perplexed about them, which leads him to think that Euthyphro's inspiration has abandoned him. Πῦρ and ὕδωρ are hard to analyze because the natures they involve are important to Heraclitus (see chapter five). According to Heraclitus, nature is in flux because it consists of fire and water (DK B66). If he is right, that nature is in flux and πῦρ and ὕδωρ are principally responsible for this then he cannot give an analysis of these names because their nature is flux. Socrates emphasizes this in his comment that an analysis of names "mustn't push them too far" (410a8).⁸³

If it is the same Euthyphro, why does Socrates credit him as the source of his inspiration? The fact that Socrates is able to show that "Zeus," "Kronos," and "Ouranos"

⁸³ Riley 2005, 81, argues that Socrates could have availed himself of several etymologies for πῦρ. Most notably Socrates could have derived πῦρ from πόρος, which would have maintained Heraclitus' aversion to water. Socrates develops πόρος as a possibility by distinguishing ἀπορία from his etymology. He has a device (μηχανή) for dealing with πῦρ and so he is not without resources (ἀπορία).

are correct suggests that he must know something about the natures of these gods. Even if he simply followed the poets and applied the principle that names are correct when they disclose nature, he still needs to verify the correctness of such names by comparing the natures they disclose and the natures of the gods. To be able to make such a comparison requires knowledge of the nature of the gods, something which Socrates denies having (cf. 400d). To avoid inconsistency, he elects to attribute his knowledge of divine nature to Euthyphro, who insists that he has such knowledge, (cf. Barney 2001, 58–60).

Another reason Socrates blames Euthyphro as the source of his inspiration is that Socrates fears acting impiously. He twice urges Hermogenes to abandon the examination of divine names because he wishes to avoid accidentally offending the gods (407d4–7 and 408d4) and we see Socrates hesitate to follow Euthyphro’s inspiration for very long:

It seems to me that this is what we ought to do: Today, we’ll use this wisdom and finish our examination of names, but tomorrow, if the rest of you agree, we’ll exorcise it and purify ourselves, as soon as we’ve found someone—whether priest or wiseman—who is clever at that kind of purification. (δοκεῖ οὖν μοι χρῆναι οὕτως ἡμᾶς ποιῆσαι: τὸ μὲν τήμερον εἶναι χρήσασθαι αὐτῇ καὶ τᾷ λοιπὰ περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐπισκέψασθαι, αὔριον δέ, ἂν καὶ ὑμῖν συνδοκῇ, ἀποδιοπομπησόμεθα τε αὐτὴν καὶ καθαρούμεθα ἐξευρόντες ὅστις τὰ τοιαῦτα δεινὸς καθαίρειν, εἴτε τῶν ἱερέων τις εἴτε τῶν σοφιστῶν. 396d9–397a1)

Socrates recommends that they take advantage of Euthyphro’s inspiration in order to finish their examination of names, but they must exorcise and purify themselves of Euthyphro’s inspiration as soon as possible for fear that they may offend the gods.

Socrates credits Euthyphro’s inspiration as the source of his knowledge of divine nature to avoid impiety.

Why should Euthyphro's inspiration be impious? It is impious because it may make us think that we know more about the gods than we really do (399a4). To protect ourselves from impiety, we must take care to admit

That we know nothing about the gods themselves or about the names they call themselves—although it is clear that they call themselves by true ones. The second best line on the correctness of names is to say, as is customary in our prayers, that we hope the gods are pleased by the names we give them, since we know no others. I think this is an excellent custom. You would want us, then, to begin our investigation by first announcing to the gods that we will not be investigating *them*—since we do not regard ourselves as worthy to conduct such an investigation—but rather human beings, and the beliefs they had in giving the gods their names. After all, there's no offence in doing that. (400d4–401a6)

Socrates is worried that Euthyphro's inspiration may make him too wise, if he is not careful. So he guards against any accidental impiety on his part by declaring that he has no knowledge of the nature or the names of the gods, which would allow him to evaluate the correctness of their names. Instead, he will confine his analysis to the names humans use to speak of the gods and try to evaluate them based on human opinions about the gods.⁸⁴

Many commentators have interpreted Socrates' remarks to mean that he has doubts about his etymologies (e.g. Baxter, 1992, 160–163; Barney 2001, 57, and Sedley 2003, 99). They assume, however, that Socrates has acquired his skill in etymology from Euthyphro. This assumption combined with Socrates' talk of exorcising Euthyphro's inspiration might lead one to agree, but only a few commentators have considered the alternative that Euthyphro's inspiration does not impart etymological skill, but instead

⁸⁴ Baxter 1992, 12, claims that the distinction between the names the Gods use to speak of one another and the names humans use to speak about the gods is a distinction between a prescriptive and a descriptive use of names (cf. 391d7ff.). This distinction, however, cannot apply here, because Socrates clearly indicates that he and Hermogenes cannot know the names that the gods use, which implies that they cannot be prescriptive for us; nor could they be prescriptive for the gods because the gods have no need for any other names.

grants Socrates with knowledge sufficient to enable him to judge the correctness of names (e.g. Reeve 1998, xxvi–xxx). On this interpretation, Socrates’ anxiety about becoming too wise is the result of his pessimism about the knowledge of divine nature with which Euthyphro has inspired him. He denies having knowledge (cf. 391e–392b, 400d–401a7, 408b). At most, Socrates, therefore, trusts Euthyphro’s inspiration about the nature of the gods, which is the result of his inspired state. Socrates, however, implies here that he has doubts about the knowledge of divine nature Euthyphro’s inspiration imparts to him, which is why he here denies having any knowledge of the nature of the gods or the names the gods use. Euthyphro, therefore, provides Socrates at best with his opinion about the nature of the gods (cf. Baxter 1992, 91, who also stresses the importance of the transition (401a) from knowledge of the nature of the gods to human beliefs about the nature of the gods for the subsequent analysis). Socrates will proceed to evaluate the correctness of the names that humans use to speak of the gods on this basis.

In a series of racing metaphors, Socrates makes evident his doubts about Euthyphro’s inspiration.⁸⁵ When Socrates begs Hermogenes to change the subject of their examination, he indicates that he wishes to move on to an investigation in which they can see “what the horses of Euthyphro can do” (407d6). This is a veiled reference to Homer’s *Iliad* 5.221–2, where Aeneas hands over his chariot to the archer Lykoan, asking him to see if his Trojan horses will help stop Diomedes, whom Ares has made berserk and has consequently slaughtered many Trojans. Socrates replaces the Trojans with

⁸⁵ Barney 2001, 57–60, considers the metaphor evidence of the view that the etymologies represent a contest between Socrates and Cratylus. Sedley 2003, 156–157, reads the metaphor as a hint that Plato intends the etymologies to be a “philosophical curriculum designed to encourage work beyond physics and into ethics, something which Plato’s predecessors avoided.” It is hard to see, however, why Plato would employ this particular metaphor for this purpose. Sedley does not make it clear why this metaphor is effective.

Euthyphro to indicate that he will test Euthyphro's inspiration. Later Socrates indicates that he is "driving my apparent wisdom pretty hard at present" (πόρρω ἤδη, οἶμαι, φαίνομαι σοφίας ἐλάττωειν, 410e2), in which he again evokes doubts about Euthyphro's inspiration by suggesting that it is only apparent. Moreover, when he finishes his analysis of θαλλεῖν, he wonders if Hermogenes has noticed how he goes "off course when [he] get[s] on the flat" (414b2), suggesting that he has digressed from his examination of Euthyphro's inspiration. This remark shows that Euthyphro's inspiration has more to do with knowledge than analytical skill. Socrates has gone off course by analyzing ἀνδρεία further and further (413e). He has lost sight of the knowledge of nature that Euthyphro's inspiration imparts. Finally, toward the end of the examination, Socrates indicates that Euthyphro's inspiration is beginning to fail when he replies to Hermogenes' comments on the swifter pace of Socrates' analysis that it is "because I'm coming to the finishing post" (420d2). The racing metaphor, therefore, is not a witness to the view that Euthyphro's inspiration imparts knowledge rather than analytical skill; it also casts doubt on the Euthyphro's inspiration by illustrating how it is transitory and only apparent knowledge.

Socrates does not refute Euthyphro's inspiration because it makes no difference to his analysis of names. Even if Euthyphro's inspiration proves to impart false opinions about divine nature, it may nevertheless prove helpful in evaluating the correctness of names. Euthyphro's inspiration can be used to determine whether the names of the gods are correct based on his particular opinion about divine nature. Socrates saves his evaluation of the truth of Euthyphro's inspiration for the end of the dialogue because Socrates has misgivings about the view that nature is in flux, which the original makers

of names appear to have held (see chapter five). For now, Socrates argues that Euthyphro's inspiration supplies him with unexamined knowledge of divine nature such that he may judge the correctness of divine names. Whether or not Euthyphro's inspiration imparts real knowledge is a question that remains to be answered (438cff.).

In the end, naming depends on one's knowledge of nature. If one does not have knowledge of the nature of something, but merely an opinion about it, one cannot guarantee the correctness of its name. If one does have knowledge—through whatever means—then one can verify the correctness of a name.

5: An Examination of Names (397a2–421c1)

After Socrates claims that Euthyphro inspired him about the nature of the gods, he and Hermogenes begin a long examination of names. Commentators have long ignored this analysis on the assumption that it is an elaborate joke meant to parody the common practice of etymology in vogue during the late fifth and early fourth centuries (see Introduction).⁸⁶ This is no reason to ignore Socrates' analysis. It has a purpose, which is to “to find out whether names themselves will testify to us that they are not given by chance, but have some sort of correctness” (397a4). This remark turns out to mean that the examination will show how names reveal the opinions or beliefs of their makers. Names will expose how their makers shared the view of Heraclitus that nature is in flux. Several commentators have recently sought to verify that the examination lives up to this purpose (Barney 1998, 2001; Sedley 2003). These commentators argue that Socrates repudiates the examination at the end of the dialogue when he attacks the view that nature is in flux. Yet Socrates does no such thing. I will show that the examination of names demonstrates (1) that names can only reveal the opinions and beliefs of their makers, (2) that the original makers of names believed that nature is in flux, and (3) that Socrates does not repudiate the view that nature is in flux at the end of the dialogue; he only suggests that nature may in fact be stable (Levin 1995, 2001).

⁸⁶ For the view that the etymologies are simply wrong according to modern etymological standards, see e.g. Taylor 1964. For the contrary view see, e.g. Sallis 1975, 233–235, Sedley 2003. On the importance of etymologies in classical Athens see, among others, Sedley, 2003 and Baxter 1992. For the view that the etymologies are an elaborate hoax, see especially Taylor 1928, Goldschmidt 1940, Kirk 1951, Levinson 1957, Robinson 1969, Weingartner 1970, 22, Chen 1982, 91, Baxter 1992, Keller 2000, Barney 2001, 71.

Throughout the examination, Socrates mentions that his etymologies reveal only the opinions of the original makers of names (cf. 397e5; 399d10; 400b14; 402a13; 402d10; 404c1; 406b18; 407b2; 408a6). He highlights this point, however, at several crucial moments. At the beginning of the examination, Socrates explains that early inhabitants of Greece named the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies θεοί (to run) because they thought the planets were gods whose nature was to run across the sky (397b7–d5).⁸⁷ Later, when Socrates turns to an examination of the names of specific gods, he asks Hermogenes, “what do you think the person who gave Hestia her name had in mind by naming her that” (401b4)? Socrates’ concern is for the opinion of the person or persons responsible for naming Hestia. Finally, when Hermogenes asks Socrates to examine the names of the virtues, Socrates replies that such names make him wonder about the opinions and beliefs about nature of the original makers of names (411b). Clearly, the names of the virtues suggest to Socrates that their makers confused their own unstable condition with nature. Socrates’ point in all this seems clearly to be that the etymology of a name reveals the opinions or beliefs of the maker of the name.⁸⁸

Who are these name-makers and what, specifically, did they believe? In answer to the first question, Socrates vaguely suggests several candidates without providing any criterion for choosing between them. He mentioned earlier that the makers of names are legislators who are responsible for embodying the form of a name in matter (389d). Nevertheless, it seems that anyone who can perform such a task qualifies as a maker of

⁸⁷ Many commentators, including Robinson 1955, 104–105, and Baxter 1992, 109, have complained that Plato never considers the origins of language in the *Cratylus*. While it is generally true that Plato does not tend to speak of how names were first coined for things. There are a few passages where he does clearly speak of the original coining of a name—whether the coinage is ancient or modern.

⁸⁸ To the extent that the etymologies also reflect Socrates’ own view of nature, they serve as a kind of Platonic lexicon. See Benardete 1980/1 for further discussion.

names. He implied more recently that the poets might be name-makers (393a1). Homer seems to be responsible for naming Hector and Astyanax, and Hesiod appears to be responsible for naming the members of the house of Pelops as well as their divine ancestors Zeus, Kronos, and Ouranos (394eff.). His analyses of θεοί and Ἑστία demonstrate that the early inhabitants of Greece count as name-makers and the etymologies as a whole indicate that different people use different names depending on their particular conception of the things about which they are talking (397c–d, 401c1ff.). Without any criterion to decide who counts as a name-maker, we must assume that anyone counts as a name-maker so long as he or she has expertise in naming, i.e. is able to embody form in matter.

This view fits nicely with Socrates' vocabulary. During the examination of names, Socrates shifts from speaking of how the poets named things to how legislators name things and he continues to use 'legislator' for the rest of the examination (393e7ff.). If the poets were the only name-makers then Socrates would have continued to mention them specifically throughout the examination. Because he switches, however, from Homer and Hesiod to "legislator," it makes sense that the poets and the early Greeks are not the only legislators.

In answer to the second question—what did these name-makers believe?—Socrates argues that they shared Heraclitus' view that nature or being is in flux. To see this, we must take a closer look at Socrates' analysis of θεοί and Ἑστία and then take a quick look at the etymologies as a whole. Socrates begins the examination with θεοί (gods) because it establishes that the beliefs of the makers of names generally served as the foundation of names:

It seems to me that the first inhabitants of Greece believed only in those gods in which many foreigners still believe today—the sun, moon, earth, stars, and sky. And, seeing that these were always moving or running, they gave them the name ‘*theoi*’ because it was their nature to run (*thein*). Later, when they learned about the other gods, they called them all by that name. (397c7–d5)

In the case of θεοί, Socrates’ examination shows that the belief that the nature of the gods is in flux serves as the foundation of naming. Early inhabitants of Greece believed the sun, moon, earth, stars, and sky were gods. These entities always seem to run (θεῖν) across the sky, so early Greeks named them θεόντα (runners, 397d4).⁸⁹ When the Greeks learned about other gods (e.g. Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades), they continued to use the same name, even though it does not apply to these gods (398d3–5). Thus, Socrates derives θεοί from θεῖν, which means ‘to run.’⁹⁰ The meaning of θεοί, therefore, implies a kind of motion or flux.

Socrates makes flux especially prominent in his analysis of Ἔστιά.⁹¹

In the case of what we in Attic call ‘*ousia*’ (being), for example, some call it ‘*essia*’ and others ‘*ósia*’. First, then, it is reasonable, according to the second of these names, to call the being or essence (*ousia*) of things, ‘Hestia’. Besides, we ourselves say that what partakes of being ‘is’ (*estin*), so being is also correctly called ‘Hestia’ for this reason. We even seem to have called being ‘*essia*’ in ancient times. And, if one has sacrifices in mind, one will realize that the name-givers themselves understood matters in this way, for anyone who called the being or essence of all things ‘*essia*’ would naturally sacrifice to Hestia before all the other gods. On the other hand, those who use the name ‘*ósia*’ seem to

⁸⁹ Socrates’ etymology of θεοί is perhaps his most famous. In late antiquity, Christian Neo-Platonists including St. John Damascene and Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite borrowed Socrates’ etymology of θεοί for use in their theological writing from Proclus’ commentary on the *Cratylus*. Later, John Scotus Eriugena excerpts the etymology from his translation of Pseudo-Dionysius’ *Divine Names*. These means will carry this unique etymology over into medieval Europe and into later medieval thinking. However, modernity will lose Socrates’ etymology. The history of this etymology is significant because it reveals the tremendous influence it had over western philosophy up until the rise of modernity.

⁹⁰ Levin 1995, 98, suggests that Herodotus is Plato’s source for this etymology. cf. *Histories* II, 52.

⁹¹ Sedley 2003, 153, agrees that Hestia refers to being (οὐσία) and symbolizes the primacy of being while associating being with flux.

agree pretty much with Heraclitus' doctrine that the things that are are all flowing and that nothing stands fast—for the cause and originator of them is then the pusher (*ôthoun*), and so is well named 'ôsia'. But that's enough for us to say about this, since we know nothing. (401c2–d3)

Socrates gives two etymologies for Ἔστία. Initially, he asserts that Ἔστία comes from ἔσσία because Ἔστία sounds like ἔσσία, which some dialects use instead of οὐσία. Then he also argues that Ἔστία comes from ὠσία, which is a contraction of ὠθοῦν (one who pushes).⁹² In this etymology, Socrates gives us a clue about the beliefs of the original name-makers: the people who use ὠσία shared with Heraclitus the view that being or nature is in flux.⁹³

The view that nature is in flux surfaces again in the examination of ῥέα and κρόνος. According to Socrates, Homer, Hesiod, and Orpheus share Heraclitus' view that nature and being are in flux. Socrates claims that Heraclitus and Homer share some kind of wisdom that is as old as Rhea and Kronos. As evidence of this Socrates quotes Heraclitus' famous aphorism that no one can step into the same river twice, and interprets the aphorism to mean that everything flows (ῥόη) in the same way a river flows. Socrates proceeds to make use of this interpretation for an etymology of ῥέα and κρόνος. He argues that ῥέα comes from ῥόη. Ῥέα obviously comes from ῥόη because they are similar. He says nothing, however, about κρόνος, except to imply that it also comes from ῥόη. Reeve 1998, 33, suggests that κρόνος comes from κρούνος (spring) and so, in a way, it comes from ῥευματα. Socrates, however, does not give this account himself. At this point, Socrates passes to Τηθύς. Citing Homer, Hesiod and Orpheus, Socrates attempts to

⁹² Sedley 2003, 99, indicates, ὠσία is a Doric pronunciation.

⁹³ Sedley 2003, 102–103, points out that Ἔστία, “by its variation across Greek dialects, reflects an unavoidable conflation of such ‘being’ with Heraclitean fluidity, and instability.” From this, Sedley concludes that the conflation underlies the early name-givers’ inability to distinguish being and becoming.

show that their accounts of Τηθύς agree with Heraclitus' doctrine. Homer writes that Ocean, who is the origin of the gods, is the mother of Tethys and Hesiod "says pretty much the same" (402b5). Orpheus too writes that Ocean was the first to marry.

According to Orpheus, therefore, Ocean has the epithet "fair-flowing." Thus, at least for Homer and Orpheus, that Ocean is fair flowing and the origin of the gods indicates that Homer and Orpheus agree with Heraclitus' claim that everything flows.

A glance at all of the etymologies shows that flux and stability roughly separate them into two groups:

(1) Natural Kinds (397c–400d):

- a. Θεοί (gods) = θεῖν (to run)
- b. Δαίμονες (divinities) = δαίμονες (knowers)
- c. ἥρωες (hero) = ἔρωες (love), ἐρωτῶν (interrogators)
- d. ἄνθρωποι (human beings) = ἀναθρῶν ἃ ὄπωπε (the one who observes closely what he has seen)
 - i. ψυχή (soul) = ἀναψύχων (revitalization); φύσέχη (sustainer of nature)
 - ii. σῶμα (body) = σῆμα (tomb), σῆμα (sign), σῶμα (safe).

(2) Gods (400d–408e):

- a. ἐστία = οὐσία (being)
- b. ῥέα = ῥοή (flow)
- c. *κρόνος = κροῦνος (spring)
- d. τηθύς = διαπτώμενον (what is strained) + ἠθούμενον (what is filtered)
- e. ποσειδῶν = δεσμὸς τῶν ποδῶν (shackle around his feet), πολλὰ εἰδότες (knows many things), ὁ σείων (shaker)
- f. πλούτων = πλοῦτος (wealth)
 - i. αἶδης = ἀειδής (invisible); εἶδεναι (to know)
- g. δήμητηρ = διδοῦσα (who gives) + μήτηρ (mother)
- h. ἦρα = ἐρατή (lovely one); ἀήρ (air)
- i. φερρέφαττα = ἐπαφή τοῦ φερεομένου (one who comprehends what is being swept along)
 - i. *φερσεφόνη = φερεῖν φόνον (one who brings carnage)
- j. ἄπόλλων = *ἀπολλύων (one who destroys), ἀπολούων (one who washes), ἀπλοῦν (single-mindedness), ἀεὶ βάλλων (always shooting), ὁμοῦ πολόσις (moving together).
- k. μούσαι = μῶσθαι (to desire)
- l. λητώ = πρόκλητος (gentle) + ἐθέλημος (willing), λεῖον (smooth)
- m. ἄρτεμις = ἀρτεμές (soundness), ἀρετῆς ἵστωρ (seeker of virtue), ἄροτον μισησάσης (hater of intercourse)

- n. διόνυσος = ὁ διδοὺς τὸν οἶνον (one who gives wine)
 - i. οἶνος = οἶεσθαι νοῦν ἔχειν (to suppose that one has intelligence)
- o. ἀφροδίτη = ἄφρος (foam)
- p. ἀθηνᾶ = ἡ θεοῦ νόησις (God's thought), τὰ θεῖα νοοῦσα (one who has intelligence about divine things)
 - i. παλλᾶς = πάλλειν (to shake) + πάλλεσθαι (to be shaken)
- q. ἠφαιστος = φάεος ἴστωρ (seeker of light)
- r. ἄρης = ἄρρεν (virility), ἀνδρεία (courage).
- s. ἐρμῆς = τὸ εἶρειν ἐμήσατο (he who contrived speaking)
 - i. *ἐρμογένης (offspring of the one who contrived speaking)
- t. πᾶν = πᾶν ἀεὶ πολῶν (one who always keeps everything in circulation)

(3) The Earliest Gods (408e–410e):

- a. ἥλιος (sun) = ἀλιγζεῖν (to collect), ἀεὶ εἰλεῖν ἴων (always rolling), ποικιλλεῖ (to color)
- b. σελήνη (moon) = σέλας νέον καὶ ἔνον ἐχεῖ ἀεὶ (it always has old and new light)
 - i. μεῖς (month) = μειοῦσθαι (to grow smaller)
- c. ἀστρά (star) = ἀνάστρεφει τὰ ὄρα (it turns the eyes upward)
- d. πῦρ (fire) is a foreign word
 - i. ὕδωρ (water) is a foreign word
 - ii. κύων (dog) is a foreign word
- e. ἄηρ (air) = αἶρει (it raises), ἀεὶ ῥεῖ (always flowing), πνεῦμα (wind)
 - i. αἶθηρ (ether) = ἀεὶ θεῖ ῥέων (always running and flowing)
- f. γῆ (earth) = γαῖα (mother) = γέγαασι (to be born)
- g. ὄραι (seasons) = ὀριζεῖν (distinguish)
- h. ἐνιαυτος (year) = ἐν ἑαυτῶι ἔταζον (it passes things in review within itself)
 - i. ἔτος (year) = ἐν ἑαυτῶι ἔταζον (it passes things in review within itself)

(4) The Virtues (411a–416a6):

- a. φρόνησις (prudence) = φορᾶς ῥοῦ νόησις (one who understands motion and flow, one who longs for new motion and flow), φορᾶς ὄνησις (one who enjoys motion)
 - i. γνώμη (recognition) = γονῆς νόμησις (to examine or study whatever is begotten)
 - ii. νόησις (thought) = νεοῦ ἔσις (one who longs for the new)
- b. σωφροσύνη (temperance) = σωτερία (preservation) + φρόνησις (prudence)
 - i. ἐπιστήμη (knowledge) = ἔπομενης τῆς ψυχῆς τῆς ἀξίας (the worthy soul who follows)
 - ii. σύνεσις (comprehension) = συλλογισμός (calculation), συνιέναι (to go along with)
 - iii. σοφία (wisdom) = ἐσυθή (rush)+ἐπαφή (grasp)
 - iv. ἀγαθόν (good) = ἀγαστόν (admirable) + θοοῦ (fast)
- c. δικαιοσύνη (justice) = δικαίου (just) + σύνησις (comprehension, to go along with)
 - i. δικάιον (just) = δίαιον (goes through), δι' ὃ (through which)
 - ii. ἀδικία (unjust) = *ἀδιαίον (not going through)

- d. ἀνδρεία (courage) = ἀνρεῖα (flowing back)
- i. ἄρρεν (male) = ἄνω ροή (upward flow)
 - ii. ἄνηρ (man) = ἄνω ροό (upward flow)
 - iii. γυνή (woman) = γονή (womb)
 - iv. θήλυς (female) = θήλη (nipple)
 - v. θήλη (nipple) = τεθήλεια (to flourish)
- e. τέχνη (craft) = ἔξις νοῦ (having intelligence, having a longing of the new)
- i. κατόπτρον (mirror) = κατα (opposite) + ὄπτω (I see)
 - ii. *σφίνξ (sphinx) = φίκιον (A mountain in Boeotia)
 - iii. μηχανή (device) = ἄνειν ἐπὶ πολὺ (accomplishment) + μῆκος (great)
- f. κακία (vice) = κακῶς ἶον (going badly)
- i. δειλία (cowardice) = δεσμός (shackle) + λίαν (too much)
 - ii. ἀπορία (perplexity) = ἀ (privative) + πορεύεσθαι (to cross)
- g. ἀρετή (excellence) = ἀεὶ ῥέον (always flowing)
- h. κάκον (bad) is a foreign word
- (5) The Varieties of Beauty and Goodness (416a7–419b4):
- a. αἰσχρόν (ugly) = ἀεὶ ἴσχει τὸν ῥοῦν (it always restrains their flowing)
 - b. καλόν (beauty) = καλοῦν (use a name)
 - c. ξύμμερον (advantageous) = συμ (together) + φορά (movement)
 - d. κερδαλέον (gainful) = κεράννυται πάντα (it regulates everything)
 - e. λυσιτελοῦν (profitable) = λοῦν (one who does away with) + τέλος (the end)
 - f. ὠφέλιμον (beneficial) = ποιεῖν αὖχην (to make grow)
 - g. ἀσύμμερον (disadvantageous) = ἀ (privative) + συμ (together) + φορά (movement)
 - h. ἀκερδαλές (non-gainful) = ἀ (privative) + κεράννυται πάντα (it regulates everything)
 - i. ἀλυσιτελές (unprofitable) = ἀ (privative) + λοῦν (one who does away with) + τέλος (the end)
 - j. ἀνωφελές (non-beneficial) = ἀ (privative) + κεράννυται πάντα (it regulates everything)
 - k. βλαβερόν (harmful) = τὸ βουλόμενον ἀπτεῖν ῥοῦν (what wishes to grasp the flow)
 - l. ζημιῶδες (hurtful) = δοῦν τὸ ἴον (what shackles motion)
 - m. δέον (obligation) = δεσμός (shackle), δῖον (passing through)
 - n. ἡμερα (day) = ἡμείρουσιν (they long for it), ἡμερα (gentle)
 - o. ζυγόν (yoke) = δυοῖν ἀγώγην (it leads two)
- (6) Pleasure and Pain (419b5–420b5):
- a. ἡδονή (pleasure) = ἡ ὄνησις (enjoyment)
 - b. λυπή (pain) = διάλυσις (weakening)
 - c. ἀνία (sorrow) = ἀ (privative) + ἵεναι (motion)
 - d. ἀλγηδον (distress) = ἀλγείνος (distressing; a foreign name)
 - e. ὄδυσση (grief) = ἐνδυσσις (entering in)
 - f. ἄχθηδον (affliction) = ἄχθος δῶν (giving a burden)
 - g. χάρα (joy) = διαχυσσις (outpouring) + ροή (flow)

- h. τέρψις (delight) = τερπνόν (delightful) = ἔρψις (glides) + πνοή (breath)
 - i. εὐφροσύνη (lightheartedness) = εὖ συμφήρεσθαι (moving well together)
 - j. ἐπιθυμία (appetite) = ἐπὶ τὸν θύμον ἴουσα (going against the spirited part)
 - k. θυμός (spirit, anger) = θυσίς (raging)
 - l. ἕμερος (desire) = ἰέμενος ῥεῖ (flows with a rush)
 - m. πόθος (longing) = ποῦ (elsewhere)
 - n. ἔρωσ (erotic love) = ἔσρος (influx)
- (7) Opinion (410b6–420e5):
- a. δόξα (opinion) = δίωξις (pursuit) or τόξον (bow)
 - b. οἶσις (thinking) = οἴσις (motion)
 - c. βουλή (planning) = βολή (hit, target)
 - d. βούλεσθαι (wishing) = βουλεύεσθαι
 - e. βουλεύεσθαι (deliberating) = ἐφίεσθαι (aiming at something)
 - f. ἀβουλία (lack of planning) = ἀτυχία (failure to get something)
 - g. ἀνάγκη (compulsion) = ἄγκη (ravine)
 - h. ἤκουσιον (voluntary) = εἶκον τῷ ἴοντι (yielding to the motion)
 - i. ἀντίτυπνον (resistant) = ἀνάγκη
- (8) The Finest and Most Important Names (421a–c):
- a. ὄνομα (name) = ὄν ὅν μάσμα ἔστιν (a being of which there is a search)
 - b. ἀλήθεια (truth) = ἀλήθεια (a divine wondering)
 - c. ψεῦδος (falsehood) = ψ + καθεύδουσι (to put people asleep)
 - d. ὄν or οὐσία (being) = ἴον (going), ἴουσα (going)
 - e. οὐκ ὄν (non-being) = οὐκ ἴον (not going)

As one can see, almost all of the etymologies in (3)–(8) deal with flux. The few that do not have a different purpose. Most of the etymologies in (1) and (2) deal with flux.

Hesiod’s genealogy explains the etymologies that do not. Socrates bases (2) on (1), and (1) follows the previous examination of names of the members of the house of Pelops but in reverse order (cf. 394e9ff.). Where that examination began with Orestes, a man, and ascended toward Ouranos, a god, the present examination begins with θεοί and descends to ἄνθρωπος, after which Hermogenes selects and organizes the names they examine (see chapter nine). Following Hermogenes’ lead, Socrates develops (1) by examining the names of specific gods (Brumbaugh 1957, 503). In all, Socrates’ analysis of the names of the members of the house of Pelops serves as an outline for the examination of names (cf.

397a5). The etymologies in (1) and (2), therefore, show that names disclose the belief of their makers in flux.

The view that nature is in flux comes most explicitly to the foreground when Hermogenes asks Socrates to examine the names of the virtues (ἀρεταί, 411a ff.).⁹⁴ Socrates agrees, but before he begins, he claims that these names have inspired him to think that the original makers of names not only based the names they coined on their beliefs about nature but also that they believed nature is in flux:

By the dog, I think that's pretty good inspiration—what popped into my mind just now! Most of our wise men nowadays get so dizzy going around and around in their search for the nature of the 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 and steadfast, but flowing and moving, full of every sort of motion and constant coming into being. (411b4–c5)

Socrates does not say explicitly who the ancient or contemporary wise men are.

Nevertheless, it is clear that his target in both cases is Heraclitus. Socrates observes that ancient wise men are very similar to contemporary wise men in that they share the belief that nature is in flux.⁹⁵ Both groups confuse how things appear to them with how things actually are. Because of the confusion they suffer, ancient wise men blame nature for how it appears instead of blaming their own condition. This confusion presents nature as if it were in flux, which led the makers of names to coin names that disclose nature as if it were in flux.

⁹⁴ Ryle notes, “especially from 411 B, nearly all of the suggested root words are verbs” (1960, p. 444). This curiosity, Ryle suggests, implies that nouns are reducible to verbs, or in other words, things are reducible to actions. Ryle adds that Plato may have been suggesting that actions rather than beings underlie Heracliteanism.

⁹⁵ Mackenzie 1986, 136, insists 411b is a hypothesis but this seems irrelevant.

Commentators have lately paid a great deal of attention to this passage because it is here where the Heraclitean character of the name-makers' beliefs becomes supremely evident (cf. Thomas 2007, Riley 2005, Sedley 2003, Barney 2001, Joseph 2000, and Baxter 1992 on the importance of this passage). Sedley 2003, 64–65, credibly argues that this passage marks a shift from a simple exposition of the basis for the natural correctness of names to criticism of it:

The overall outcome of [Socrates'] survey of names, as I shall read it, is that in their theology and cosmology the early name-givers proved themselves to have privileged access to numerous important insights, but in that area of discourse, which Socrates and Plato were later to make their own, and which in the proper domain of the dialectician, namely the vocabulary of moral and intellectual value, they shared the relativism characteristic of early Greek thought, and embodied this mistaken outlook in a series of names which placed radical instability at the root of goodness and understanding.

More specifically, he insists that Socrates considers the name-makers correct to base the names they coined on their belief that the natures of the gods, the planets, and other cosmological phenomena are in flux. These natures do change because all sensible things change (Sedley 2003, 108–109). Thus, the name-makers coined naturally correct names because they understood that sensible things are in flux. Sedley, however, continues to argue that Socrates thinks that the natures of the virtues are in flux. Knowledge remains knowledge despite the fact that it may concern different things. Therefore, when the name-makers coined the names for the virtues, they did so based on the incorrect assumption that the nature of the virtues is in flux. According to Sedley, where the etymologies in (1)–(2) were “exegetically” and “philosophically” correct, to the extent that they disclosed the meaning and nature of the things named, the etymologies in (3)–(8) are only “exegetically” correct because they do not disclose such natures.

Sedley’s argument is appealing for three reasons: first, it makes sense of the fact that the etymologies can be divided into two groups: (1)–(2) and (3)–(8); second, it explains the swifter pace of Socrates’ analysis in (4)–(8) (cf. Hermogenes’ remarks at 420c12); and, third, it accounts for Socrates’ doubts about the view that nature is in flux (403b, where he speaks of the possibility that people may be mistaken about the nature of Hades; and at 409d, where he claims that πῦρ and ὕδωρ are foreign names).⁹⁶ To date, Sedley’s interpretation of the etymologies best explains the evidence given in the dialogue.⁹⁷ Like many others, however, Sedley makes an assumption that is far from justified in the dialogue. He presumes that Socrates—and Plato—consider the view that nature is in flux wrong with no evidence to justify this presumption (see also Thomas 2007, Riley 2005, Verlinsky 2003, Barney 2001, Keller 2000, and Baxter 1992).

Socrates’ comments about the condition of the original name-giver at 411b serves only to emphasize that the correctness of names depends on the beliefs of their makers and that they coined names on the view that nature is in flux. A name is only as good as the truth of the belief on which it is based. It appears to Socrates that nature confused the original name-givers and that these same name-givers based the names they coined on their confusion. In doing so, they may have named things incorrectly. If nature is the cause of their confusion then the names that they coined to disclose nature are correct. If

⁹⁶ Socrates raises the possibility that the correctness of names depends on the truth or falsehood of opinions or beliefs about nature in his examination of Hades. Socrates argues that people generally use the name πλούτων more often than his other name, αἰδης (“unseen”), because they are afraid of what they cannot see (αἰδέεσθαι) and refuse to call Pluto Αἰδης as a consequence (Levin 1995, 98, indicates that Homer is likely to be Plato’s source for this etymology. See *Iliad* v. 844–845.). About this fear, Socrates alleges that people’s mistaken view of Hades causes them to fear the god. Because people are generally afraid to die and they go to Hades when they die, they associate their fear of death with Hades.

⁹⁷ Thomas 2007, 222–223, challenges Sedley’s interpretation in order to provide one of her own, but her exposition of Sedley’s view is far from sufficient and shows misunderstandings of it that vitiates anyone from embracing her criticisms and her own interpretation of the etymologies.

nature, however, is not the cause of their confusion then the names they coin will not be correct. Socrates does not try to argue that nature is one or another. He leaves unexamined and unresolved whether nature is responsible for the fluctuating condition of the original makers of names. He goes on to show in (3)–(8) that names are correct to the extent that they show the original makers of names to have believed that nature is in flux. Socrates corroborates this view at the end of the examination when he argues that ὄν and οὐσία come from ἰόν and ἵουσα (going, 421b). The fact that ὄν and οὐσία come from ἰόν and ἵουσα exhibits the name-makers' preference for the view that nature is in flux

The view, however, that Socrates repudiates the etymologies by casting doubt on the belief that nature is in flux is not baseless. Socrates makes use of the same imagery of confused name-makers at 439cff. to attack flux and to proceed to defend the view that nature is stable:

Are we or aren't we to say that there is a beautiful itself, and a good itself, and the same for each one of the things that are?—I think we are, Socrates.—Let's not investigate whether a particular face or something of that sort is beautiful then, or whether all such things seem to be flowing, but let's ask this instead: Are we to say that the beautiful itself is always such as it is?—Absolutely—But if it is always passing away, can we correctly say of it first that it is *this*, and then that it is *such and such*? Or, at the very instant we are speaking, isn't it inevitably and immediately becoming a different thing and altering and no longer being as it was?—It is.—Then if it never stays the same, how can it *be* something? After all, if it ever stays the same, it clearly isn't changing—at least, not during that time; and if it always stays the same is always the same thing, so that it never departs from its own form, how can it ever change or move?—There's no way. (439c7–e5)

Socrates manages to persuade Cratylus, who believes in flux (cf. 440e1), that being or nature is stable.⁹⁸ He does so by first securing Cratylus' agreement that there are such

⁹⁸ There are many disputes about this argument. The main one concerns whether the argument succeeds in establishing the existence of the forms. Some commentators consider the argument an infantile version of the theory of forms (e.g. Irwin 1977, 2). Others see it as much more mature (e.g. Kahn 1973,

things as beauty and goodness and that these things can exist on their own, independent of particular instances of beauty and goodness. Socrates is not interested in beautiful or good things. He wants to focus on beauty itself. If beauty exists, it must always remain what it is, i.e. it must always be beautiful (cf. Sedley 2003, 169). Otherwise, it will not be beauty because it will always be something else. If this were the case, we could never speak of it. To speak of beauty requires that it remain what it is. If beauty were always becoming something else, we could never say that it is beauty itself. Moreover, if beauty were always becoming something else, it would never seem to be anything at all. The moment beauty becomes something else it is no longer beauty. In addition, if beauty is always becoming something else, it is never beauty.

If Cratylus believes in flux, why does he make any of these concessions? Barney 2001, 152, suggests that Cratylus grants that beauty and goodness exist only in the sense that there is always something that is beautiful or good. What is beautiful is beautiful in all cases, and “perhaps, at most, that this thing, beauty is in every case the same.” According to Barney, Socrates’ argument requires Cratylus to admit that such beings exist in the sense that there is always something beautiful. The existence of beautiful things implies only that there will always be at least one thing that counts as beautiful.

Most of the recent commentators rightly treat the claim that “the beautiful itself is always such as it is” (ἀλλ’ αὐτό, φῶμεν, τὸ καλὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ ἐστὶν οἷόν ἐστιν) as

171, and Mackenzie 1986, 13). The fact that the passage is replete with form-talk (i.e. the beautiful itself, the good itself, etc.), begins with dreams (439c7), and contrasts readily acceptable forms like the forms of beauty and goodness with the form of name serves as evidence that the argument does concern the theory of forms, although Silverman 2001, 32 finds this evidence unconvincing. Recent commentators doubt the importance of such a dispute in helping to provide an interpretation of the argument (Thomas 2008, 358, and Sedley 2003, 167–8). The purpose of the argument, I will show, is not to justify the existence of forms, but to question the authority of Heraclitean beliefs of the original makers of names, and thereby to shatter Cratylus’ confidence in such men.

referring to the fact that beauty is self-predicating. It is true to say of beauty that it at least is beautiful (Sedley 2003, 168–9, and Silverman 2001, 40; cf. Vlastos 1954, 324, and Kahn 1966).⁹⁹ One, however, should not assume that self-predication excludes other kinds of predication (Silverman 2001, 40).¹⁰⁰ Socrates rejects an investigation of beautiful things because he is not concerned about them. His rejection, however, does not entail a denial that beauty can be predicated of things. He is interested in learning what beauty is, and insists upon an investigation that focuses on this question.

Once Socrates establishes that beauty must be stable if it is self-predicating he turns to the manner in which beauty is recognized (γνωσθεῖν):¹⁰¹

Then again it can't even be known by anyone. For at the very instant that the knower-to-be approaches, what he is approaching is becoming a different thing, of a different character so that he can't yet come to know either what sort of thing it is or what it is like—surely, no kind of knowledge is knowledge of what isn't in any way.—That's right.—Indeed, it isn't even reasonable to say that there is such a thing as knowledge, Cratylus, if all things are passing on and none remain. For if that thing itself, knowledge, did not pass on from being knowledge, then knowledge would always remain, and there would *be* such a knowledge. On the other hand, if the very form of knowledge passed on from being knowledge, the instant it passed on into a different form than that of knowledge, there would be no knowledge. And if it were always passing on, there would always be no knowledge. Hence, on this account, no one could know anything and nothing could be known either. But if there is always that which knows and that which is known, if there are such things as the beautiful, the good, and each one of the things that are, it doesn't

⁹⁹ Self-predication lies at the root of Sedley's interpretation of the final argument (2003, 169). He fails, however, to clarify which sort of self-predication he means. Self-predication is ambiguous; it could mean that beauty is a beautiful thing, which, as many commentators have noted is problematic (cf. Silverman 2001). It could also mean that it is that beauty is true (cf. Kahn 1966). My interpretation of self-predication follows Kahn 1966.

¹⁰⁰ Silverman appears to owe this observation to Mackenzie 1986, 138, who points out that Socrates allows forms to be stable in one respect but fluctuating in another, although he does not explore this possibility because the argument operates, she claims, “on the explicit disjunction of total stability and total flux.”

¹⁰¹ Reeve 1998 translates γνωσθεῖν as “knowledge” in the passage below.

appear to me that these things can be at all like flowings or motions, as we were saying just now they were. (439e6–440b9)

Socrates argues that if beauty changes then no one could recognize it.¹⁰² For while a person approaches beauty, it changes so that by the time someone recognizes beauty it has become something entirely different. The result is that recognition of beauty is impossible.¹⁰³ Cratylus admits that if beauty changes then no one could recognize it.¹⁰⁴ Socrates, however, exacerbates the conclusion. If reality changes then recognition is impossible, unless recognition itself changes. Nevertheless, if recognition itself changes then it never remains recognition. At the very moment when recognition changes into something else, it ceases to exist. If recognition, therefore, changes, there is no recognition at all. If instead recognition exists then recognition must never change and must remain the same.¹⁰⁵ If recognition of reality exists, however, then reality must not change. Socrates concludes that, since they agree that beings like beauty and goodness exist, reality must not change.

¹⁰² Joseph 2000, 83, suggests that if a person changes while recognizing something then recognition itself would change, becoming “empty and absurd.”

¹⁰³ Silverman 2001, 33, incorrectly reads this line of argumentation as indicating that anything that remains what it is in some respect would be inconsistent with Heracliteanism.

¹⁰⁴ Barney 2001, 151, argues that Socrates and Cratylus assumed but have not shown that there is such a thing as knowledge. However, Cratylus explicitly agreed at 439d2 that beauty, goodness, and knowledge of them is possible. Thus, it is not an assumption, except in a very literal sense.

¹⁰⁵ Again, Silverman 2001, 37, is helpful here in showing how the argument demands comprehensive knowledge by applying the conclusion to primary names: “To know any one element requires that one know its relation to, or powers of combination with, the other elements. Thus, the entire field or ‘science’ becomes the primary object of knowledge. We thus eschew the simplicity both of the Form and its attendant first *onoma*. No longer is there a basic similarity between a first *onoma* and its referent. Instead, we have a web of similar and dissimilar, to adopt the language of Speusippus, such that to know any one Form or element requires that one know them all.” Thus, to recognize the form that a letter imitates, one must recognize what each letter is and how they differ from one another. The same argument applies to primary and secondary names.

Calvert 1970, 40–41, argues that Socrates contradicts himself in shifting from “that which is never in the same state” at 439e to “that which is in no state” at 440a. Calvert insists that this conflation is a mistake. The expressions “that which is never in the same state” and “that which is in no state” differ. Something that is never in the same state is always in the process of changing into a different state. Yet something that is in no state is not in any process of change. Nevertheless, Socrates’ concern is recognition, and Calvert fails to address whether or not Plato’s mistake affects one’s ability to recognize beauty. It seems not to because recognition can be equally denied of something that is never in the same state because it is constantly changing, and something that is in no state because it must be recognizable in order to be recognized.

No commentator has overlooked the last argument, but they go too far in claiming Socrates refutes the view that nature is in flux when he refuses to admit that he does:

So whether I’m right about these things or whether the truth lies with Heraclitus and many others isn’t an easy matter to investigate. 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, nor will he condemn both himself and the things that are as totally unsound and all flowing like leaky pots, or believe that things are exactly like people with runny noses, or that all things are afflicted with colds and drip over everything. It’s certainly possible that things are that way [...] but it is also possible that they are not. (440b9–d4).

Having derided the view that nature is in flux, Socrates retreats from claiming a refutation. It is not easy to determine whether Heraclitus is correct or incorrect in thinking that reality changes. Because names have been shown to be inconsistently coined and that the majority of them are likely to be based on the view that nature

changes, one should not trust names or the men who originally coined them.¹⁰⁶ If someone were to put one's faith in names, the knowledge that one would acquire would be unreliable for the reasons already given. Not only would such knowledge be unreliable because an uncertain and unexamined view of nature is the basis for it but such knowledge would be unreliable also because names were necessary to acquire it (cf. 438d). Moreover, if someone were to put one's faith in the coiners of names then the knowledge that one would acquire from them would also be unreliable. It would be unreliable because they hold a questionable view of reality. They are, consequently, afflicted in the same way a person suffering a cold is afflicted. Their condition is runny. Thus, anyone who puts one's trust in the coiners of names based on this view puts one's faith in men who cannot distinguish their own afflicted condition from reality. One who trusts names and the coiners of them adopts for oneself an afflicted condition.

Socrates admits that the view that nature changes is possible. He insists, however, that the opposite view is also possible.¹⁰⁷ Why does Socrates insist that Heracliteanism is still possible? He does so because none of his arguments has disproved the claim that nature changes.¹⁰⁸ Socrates has shown only that if this view is true then knowledge is

¹⁰⁶ Barney 2001, 157–158, contends that the final argument of the dialogue (1) shows that Socrates' actions accord with his words insofar as he forces a shift in the conversation away from names to beings, (2) "inoculate[s] us" against Heracliteanism after the etymological survey has tried so hard to convince us that names disclose beings in flux, and (3) justifies the rejection of Protagorean relativism, which was not argued for but merely agreed to by the interlocutors (384e4–386e5).

¹⁰⁷ Barney 2001, 112, argues that the *Cratylus* concludes on a note of pessimism. At the end of the dialogue, Socrates remains pessimistic about nature's role in the correctness of names because of the need to supplement convention. On the contrary, I argue that Socrates' pessimism lies in his simultaneous repudiation and vindication of conventionalism and naturalism.

¹⁰⁸ See Thomas 2008, 359 who argues that there is an intermediate position between radical flux and extreme stability that Socrates' favors without explicitly defending. I would argue that Socrates does not explicitly embrace such a view because he is more interested in making Cratylus aware of the fact that Heraclitean flux is not an essential feature of the correctness of names.

impossible and nothing can exist. If one doubts that knowledge is possible as skeptics tend to do then one is free to deny that nature is stable. It is conceivable that nature changes so long as existence and knowledge are not predicated of it. Furthermore, Socrates' ignorance prevents him from positively asserting that knowledge of nature is possible (383b–c, 391a, cf.). If we take him seriously then he does not have knowledge, which is sufficient evidence for his retreat. Nevertheless, if one hopes to determine the correctness of names, one must decide whether nature is stable or in flux. Only then can one learn whether names are correct or incorrect.

At the end of Socrates' long analysis of names we have learned that the original makers of names coined names based on their opinion of nature, and that these opinions were Heraclitean in character. These artisans thought that nature is in flux. The result of these discoveries is that names are naturally correct to the extent that they disclose the opinions of the original makers of names. This implies that the correctness of names depends on the truth or falsehood of the opinions of the original makers of names. If it is true that nature is in flux, then the names that disclose this opinion will be correct and the names that disclose the opposite opinion will be incorrect. If it is not true that nature is in flux, then any name that discloses such an opinion will be incorrect and any name that discloses the opposite opinion will be correct. Or, further, if it is true that nature is in flux but also not true that it is, any name that reveals this opinion will be correct and any name that discloses the opposite opinion will be incorrect. In the end, the original name-makers coined names based on their opinion that nature and being are in flux. For this reason, one can judge names naturally correct to the extent that they reflect the true or false opinions of the original makers of names, which require further examination.

6: Imitation (421c2–427c9)

After an extensive analysis of various Greek names, Socrates and Hermogenes have shown that names are naturally correct because they reveal and distinguish nature. They have yet to discover *how* names manage to do this (Barney 2001, 82). Socrates will now suggest that names are correct because they are imitations of nature in the same way a portrait is an imitation of a person. Just as portrait-paint imitates a person's features, so letters (γράμματα) imitate the essential features of reality: motion and rest. Commentators typically reject this view (e.g. Ackrill 1964, 611). Barney 2001, 93, however, defends the theory:

the mimetic principle in the *Cratylus* is not merely the speculative thesis that our actual names originated in onomatopoeia, nor a vague claim to the effect that sound may influence meaning, but a robust theory of what names essentially *are* (imitations), how names *mean* (via the *dunameis* of their letters), and what makes a name—or any linguistic expression—*correct* (resemblance).

I will refine Barney's thesis by showing how letters imitate the motion and rest of reality.

When Socrates finishes his analysis of ὄνομα, ἀλήθεια, ψεῦδος, and ὄν, Hermogenes asks him to examine ἰόν (going), ῥέον (flowing), and δοῦν (shackling, 421c2–5). Socrates indicates that there are two ways of accounting for the correctness of these names: (1) they might be foreign (βαρβαρικόν),¹⁰⁹ or (2) they might be old. If they were foreign then they would be unfamiliar (ὄ ἄν μὴ γινώσκωμεν). Because they do seem to be meaningful, however, Socrates concedes that they are probably not foreign.

¹⁰⁹ To say ἰόν, ῥέον, and δοῦν are βαρβαρικόν is really to suggest that they are nonsensical. The pronunciation of βαρβαρικόν is onomatopoeic; it represents the speech sounds the Greeks heard when a foreigner spoke. To them, foreign speech sounded like nonsense. However, it seems hardly the case that ἰόν, ῥέον, and δοῦν are nonsense. Socrates and Hermogenes agree that they are meaningful. For this reason, they cannot be βαρβαρικόν.

Instead, they may be very old, and, if they are, their original meanings might have become obscured by changes in their pronunciation (cf. 414c–d). Luckily, it is possible that foreign names preserve the pronunciation of the oldest Greek ones. In this case, Socrates and Hermogenes can compare the present pronunciation of these words with their foreign counterparts to learn their old pronunciation, without analyzing foreign words directly. In doing so, they may be able to recover the original pronunciation of these names and figure out their original meaning.

The fact that these names might be foreign does not prevent Socrates and Hermogenes from pursuing an investigation of them. One may compare their current pronunciation to their foreign counterparts to learn their old pronunciation. In this way, Socrates and Hermogenes could learn the original meanings of these words. Moreover, because these words play a crucial role in the previous examination of names, Socrates and Hermogenes must investigate them in order to ensure that the previous examination is complete.

The best way to investigate ἰόν, ῥέον, and δοῦν is to break them down into their constituent parts. Socrates, however, does not recommend this approach:

At what point would he be right to stop? Wouldn't it be when he reaches the names that are as it were the elements [στοιχεῖα] of all the other statements and names? For, if these are indeed elements, it cannot be right to suppose that *they* are composed out of other names. Consider 'agathos' ('good'), for example; we said it is composed out of 'agaston' ('admirable') and 'thoon' ('fast'). And probably 'thoon' is composed out of other names, and those out of still other ones. But if we ever get hold of a name that isn't composed out of other names, we'll be right to say that at last we've reached an element, which cannot any longer be carried back to other names. (422a2–b3, Reeve's emphasis)

Socrates thinks that anyone who employs a method that continually divides names into their constituents must eventually reach a limit.¹¹⁰ If a person keeps dividing names into their constituents, he must eventually reach indivisible names. When he reaches these basic names, he must stop and adopt a different approach in order to learn how such names are correct. Socrates suggests that the elements (στοιχεῖα) of statements and names limit such analysis (On the various senses of στοιχεῖα, see Burkert 1959). When he reaches the elements of names, he will not be able to analyze the elements any further.

Socrates uses ἀγαθός to illustrate the problem. Ἀγαθός is a contraction of ἀγαστόν and θοῦν (412c). These names probably consist of other names, which consist of still other names. If one were to divide ἀγαθός into more and more basic names, and reach a name that cannot be further divided, he will have reached a primary name (πρῶτος ὄνομα). Socrates proposes that ἰόν, ῥέον, δοῦν are primary names (422b5). If so, they will require an altogether different approach than the names they make up to determine whether they are correct (Lorenz and Mittelstrass 1967, 10).

Socrates distinguishes between primary and secondary names (πρῶτος καὶ ὑστάτος). Only one kind of correctness of names applies equally to primary and secondary names (422c6–9; see Sedley 2003, 126–127, for further discussion). Now the correctness of the secondary names so far examined consisted in the fact that their function is to disclose and distinguish nature, but it is not obvious that primary names share this function (Annas 1982, 107). If the correctness of names is the same for primary and secondary names then primary names must disclose and distinguish nature in the

¹¹⁰ Sedley 2003, 129, notes that this is the only place in the *Cratylus* where Socrates introduces the method of division so frequently discussed in the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*. On the importance of this passage in determining the relation of the *Cratylus* to other dialogues such as the *Sophist* and the *Philebus*, see Barney 2001, 83. Sedley fails to observe that Socrates introduces this method explicitly in order ultimately to reject it as a suitable method of dealing with primary names.

same way that secondary names do. Their common function, however, should not obscure the difference between them. Secondary names depend on primary names to disclose and distinguish nature (422d8).

How do primary names do this? Socrates suggests that they do it through imitation (μίμησις). If a man lacked a larynx and a tongue with which to articulate speech, the man would use his hands, head, and the rest of his body to communicate.¹¹¹ If the person wished to say something about something above them, he or she might point upward. If the person wished to say something about something below them, he or she might point downward. If the person wished to say something about a galloping horse or any other animal, he or she might use his or her body to imitate the galloping horse. In each of these cases, Socrates argues that people imitate (μιμεῖται) the things about which they wish to speak.

Socrates applies imitation to speech as well. Since the larynx, tongue, and mouth are parts of the body, they do not seem to differ from the other parts the body uses to communicate a galloping horse. If the body communicates through imitation, the larynx, tongue, and mouth must also somehow communicate through imitation. This claim would implicate speech, since speech is the product of the larynx, tongue, and mouth. Socrates concludes that a name, which he and Hermogenes have already agreed is a part of speech (387c6), must be a vocal sort of imitation. When someone speaks, his larynx, tongue, and mouth imitate nature. The problem with this conclusion is that an imitation of the sound a

¹¹¹ Larynx” translates “φωνή. Commentators have overlooked Socrates’ emphasis on the body in the present argument: “the only way to express anything by means of the body is to have our body imitate whatever we want to express” (423a8–10). This claim applies to φωνή only in a physical sense. When we speak, we use the mouth, the tongue, and the *larynx* to imitate nature. See below for further discussion.

galloping horse makes could count as its name. If this is unacceptable then there must clearly be a distinction of some kind between a name and an imitation (Joseph 2000, 60).

This problem troubles Hermogenes. If a name is not a vocal sort of imitation, what kind of imitation is it? Before Socrates answers this question, he explains why a name cannot be a vocal sort of imitation.¹¹² If one were to imitate something in the same way that a musician might, namely, through music, one would not name anything at all. Nor would one be able to imitate something if one's imitation were vocal.

The argument denies the problem. According to Socrates, if a person considered speech akin to music then one must view names as sophisticated interpretations of animal sounds. Under these circumstances, the phrase "galloping horse" would be nothing more than a version of the sound a galloping horse makes. Names would be nothing more than elaborate interpretations of bleating sheep, crowing cocks, and galloping horses.

The same argument applies if they attempt to imitate the things music imitates.¹¹³ Things have incidental features such as sound, shape, and color. Naming does not imitate such incidental features. These belong to music and painting. Music imitates the passions or moods of things and the sounds they make to express them. Painting imitates the shapes and colors of things. Naming does not clearly imitate any obvious part of an object, nor does it clearly imitate the object in its entirety because it would incorporate

¹¹² Many commentators seem somehow to have overlooked this part of the discussion (Ackrill 1964, 611, Barney 2001, 89). Sedley 2003 continues to describe the sort of imitation as vocal long after Socrates and Hermogenes have rejected it. He seems to think that their rejection is limited to the referent rather than the word itself, i.e. that words are not vocal imitations of the sounds things make, but they are vocal insofar as they are a product of the mouth, tongue, and larynx. However, this account makes nonsense of imitation in this context and explains why so many commentators see this discussion as ridiculous.

¹¹³ One should not understand "music" in our modern sense. The Greeks considered music broadly to be anything belonging to the muses. To this extent, music encompassed literature, fine art, rhapsody, and music in our sense. See *Oxford Classical Dictionary* q.v. Music.

the qualities that music and painting imitate (contra Ross 1951, 18–23). How, then, does a name imitate an object? Socrates argues that each thing has its own being (οὐσία).¹¹⁴ This claim should come as no surprise since Socrates and Hermogenes established that being belongs to each thing as its nature (387d1). The difference is that this agreement no longer applies to the being of things in general. It could be easily confused with the being of color, shape, or sound, which might also belong to each thing. Instead, their agreement now concerns the being of things apart from any of its other features. The being of each thing is separate from its features. As long as Hermogenes and Socrates agree that everything has its own being, they are free to discover how names disclose the being of each thing apart from its features. Socrates concludes that, if someone were to imitate the being belonging to each thing using sounds and syllables, the resulting name would distinguish the nature of each thing and “express what each thing itself is.” Thus, when the musician plays, the music imitates the being (οὐσία) of its subject; and when the painter paints, the painting imitates the being of its subject as well. So when the name-giver names, the names imitate the being of the thing named.

Socrates and Hermogenes are now in a better position to examine names such as ἰόν, ῥέον, and δοῦν.¹¹⁵ Socrates proposes that they divide sounds in the same way critics of rhythm divide the power of elements and syllables:

¹¹⁴ We might ask why Socrates switches from φύσις, which he used to describe the meaning of names at 422d2, to οὐσία? He makes the switch to emphasize the relationship between the elements of names and the elements of reality. Socrates has already argued in his analysis of ἐστία that it could equally mean οὐσία (being) as ἰουσία (going, 401a7–401e1). Being could signify motion or rest, or both. For this reason, it remains a question whether names disclose and distinguish beings in motion or at rest. If nature is a source of motion, it could be either a moving cause, or an unmoved mover. Socrates has not clarified this, and it is for this reason that he prefers now to emphasize οὐσία as the object of the function of names rather than the φύσις. In doing so, he will be free to consider in greater depth the significance of motion and rest in the elements of names.

¹¹⁵ Socrates replaces δοῦν with σχέσις (state). He does so to suggest that there are indeed more than three primary names. Barney 2001, 83, derides the switch and claims that it has no significance.

But how are we to divide off the ones with which the imitator begins his imitation? Since an imitation of a thing's being or essence is made out of letters and syllables, wouldn't it be most correct for us to divide off the letters or elements first, just as those who set to work on speech rhythms first divide off the forces or powers of the letters or elements, then those of syllables, and only then investigate rhythms themselves?—Yes.—Mustn't we first divide off the vowels and then the others in accordance with their differences in kind, that is to say, the “consonants” and “mutes” (as I take it they're called by specialists in these matters) and the semivowels, which are neither vowels nor mutes? And, as to the vowels themselves, mustn't we also divide off those that differ in kind from one another? (424b6–c10)

Critics of rhythm wish to learn about rhythm. So they divide various sounds and syllables in order to identify, first, each individual sound and then to learn how sounds change when they combine into syllables (cf. *Philebus* 18b5–d2). After they have learned how to combine sounds into syllables, they combine these syllables into rhythms to learn how rhythms work. Likewise, when someone wants to learn how names imitate beings, but especially how primary names imitate beings, it is best to look at the elements of these primary names in order to determine how these elements imitate beings.¹¹⁶ So, in order to determine if there are other primary names besides *ῥοή*, *ιέναι*, and *σχέσις*, Socrates and Hermogenes must consider the elements of this sort of name.

Socrates uses *στοιχεῖα* differently here than he did before. He first used *στοιχεῖα* to refer to primary names (422a3), but now he uses it to refer to the sounds that make up

Nevertheless, the switch has the effect of implying that neither motion nor rest predominates. As many primary names may imitate motion as imitate rest. Hermogenes' request suggests that motion predominates because there are two words for motions (*ίόν* and *ῥέον*) while there is only one for rest (*δοῦν*). The inclusion of *σχέσις* levels the playing field, hinting that motion and rest are equal.

¹¹⁶ Socrates speaks of the power of elements (424c1), which suggests that the elements of names are as much names as are primary names and secondary names (cf. 427c6, Kretzmann 1970, 135; and Baxter 1992, 36). If this is correct, the power of an element would correspond to beliefs about the power of the things they imitate (contra Anagnostopoulos 1972, 725). So elements would suffer the same sort of interference primary and secondary names do. Instead of revealing nature, elements can only expose the beliefs of original makers of names about nature. Primary names will not resolve the previous concerns about the success of names in exercising their function. So long as the beliefs of the name-makers form the basis for names, they may always be subject to error.

primary names, but which are not names (Ryle 1960, 433). Barney 2001, 93, warns that Socrates' use of στοιχεῖα might lead us astray:

We might be tempted to see this as simply an equivocation: the fact that *stoicheion* means both 'element' and 'letter' seduces Socrates into identifying the two. And such a slip could have been made easier by a naïve presumption that, as the minimal phonetic parts of language, the letters must be the minimal bearers of meaning as well—in short, by compositionality run amok, and a failure to recognize the separate spheres of descriptive content and phonetic expression.

According to Barney, the ambiguity of στοιχεῖα leads Socrates to confuse meaning and sound. There is, however, a better explanation for why Socrates chooses to use στοιχεῖα in this manner. He does so to highlight the proximity of words and things. A word has meaning because it imitates its object. This applies to secondary as well as primary names, although, as we have seen, the imitation involved in secondary names depends on primary ones. Names will depend, nevertheless, for their meaning ultimately on the sounds that make them up. As we will see, ῥῶ will imitate motion because the element ῥ imitates motion. Thus, the meaning of words will depend on how the articulation of its constituent sounds imitate being. Nevertheless, the elements of words will not imitate simply anything; they will imitate their correlates; they will imitate the elements of reality (Anagnostopoulos 1972, 727–29; cf. Wittgenstein 1922). Reality consists of motion and rest. By imitating motion and rest, the elements of names will imitate the elements of reality. Further, the elements of secondary names (i.e. primary names) will imitate the elements of complex beings. Socrates, therefore, uses elements ambiguously to show how the elements of words meet the elements of reality, and become in a way, no different from them.

Socrates now examines the elements of names. He begins by distinguishing between vowels, consonants, mutes, and semivowels.¹¹⁷ In doing so, Socrates divides letters into kinds that can relate to each other only in certain ways. For example, one can pronounce a consonant only alongside a vowel, but one can pronounce a vowel without a consonant. Thus, distinguishing between different kinds of sounds reveals the different relationships that each of these different kinds can have with one another. We will see that these relationships parallel the sorts of relationships that the elements of reality have.

That a person can pronounce vowels independently also explains why Socrates goes on to distinguish between different kinds of vowels. Although he does not actually exhibit how to distinguish between them, one could distinguish between long and short vowels, such as *omega* and *omicron*, which is a distinction that Socrates employed earlier to demonstrate the difference between ancient and modern pronunciation (418a3–e3). One could also distinguish vowels according to their pronunciation. This distinction would however treat each vowel as a separate kind. If Socrates and Hermogenes can agree to divide sounds and syllables in the same way a critic of rhythm divides the power of letters and the power of syllables, then Socrates' distinction must mean to separate vowels by their pronunciation rather than by their length. Only in this way can Socrates and Hermogenes maintain the parallel between a critic's separation of sounds and the separation of vowels. Otherwise, vowels such as *ēta* and *omega* would be treated in the same way without regard for their different pronunciation, and so too with *alpha*, *epsilon*,

¹¹⁷ We now consider mutes and semivowels consonants because we pronounce them alongside vowels. Attic grammar distinguished mutes, such as *gamma*, and semivowels, such as *φ* or *ψ*, from vowels and consonants because, in the former case, articulation involved an eruption of breath after the breathing passage was entirely blocked and, in the latter case, articulation involved both a consonant and a vowel, which we are able to articulate separately. Consider English 'w' and 'y' for example.

iota, and upsilon. Even though these vowels differ in their pronunciation, the investigation will treat them identically.

Before discussing elements any further, Socrates explores reality (οὐσία):

Then when we've also well divided off the things that are—the things to which we have to give names—if there are some things to which they can all be carried back, as names are to the letters, and from which we can see that they derive, and if different kinds of being are found among them, in just the way that there are among the letters—once we've done all this well, we'll know how to apply each letter to what it resembles, whether one letter or a combination of many is to be applied to one thing. (424c11–d7)

Here, Socrates argues that just in the same way names can be divided into sounds of different kinds, so the beings named can be divided. Yet into what can a being be divided? Earlier Socrates argued that names imitate something's being alone—not its properties. The name “horse,” for example, imitates only the nature of a horse. It does not include an imitation of brown or black, if horses happens to be so colored. Properties belonging to the horse do have their own being, in which case the name “brown” imitates only the nature of brown but not also the horse that happens to be brown. In this situation, a horse is composed of various properties that attach to its own being; and in the same way that a horse is composite, so too is the name “horse.” Only while the horse is composed, for instance, of being and brown, the names of which imitate their being, the name “horse” is composed of “h”, “o”, “r”, “s”, and “e,” each of which also imitates some being. So if Socrates and Hermogenes can separate each being belonging to horses in the same way they separate each letter composing the name “horse,” they will be able to determine how each sound imitates each being and how a combination of sounds imitates being.

Socrates clarifies the preceding argument by introducing the example of painting. When a painter paints, he uses whatever colors the subject demands. In one case, a painter may use only one color; in another case, he may use another; but oftentimes, a painter will need to mix colors together. If a painter paints a human being, for instance, he will need to mix several colors to produce a color similar to the color of human skin. Similarly, Socrates argues, we use whatever sounds the being we wish to name demands. To imitate one kind of being, we may use one kind of sound, and to imitate another, we may use another. We may also combine sounds into syllables and combine syllables to create names and combine names to create sentences, which Socrates describes as “great, beautiful, and whole” (μέγα ἤδη τι καὶ καλὸν καὶ ὅλον). In short, just as a painter might imitate an animal by painting it, so we imitate a being by naming it. Just as each color the painter uses imitates the color of the animal, so the articulation of each sound we use imitates some nature. Thus, Socrates compares sounds with colors, syllables (which are of course sounds) with mixtures of color (which are of course colors), names with each part of a painting, and sentences with the entire painting. Each stage in Socrates’ illustration involves imitation. Each color and each sound imitate, each mixture of color and each syllable imitate, each part of the painting and each name imitate, and each painting and each sentence imitate (Silverman 2001, 36).

If Socrates’ illustration, however, holds, it is difficult to see how sounds imitate in the same way colors do. A painter clearly uses red to imitate the redness of a rose, but a sound in the name “rose” does not obviously imitate any feature of the same rose. Socrates must clarify how a sound imitates some specific being. He may have already taken care of this problem through his use of στοιχεῖα. Its ambiguity allows Socrates to

draw the composition of names into comparison with the composition of a painting. Although it may be difficult to understand how the articulation of a sound imitates the nature of an animal in the same way paint imitates the color of an animal, it is not hard to see how an element of a name more generally imitates some feature of a horse in the same way paint might imitate a horse's color. Pigment is an irreducible element of a painting and can be included in the meaning of στοιχεῖα.

Socrates summarizes his illustration by comparing the painting of an animal to the construction of a sentence. In the course of this summary, Socrates describes the construction of sentences as the “art of naming or rhetoric or whatever it is” (425a4). Why does Socrates characterize naming as rhetoric, which we may assume is not commendable? Before, naming required that names disclose being and distinguish it from every other being (cf. Joseph 2000, 62). This requirement would apply to the preceding argument as well and has in fact been fulfilled insofar as names imitate the being of each thing apart from the being of its various properties. It was also Socrates and Hermogenes who agreed that dialecticians must supervise naming in order to ensure that they disclosed and distinguished beings correctly. While this supervision may alleviate the problem of coining names incorrectly, it does not eliminate the possibility of doing so. Coining inappropriate names remains a possibility for naming so long as the beliefs of the name-makers serve as its basis. Socrates describes naming as rhetoric or as whatever it is because it is not clear that anyone supervises in the way that a craft must be supervised. Since the practice of any art requires supervision from those who will eventually use the products of the art, naming also requires supervision from those who will eventually use names. If naming does not receive such supervision, its status as an art is questionable.

Socrates and Hermogenes agree that they must carve names at their joints, but they doubt that they will succeed. Should they give up the investigation in favor of another one they are better equipped to complete, or should they do their best to complete the investigation even though it may be an impossible task? Socrates suggests that their present investigation is like their previous examination of divine names:

Aren't we in a similar situation to the one we were in a while ago with the gods? We prefaced that discussion by saying that we were wholly ignorant of the truth, and were merely describing human beliefs about the gods. So, shouldn't we now say this to ourselves before we proceed: if anyone, whether ourselves or someone else, divides names skillfully, he will divide them in the way we have just described, but, given our present situation, we must follow the proverb and "do the best we can" to work at them? (425b9–c7)

According to Socrates, the present investigation of primary names is similar to their previous examination of the names of the gods in that they both acknowledge that they are ignorant of how name-makers originally made names, but insofar as they have certain beliefs about how name-makers might have made names, these they will examine. Thus, in the same way that they had opened their examination of divine names by admitting their ignorance and acknowledging their investigation will deal strictly with their own views about the nature of the gods, they ought to begin the present investigation of primary names with the same acknowledgment and reservation. To compare the examination of primary names with the examination of divine names suggests that the examination of primary names may be offensive in the same way the examination of the divine names was. Because the examination of the divine names threatened to offend the gods, the preceding discussion seems also to threaten offense against them. This would imply that the gods are responsible for coining primary names, or at least that whoever did so might share a similar status. In either case, the risk of offense emphasizes

Socrates' distinction between ancient and modern use. If the gods have their own names for one another, names are different from the ones human use to speak of them, ancient men must somehow have had access to names that are inaccessible to modern men. Hence, any examination that purports to be of ancient names is really an examination of modern beliefs about those names. Such an examination would offend the gods because it claims to have knowledge about the beliefs underlying the coining of names when in fact it merely substitutes its own beliefs about ancient names. The alternative is to acknowledge one's ignorance about their use and examine one's own beliefs about such use while recognizing that they are one's own beliefs.

In keeping with his ignorance, Socrates grants that it is difficult to see how sounds and syllables reveal beings.¹¹⁸ It is hard to explain how name-makers could have assigned the articulation of each sound and each syllable to some being. I suggested earlier that the answer might lie in the fact that Socrates uses *στοιχεῖα* ambiguously. *Στοιχεῖα* is general enough to include sounds and colors to maintain the analogy with painting. Socrates does not find this explanation satisfying. Nor should he if he seeks to relinquish the analogy and explain how sounds and syllables imitate being. Nevertheless, Socrates and Hermogenes must accept this difficulty as unavoidable because there seems to be no better explanation. The only other explanation Socrates can come up with confirms our earlier suspicion that the gods are ultimately responsible for primary names (425d8). Nevertheless, Socrates doubts that this explanation will accomplish much. He compares it to a *deus ex machina*. In a similar way, Socrates and Hermogenes could argue that the

¹¹⁸ Anagnostopoulos 1972, 728, misconstrues the argument supporting the view that sounds imitate motion and rest. He finds it difficult to see how elements of names could imitate the elements of reality. However, I have suggested how this might work. Sounds merely imitate motion and rest, the elements of reality. If one were to grant that reality consists mainly of motion and rest then the variety of things imitated would be rather limited, and the account plausible.

gods are responsible for primary names. But Socrates believes this claim to be nothing more than an excuse, a *deus ex machina*, that saves them the trouble of having to explain how primary names imitate being. The authority of the gods alone would justify that they do what they do.

There are similar explanations. Foreigners more ancient than the Greeks could have coined primary names, but this explanation trades one difficulty for another. Instead of explaining how primary names imitate being, this explanation merely assumes that they do. This reinstates two previous problems: first, that Socrates and Hermogenes cannot analyze foreign names because they are foreign; and second, no explanation could account for how ancient foreigners coined primary names because the pronunciation of these names has probably changed significantly over the course of time. Thus, the explanation that foreigners coined primary names merely supplants the explanation of how primary names imitate beings.

In the third explanation, Socrates suggests that it is impossible to investigate primary names because they are too old. This argument is similar to the previous one. Because this explanation argues that primary names are very ancient, it depends, as before, on the previous problem of pronunciation. If primary names are old, their pronunciation has probably changed over time. For this reason, Socrates and Hermogenes cannot properly investigate these names. If sounds, however, are primary names then it is hard to see how a change in pronunciation could lead to confusion. Perhaps if one of the sounds under investigation were a vowel then we would face some difficulty in explaining how it imitates a being after it has undergone a vowel shift. If alpha shifted to

epsilon or to the diphthong αι then it might become difficult to explain how alpha by itself imitates some being.

Socrates concludes that none of these explanations is satisfying because they do not explain how primary names imitate being: someone made them to do so.¹¹⁹ These explanations are merely devices for avoiding the problem. Nevertheless, the difficulty remains and it bears heavily on the present investigation. Because secondary names are composed of primary ones, an explanation of how primary names imitate beings is necessary in order to explain how secondary names imitate beings. Socrates and Hermogenes must for this reason provide an account of how primary names imitate being if they are to justify the previous analysis of secondary names.

Socrates tries now to explain how ρ, ι, φ, ψ, σ, ζ, δ, τ, λ, γ, ν, α, η, and ω imitate being.¹²⁰ ρ appears to be an instrument of motion (κίνησις), but this is far from obvious because ρ is not part of κίνησις (Joseph 2000, 63). Before Socrates can pursue his investigation of ρ, he must analyze κίνησις. Κίνησις combines the name ἴσις (going forth), and κίειν, which Socrates identifies as a non-Attic name synonymous with ἰέναι (to move). Although one should pronounce κίνησις as either κειέσις or κίεις, he or she pronounces κίνεσις because ἴσις suffered the familiar vowel shift from ε̄ to η, which

¹¹⁹ Joseph 2000, 58, contends that this argument throws every previous analysis of names, “including [Socrates’] own, into the philosophical rubbish bin.” However, this goes too far. The argument challenges the previous analysis of names only to the extent that it depends on the present examination of primary names. If Socrates and Hermogenes are unable to learn how primary names imitate being then they cannot be sure that the secondary names they have examined are naturally correct.

¹²⁰ Socrates describes his view of the elements of primary names as “entirely outrageous and absurd” (πάνυ μοι δοκεῖ ὑβριστικὰ εἶναι καὶ γελοῖα, 426b5). This remark echoes his original statement of the difficulty involved in explaining how primary names imitate being (421c10). The solution to the difficulty that Socrates is about to present is absurd in the very same way the difficulty is absurd. He has described no other possibilities as absurd. It appears that Socrates sets absurdity as the solution’s criterion. Since the difficulty is itself absurd, absurdity is itself a criterion for determining the appropriate solution. Only an absurd solution seems able to solve an absurd problem, which implies that Socrates’ solution will resolve the difficulty because it is absurd.

explains the η in κίνησις, and because the maker of the name inserted a ν for euphony. This change results in κίνησις.

Socrates also analyzes στάσις (rest) to complete the framework for his analysis. If primary names imitate motion and rest, it would be good to analyze the names of motion and rest. Socrates argues that στάσις simplifies the pronunciation of στάεσις, which signifies the opposite of ἰέναι. Thus, κίνησις and στάσις are contraries because κίνησις means “going” and στάσις means “not going.”

Once Socrates has established that ρ is an instrument of motion, he explains how one might use ρ in this way. He argues that the name-maker originally used ρ in the names $\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ (flowing), $\rho\acute{o}\eta$ (flow), $\rho\acute{o}\eta$ was one of the primary names for which Hermogenes requested an analysis at the beginning of this discussion. The same person then included ρ in $\tau\rho\acute{o}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ (trembling), $\tau\rho\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$ (running) and in verbs like $\kappa\rho\acute{o}\upsilon\epsilon\iota\nu$ (striking), $\theta\alpha\acute{\upsilon}\epsilon\iota\nu$ (crushing), $\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$ (rending), and $\theta\rho\acute{\upsilon}\pi\tau\epsilon\iota\nu$ (breaking), $\kappa\epsilon\rho\mu\alpha\tau\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\iota\nu$ (crumbling), and $\rho\upsilon\mu\beta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ (whirling). Socrates argues that ρ is responsible for the motion involved in each of these cases; and, indeed, one can see that every one of these words suggests motion in some way and every one of these words possesses ρ . There are two moves involved in this argument that justify ρ 's imitation of motion: (1) that ρ naturally imitates motion such that (2) a name-maker can exploit this imitation for the purpose of communication (see Barney 2001, 8, for further discussion). Without (2), (1) would not constitute an imitation, only similarity. The reason is that there is no deliberate agent involved in bringing the similarity to light through speech. (1) by itself is not a sufficient condition of imitation. (2) is also necessary. For this reason, ρ must be responsible for the motion involved in each of these names. The test would be to find some exceptional

name whose meaning does not imply motion but whose pronunciation includes ρ. Socrates will supply such an exception in his discussion with Cratylus later (434b7–d12). For now, he is satisfied to deduce from these cases that ρ imitates motion. There is, however, another reason why ρ is responsible for motion in these cases. Socrates suggests that perhaps the name-maker observed that the tongue was most agitated when it pronounced rho. Unlike modern English pronunciation, (which does not trill “r,” though some consider it more proper to do so, cf. Joseph 2000), Greek pronunciation did trill ρ. Thus, when Socrates and Hermogenes pronounce ρ by itself or with other letters in a word, the tongue trills. As a result, the name-maker treated ρ as an instrument of motion because the tongue trilled when it pronounced ρ.

The sound ι is a tool used to imitate very small things that can pass easily through everything. The articulation of ι is evidence of this. Pronouncing ι involves bringing the tongue close to the palate but resting the tip behind the lower row of teeth, allowing a person to draw only a small amount of breath into the mouth to produce the required sound. In *ιέναι* and *ἵεσθαι* (hastening), for instance, the sound and pronunciation of ι signifies the movement implicit in the meaning of these names. Socrates’ account of ι should remind us of his analysis of *δικαῖον* (Barney 2001, 95). *Δικαῖον* was responsible for generating and preserving the organization of the universe because it was the smallest and swiftest thing (412d4). For this reason, *δικαῖον* was able to penetrate, or go through (*δι’ ἴον*) everything. If the pronunciation and sound of ι imitates the smallest things that can penetrate everything else, ι will imitate *δικαῖον*. The number of *iotas* in the name *δικαῖον* confirms this imitation.

Φ, ψ, σ, and ζ are instruments used to imitate blowing and heavy breathing because pronouncing these sounds involves an “explosion of breath” (427a6) This imitation of breathing is evident in such names as ψυχρόν (chilling), ζέον (seething), σείσθαι (shaking), and σεισμός (quaking). Not only is one or more of these letters present in these names, breathing is implicit in their meanings.

In contrast, the articulation of δ and τ imitates the hindrance of breath. When pronouncing δ and τ, the tongue rests on the backside of the teeth, blocking the passage of air out from the mouth (dental stops) and later releasing the breath. This hindrance of breath is evident in names such as δεσμός and στάσις. Δεσμός and στάσις are particularly illustrative because of their previous analyses. Δεσμός served as a primary name in the analyses of ποσειδών (402e) and δείλια (415c). Now we learn that the δ in the pronunciation of these names is ultimately responsible for their connoting obstruction either of the feet by the sea in the case of ποσειδών or of the soul by its own strongest desires in the case of δείλια. The τ in στάσις, which signifies the opposite of ἵεναι, is also ultimately responsible for its connotation of obstruction. Again, τ and δ are not only present in the pronunciation of these names, but their pronunciation as a whole also involves obstructing the breathing passage with the tongue. Thus, the articulation of δ and τ imitates rest.

The articulation of λ causes the tongue to glide over the mouth. The articulation of λ, consequently, imitates motion in such names as ὀλισθάνειν (to glide), λείον (smooth), λιπαρόν (sleek), and καλλῶδες (viscous). Λ is included in these names because it is responsible for the connotation of gliding, without which these names could not properly imitate this sort of motion.

Γ inhibits the gliding motion imitated by λ so as to indicate cloying sweetness. When the name-maker put γ before λ in such words as γλισχρόν (gluey), γλυκύ (sweet), and γλοιῶδες (clammy), he interrupted the smooth articulation of λ. Thus, the combination of γ and λ imitates something sticky and sweet, which the meaning of names incorporating λ and γ conveys.

The articulation of ν occurs inside the mouth. The reason behind this is certainly that ν is a nasal sonorant, meaning that one must articulate it within the nasal cavity. The tongue rests on the teeth and blocks the passage of air out of the mouth. This same description could apply to μ, but Socrates does not apply it. Because the articulation of ν occurs while the tongue rests on the back of the teeth, a person must pronounce names that include ν in its spelling from inside the mouth. Thus, names such as ἔνδον and ἐντός come to mean “within” and “inside” because they include ν in their pronunciation.

The articulation of ᾶ and ῆ are instruments used to imitate large and long respectively because of the length of their articulation. In μεγά (large), the articulation of ᾶ is long because it follows γ, which makes any subsequent vowel long (Smyth 1920, 20). According to Socrates’ argument, μεγά means “large” because of the long articulation of its ᾶ. Likewise μῆκος means “length” because the articulation of its ῆ is naturally long.

Finally, the articulation of ὀ imitates roundness because the pronunciation of this letter requires that the lips be round. The name γόγγυλον proves that *omicron* imitates roundness because γόγγυλον means “round.” Γόγγυλον means “round” because it has so many *omicrons* in its pronunciation.

Socrates concludes his examination of primary names by summarizing the implications of the legislator's actions:

In the same way, the rule-setter (*nomothetēs*) apparently used the other letters or elements as likenesses in order to make a sign or name for each of the things that are, and then compounded all the remaining names out of these, imitating the things they name. (427c4–8)

The examination of the articulation of various sounds, the elements of names, has revealed that the legislator made them to be signs of the mouth's imitations of beings and names for each of those beings (ἐκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων σημεῖόν τε καὶ ὄνομα ποιῶν ὁ νομοθέτης). In doing so, Socrates and Hermogenes were able to combine sounds into syllables, syllables into primary names, and primary names into secondary names, justifying naturalism from the bottom up.

One might remain concerned that Socrates has not accounted for every letter of the Greek alphabet. He has omitted β, ἐ, θ, κ, μ, ξ, π, ϑ, χ, and ω. These omissions leave the investigation inconclusive. Nevertheless, this view does manage to account for the main difficulty Hermogenes raised against the naturalism. The fact that legislators made elements correspond to the elements of reality explains the variety of languages. Different legislators chose different sounds whose articulation imitates different beings (Baxter 1992, 64). To this extent, one must regard it as a success.

In arguing that different legislators make use of different sounds to imitate different beings, Socrates may appear to contradict himself (Schofield 1982, 65). Socrates insisted at 393d–e that changes in the pronunciation of names do not affect their meaning. If one subtracts or adds a sound to a name, the name will remain the same so long as it discloses the nature of the things (See note 98 above). Hermogenes does not understand. Hence, Socrates elaborates:

It's something fairly simple. You know that when we speak of the elements or letters of the alphabet, it is their names we utter, not the letters themselves, except in the case of these four, ε, υ, ο, and ω. We make names for all the other vowels and consonants, as you know, by uttering additional letters together with them. But as long as we include the force or power of the letter, we may correctly call it by that name, and it will express it for us. Take βῆτα, for example. The addition of η, τ, and α does no harm and doesn't prevent the whole name from expressing the nature of that element or letter which the rule-setter wished to name, so well did he know how to give names to the letters (393d6–e8)

When a person recites the letters of the alphabet, he does not pronounce each letter; he says the name of each letter. When he says βῆτα, he does not simply articulate the phoneme β; he adds η, τ, and α. These additions do not prevent βῆτα from disclosing the nature of β because the nature of β is contained in the meaning of the word itself.¹²¹

Letter names like βῆτα are a touchstone for Socrates' etymologies because they are inescapably naturally correct names. The nature of each letter-name is part of the pronunciation of its name. Βῆτα has β in it; so it refers unambiguously to β. Whether written or spoken, it is always correct. Names such as Ἀστράναξ or Ἐκτωρ also reveal the natures of the things named, but they do not have the natures in them. The articulations of elemental sounds in these names are not the correct imitations. The names are signs of correct (or possibly correct) imitations. The best names will never fail to reveal the nature of the things they name if that nature is part of their pronunciation.

In case βῆτα proves difficult to understand, Socrates provides a stronger example. The letters ε, υ, ο, and ω are exceptional because their nature is the same as their names.¹²² When speaking of the letter ε, for instance, Socrates only needs to articulate the

¹²¹ Reeve 1998, xxx, rightly considers Socrates' advocacy of adding and removing letters from words, various etymologies of the same name, and foreign imports evidence that Socrates believes the first lawmakers were Heracliteans.

¹²² Most classical linguists believe that the Greeks adapted the Phoenician alphabet in the early part of the eighth century. Along with the alphabet, the Greeks took the Phoenician letter-names. However,

letter to disclose its nature. To speak of other letters, such as β, Socrates will have say its name, which differs from the nature of letter itself. Βῆτα has additional letters that ease pronunciation and serve to distinguish the name from the nature it names. Unlike βῆτα, however, nothing interferes with ἐ, ὕ, ὀ, and ὦ. When Socrates names one of these letters, he simply pronounces the letter, disclosing its nature directly.

Socrates returns to the names Ἔκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ to illustrate the point. These names have the same meaning, though they share only one letter. When a person says these names, he or she discloses the nature of a king. The spelling of Ἀρχέπολις (ruler of a city) has no obvious connection to Ἔκτωρ and Ἀστυάναξ, despite their similar meaning. Moreover, many different names mean “general” despite not sharing the same spelling. For example, Ἄγις (leader), Πολέμαρχος (warlord”, and Εὐπόλεμος (good warrior), all mean “general.” Furthermore, many different names mean “physician” though they may not share the same spelling. Ἴατροκλῆς means “famous healer,” and Ἀκεσίμβροτος means “healer of mortals.” All of these names share the same meaning but are spelled and pronounced differently.

If Schofield is right, Socrates cannot assert that different legislators use the articulation of different sounds to imitate different beings without contradicting himself. It cannot be that pronunciation does not affect meaning and that articulations of various sounds imitate different beings. Schofield, however, fails to see that reality is in motion or at rest (401c–d). If the articulation of the various sounds in a name imitates being then it imitates motion and rest. To this extent when a name is pronounced, it expresses some

they did not adapt the Phoenician names for the letters ε, η, ο, ω (‘he’, ‘waw’, and ‘ayin’ respectively). Instead, they simply made the sounds the letters represented. However, toward the end of the third century B.C., the Greeks adopted the names “epsilon,” “upsilon,” “omicron,” and “omega” when the pronunciation of vowels shifted down from α toward ω.

motion or rest. Adding or removing sounds from the name does nothing to change this. Different sounds alter only how much a name imitates motion or rest. This does not, however, mean that pronunciation matters. There are varieties of sounds, of which the articulation of some imitates motion and the articulation of others imitates rest. The Greek legislator may have decided to use ρ to signify motion, but he could have used σ or τ , as English does. Since the Greek legislator uses ρ , many of the names that mean “motion” have ρ in them. One, therefore, pronounces Greek names for motion differently from their English counterparts. The point is that pronunciation does not matter so long as the articulation of each sound imitates motion or rest. If a name means motion, but the articulation of its sounds does not imitate motion, then it will not be correct.

Ultimately, Socrates and Hermogenes have established that names must be naturally correct because their elements imitate nature. Secondary names can be broken down into primary ones, and the elements of primary names imitate the two main elements of reality: motion and rest. Names consist of sounds produced in the mouth of a speaker. When someone wishes to say something about reality, he or she must imitate motion and rest using his or her tongue, larynx, and mouth. In doing so, the person physically imitates motion and rest.

Part Three: Why it is

7: Quality Control (427c9–435c9)

Naturalism has emerged as consisting of the propositions that names are naturally correct because the articulation of their constituent sounds imitates the motion and rest of reality, that naming is an art practiced by an artisan called a legislator, and that a dialectician who knows how to ask and answer the question: “what is it?” must supervise this art in order to ensure the highest quality of the artisan’s product. Socrates claims this view of the correctness of names as his own (427c9, cf. 432c8). He admits, however, that it depends on Cratylus. If Cratylus does not accept this view then Socrates will have failed to arbitrate the dispute. Socrates and Cratylus review the account of naming given at 397d9ff. Cratylus admits (1) that names reveal nature through teaching, (2) that a craftsman practices the craft of naming, and (3) that “legislator” is the name for this craftsman. Cratylus, however, will deny that some names are better imitations than others. One result of this denial will be that false speech becomes impossible. If no names are better or worse than others, then it is impossible to use a name incorrectly. In this part of the *Cratylus*, Socrates tries to convince Cratylus that some names are better imitations than others first, by demonstrating that imitations can be better and worse; second, by proving that a name cannot be a perfect imitation of something because it would be no different from the thing it names—as seen in letter names, where the name is the thing named; and, third, by showing that convention is needed to ensure that names imitate.¹²³

¹²³ Controversy surrounds the role conventionalism plays in determining the correctness of names. Many commentators insist that conventionalism replaces naturalism entirely (Bestor 1980, 324, Annas 1982, 108–109, Schofield 1982, 70; and Silverman 2001, 27, 992, 30–35, although he doubts that Socrates really adopts any particular view), while most of the recent commentators argue that conventionalism supplements the natural correctness of names (Sedley 2003, 145; Thomas 2008, 343; Barney 2001, 133, and Reeve 1998, lii). My view follows the more recent interpretations, which demonstrate that conventionalism is necessary to ensure poorly made names imitate nature.

Socrates begins by asking Cratylus to endorse specific propositions in his account of the correctness of names. This approval will show that Cratylus' position is the same as his own. Cratylus agrees that the correctness of names is something that displays (ἐνδείξεται) something (πρᾶγμα, 428e1–3),¹²⁴ that teaching (διδασκαλίας) is the purpose of names (428e4–5), that naming is an art and there are artisans who practice it (428e6–8), and finally, when Socrates asks Cratylus who these artisans are, he admits that they are the legislators (νομόθηται) whom Socrates mentioned before (428e9–429a1, cf. 388d1ff.). After obtaining agreement on these points, Socrates returns to his portrait analogy:

Aren't some painters better or worse than others?—Certainly.—And the better painters produce finer products or paintings, while the others produce inferior ones? Similarly with builders—some build finer houses, other build inferior ones?—Yes.—What about rule-setters? Do some of them produce finer products, others inferior ones?—No, there I no longer agree with you. (429a6–b2)

Cratylus agrees that some painters are better and some are worse than others. Thus, he admits that there is a hierarchy of skill among painters. He also agrees that better painters produce finer paintings while others produce inferior ones. Thus, he agrees that the quality of the painting depends on the skill of the painter. If a painter is more skilled, he will paint finer paintings. If a painter is less skilled, he will paint inferior ones. This same argument applies to builders.

The fact that Cratylus admits this argument applies to building and to painting indicates that he must apply his argument to all crafts, including naming. Cratylus,

¹²⁴ Joseph 2000, 65 thinks this claim is justified by the previous discussion. Socrates introduced the claim that names display the kind of thing something is, but before his analysis of names. Afterward, it was repeated (422d1) and presented as a conclusion. However, Joseph does not attempt to understand why it might warrant such treatment. The purpose of Socrates' analysis of names is to demonstrate through induction that this claim is correct. The divine names, ethical names, etc. show the sort of thing something is.

however, takes naming to be the exception. Legislators do not vary in skill nor do the names they produce vary in quality.

To understand better how Cratylus could reject the possibility of better or worse names, Socrates separates rules from names. Cratylus denies that rules can be better or worse. Poorly fashioned rules do count as rules at all. Cratylus also denies that names can be better and worse. If a name is coined, it is correct. If a name is not coined, it is not a name at all: “So all names have been correctly given?—Yes, as many of them as are names at all” (429b9–10).

Cratylus extends this claim to speech. It is impossible to speak about things that do not exist (429d6; cf. Barney 2001, 113). Here, Cratylus denies one of the core claims of the previous discussion of true and false names. False speech consists of speaking about something that exists as if it did not (385b8). Cratylus maintains that it is impossible to speak falsely because false speech involves speaking about things that do not exist.

Socrates distinguishes between affirmation and speech in order to see how far Cratylus will go to deny falsehood (429d8). Is it possible to affirm (φάναι) something falsely and not possible to speak (λέγειν) about it falsely? This question tries to introduce the results of the discussion of truth and falsehood into the present discussion. Earlier Hermogenes insisted that statements were true if they affirmed (φάναι) something that it is as it is and false if they denied (οὐ φάνει) something that is as it is (385b). Only a speaker can make (λέγειν) a statement (λόγος; see Silverman 2001, 39, for a discussion of the implications of this argument on the final one). Hence, statements must affirm and deny something that is as it is. However, Cratylus rejects the distinction between affirmation

and speech (429e2). In doing so, he denies any distinction between truth and falsehood. It is of limited significance to speak of truth if all speech is true.

How would this apply to a situation where someone addresses (προσειπεῖν) someone falsely (429e4)? If, while traveling to a foreign land, Cratylus meets a person who says, “Greetings Athenian visitor, son of Smicrion, Hermogenes,”¹²⁵ would the person be speaking (φαίη), saying (εἶποι), or addressing (προσείποι) Cratylus, Hermogenes, or no one? The example ingeniously illustrates a problem of denying the possibility of false speech. The man addressing Cratylus greets him using three different forms of address, two of which are true and one of which is false. First, he identifies Cratylus as a visitor from Athens, which, as we have seen, is probably true (see Introduction). Second, he identifies Cratylus as the son of Smicrion, which is also probably true (most scholars cite this line in support of the claim that Cratylus is the son of Smicrion; see Kirk 1951, Allan 1954, and Nails 2002). Third, he identifies Cratylus as Hermogenes. This claim is obviously false. Cratylus is not Hermogenes, nor is he in any sense the offspring of Hermes.

At first, Cratylus indicates that the person in the example is not speaking properly. However, because this argument is extremely vague and implies that Cratylus’ position is no more defensible than Hermogenes’ (Barney 2001, 113), Socrates presses Cratylus to say whether the entire address is false or simply the last part. Cratylus argues that the address is entirely meaningless. It does not matter that Cratylus is from Athens or that he is the son of Smicrion. The person addressing him in the example calls him

¹²⁵ This example sounds suspiciously like the goddess’ reception of Parmenides in his poem. Parmenides describes how “the goddess received me willingly, and took my right hand in hers, and spoke to me and addressed me thus” (DK B1 22–23, Cherubin’s translation). The similarity between Socrates’ present remarks and Parmenides’ poem may serve to highlight the sort of Parmenidean rejection of false speech that Cratylus is now borrowing.

“Hermogenes,” which is false. The man, therefore, cannot be addressing him. He must be addressing someone else.

Despite his denial, the order of the address presents Cratylus with a problem (Sedley 2001, 133). The first two forms of address are true while the third is false. So is the entire address false or is it only partially false? Each part of the address may be true or false by itself, but it is a part of whole. Their truth-value, therefore, depends on the truth-value of the whole (cf. 385b2–d1; Fine 1977, 296, and Joseph 2000, 66). Taken as a whole, the address can be neither correct nor incorrect because it is only partially false. However, Cratylus insists that the entire address is meaningless and that the person speaking is making noise in the same way he would be “if he were banging a brass pot” (430a6). Yet Cratylus cannot reject the entire greeting because of the failure of one of its parts. The address identifies Cratylus in one respect, though fails to do so in another. It would be similar to the way a painting might generally depict Cratylus correctly, but might also give him completely wrong hair-color.

Socrates’ review of naturalism reveals that Cratylus disagrees that there are no better and worse names. If a name fails in any way to distinguish nature, it fails to be a name. Thus, correctness is an inalienable feature of names. To remove this feature from a name is to deny it the status of a name.

Socrates now undertakes to refute Cratylus. There are two reasons for Socrates to do so. First, it is possible to speak falsely as long as some names are better imitations than others. Second, some names are better imitations than others. To deny that names differ in quality implies, as Cratylus has done, that the makers of names do not differ in skill. One of the implications of denying that name-makers differ in skill is that they do

not need dialecticians to supervise them in order to ensure that they make names well. This eliminates the distinction between coining a name and using a name, undermining the possibility of error. The makers of names cannot err on such a view. They are infallible artisans.

Socrates' first refutation introduces the portrait analogy raised in the discussion of primary names to show Cratylus that it is possible to coin names correctly and incorrectly (423d–e). Cratylus admits that there is a distinction between a name and something named (430a6–8). He also grants that names imitate things and that paintings are similar (430a9–b5). Furthermore, he admits that paintings and names can be assigned and applied (διανεῖμαι καὶ προσενεγκεῖν) to things (430b6–c1). To clarify how painting and naming are similar, Socrates initiates the following exchange:

Consider this. Can we assign a likeness of a man to a man and that of a woman to a woman, and so on?—Certainly.—What about the opposite? Can we assign the likeness of a man to a woman and that of a woman to a man?—Yes, we can.—And are both these assignments correct, or only the first?—Only the first.—That is to say, the one that assigns to each things the painting or name that is appropriate to it or like it?—That's my view at least.—Since you and I are friends, we don't want to engage in a battle of words, so here's what I think. I call the first kind of assignment correct, whether it's an assignment of a painting or a name, but if it's an assignment of a name, I call it both correct and *true*. And I call the other kind of assignment, the one that assigns and applies unlike imitations, incorrect, and, in the case of names, *false* as well. (430c2–d6).

Cratylus admits that a person can apply a likeness (εἰκόνα) of a man to a man and apply a likeness of a woman to a woman. He also admits the contrary, that a person can apply a likeness of a man to a woman and the likeness of a woman to a man (see Sedley 2003, 133, and Fine 1977, 295–300 for further discussion). Of these cases, only the first is correct according to Cratylus. Such an admission would seem to force Cratylus to acknowledge that names can be incorrect in some circumstances. One can legitimately

assign the likeness of a woman to a man though it may be incorrect. Likenesses, therefore, can be incorrect as well as correct. Socrates spells out what this view entails. Application of a likeness to what it is like involves bestowing suitability and similarity to each kind of application (“Ἡ ἅν ἐκάστῳ οἶμαι τὸ προσήκόν τε καὶ τὸ ὅμοιον ἀποδιδοῖ, 430c12–13).

Now Socrates comes to the point. He calls correct the application of the likeness of a man to a man and of a woman to a woman regardless of whether the likeness is a portrait or a name. However, in the case of names, the application is correct and true. The application of the likeness of a man to a woman and of a woman to a man he calls incorrect whether the likeness is a portrait or a name. If the likeness is a name then it is both incorrect and false. Cratylus grants that it is possible to assign portraits incorrectly, but he denies that it is possible to assign names incorrectly and falsely. One can assign names only correctly and truly. Cratylus’ denial dislodges the analogy between painting and naming. Because it is possible to apply portraits only incorrectly, but impossible to apply names incorrectly, painting and naming differ in this crucial respect.

Socrates does not understand why there should be any difference between painting and naming. After all, it is possible to show a man his portrait or the portrait of a woman, and claim that the portrait bears his likeness:

Can’t I step up to a man and say “This is your portrait,” while showing him what happens to be his own likeness, or what happens to be the likeness of a woman? And by “show” I mean bring before the sense of sight.—Certainly.—Well, then, can’t I step up to the same man a second time and say, “This is your name”?¹²⁶ Now, a name is an imitation, just as

¹²⁶ Some commentators have taken the remark to suggest that the assignment of a name to a thing is prescriptive and involves imperatives (see e.g. Fine 1977). Sedley 2003 argues, correctly, I think, that there is no reason to treat the statement “This is your portrait” as a command. Socrates’ Greek conveys only an indicative statement about the nature of the portrait and how it relates to the person it depicts.

a painting or portrait is. So, can't I say to him, "This is your name," and after that put before his sense of hearing what happens to be an imitation of himself, saying "Man," or what happens to be an imitation of a female of the human species, saying "Woman"? Don't you think that all this is possible and sometimes occurs?—I'm willing to go along with you, Socrates, and say that it occurs. (430e4–431a7)

If it is possible to compare a portrait to its subject and judge whether the portrait is like or unlike its subject then it should be possible to compare a name to its object and judge whether the name is like or unlike its object insofar as portraits and names are imitations. Cratylus admits that it is possible to compare a portrait to its subject and to judge their resemblance. This admission forces him to concede that it is also possible to compare a name to its object and judge their resemblance. Such comparisons can be correct and incorrect and certain judgments about these comparisons can be true and false (i.e. Sedley 2003, 133–34). If Cratylus held that the portrait bears the likeness of this man when in fact it bears the likeness of a woman, as he did in the discussion of false speech, he would escape from having to deny that painting and naming are alike. However, since he permits Socrates to show a man the portrait of a woman and judge it is a likeness of the man, he permits Socrates to argue that painting and naming are analogous for the purposes of correctness.

Socrates proceeds with the illustration. If he were to approach the same man a second time and say "Man," or even say "Woman," he could claim that this is his name. It is possible to claim that "man" or "woman" is this man's name because a name is an imitation in the same sort of way that the portrait is an imitation. To admit that it is possible to name a person and claim that the name is a likeness of him or her is to concede that naming and painting are analogous. Cratylus appears to be aware of the

implications of conceding this point. Nevertheless, he is willing to yield to Socrates and concede that naming and painting are the same insofar as they both involve imitation.

Socrates concludes that the comparison of names with things can be correct and incorrect, and true and false. However, Socrates extends this conclusion to predicates (ρήματα) as well as statements. (For a defense of the view that ρήματα are predicates see Lorenz and Mittelstrass 1970, and Sedley 2003.) This conclusion applies to predicates because Socrates treats predicates throughout the dialogue as a species of names. As a result, the same conclusion applies to them that they may be correct and true or incorrect and false. Moreover, since Socrates and Cratylus agree that names are part of statements, the same conclusion also applies to statements. Statements consist of names and predicates, which are a specific kind of name (431c1, cf. *Sophist* 261–2).¹²⁷ Because one can apply names to things correctly and incorrectly, one can likewise apply statements correctly or incorrectly, as well as truly and falsely. Thus, one can apply names and statements correctly and truly as well as incorrectly and falsely.

Socrates extends the portrait analogy to primary names. Portraits can, he argues, display every color and shape belonging to their subjects. Portraits may also omit certain colors or shapes, including too many or too much of them. It is possible, therefore, for portraits to depict their subjects more or less correctly. A painter who includes every color and shape of his subject in a portrait paints a fine likeness of it. Yet a painter who adds or omits colors and shapes fails to paint a fine likeness, though he has still produced a likeness. Similarly, Socrates maintains, a name-maker who imitates the nature or reality

¹²⁷ Annas 1982, 106, rightly claims that Socrates “does not explicitly draw the distinction between ὀνόματα and ῥήματα” in the *Cratylus*. However, in alleging that one could combine ὀνόματα and ῥήματα to make λόγοι, he seems to mean that ὀνόματα and ῥήματα are distinguishable.

of things in letters and syllables, including everything appropriate in his name, creates a beautiful likeness of his subject. A name-maker, however, who adds or omits anything inappropriately fails to make a beautiful likeness of something in a name, though he nevertheless produces a likeness of something.

Cratylus reluctantly agrees that painting and naming are analogous insofar as they can produce better and worse likenesses of their subjects.¹²⁸ By implication, therefore, he must also agree that these arts successfully produce likenesses regardless of how well they do so. However, Socrates pushes the analogy further. While they agree that artisans can make these products more or less well, Socrates and Cratylus have not yet agreed that the quality of a name depends on the skill of the name-maker. Cratylus admits that some painters are better than others and that painting and naming are similar insofar as their products are likenesses. Thus, if legislators are like painters, capable of producing better and worse portraits depending on their skill in imitating their subjects, legislators too would seem to be capable of producing better and worse names depending upon how well they imitate their subjects. In addition, since the quality of the work is an indication of skill, some legislators must be better than other legislators because they can produce better names (Reeve 1998, li).

Despite Socrates' efforts, Cratylus remains obstinate in his rejection of the view that names differ in quality. We will shortly see that Socrates does not persuade him as easily as Socrates expected he would. He will raise a new objection to the portrait analogy on the grounds that names are perfect imitations of their objects while portraits

¹²⁸ Sedley 2003, 136, points out that qualitative difference is already built into Socrates' account of natural correctness insofar as a name such as Astyanax is more correct than a name such as Skamandrios (cf. 400a).

are not. Socrates will take this objection seriously in this second attempt to convince Cratylus of the view that names differ in quality by taking the implication of his objection to the extreme. If names were perfect imitations of things then they would not differ in any way from the things they name. There would not be an original and a copy. There would be two separate things.

To save the view that names do not differ qualitatively from one another, Cratylus appeals to the previous discussion of pronunciation. Socrates and Hermogenes had agreed that letters such as alpha and beta imitate reality (434d). They also agreed that the pronunciation of names changes when a person adds, subtracts, or transposes letters (394a). Cratylus now insists that, in such cases, misapplied names are entirely different names.

Socrates rejects this analogy on the grounds that it mistakenly treats numbers as likenesses. (Worse still, Cratylus' argument may confuse quality and quantity.) If a unit is added to or subtracted from a number, the number becomes an entirely different number. The difference between one and ten is nine, and the sum of one and ten is eleven. In each of these cases, addition and subtraction convert the original number to an altogether different number without leaving any evidence of the change. Socrates notes that this view applies to all numbers equally, but it does not apply to names because they are likenesses. A likeness cannot remain a likeness if it shares every feature of its subject. If a god were to make a perfect likeness of Cratylus, one so complete that it excluded none of Cratylus' features, and placed it beside him, there would there be two Cratyli instead of Cratylus and a likeness of Cratylus.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Sedley 2003, 137, thinks the two Cratyli argument is a non-sequitor. A name, he argues, never set out to be a perfect copy of its subject. Sedley, however, seems to read Socrates' illustration more

Socrates' refutation depends on Cratylus conceding the portrait analogy. The concession permits Socrates to exploit the analogy to show that names cannot imitate their subjects completely. Portraits may be imitations of their subjects, but they must be incomplete imitations because they do not possess many of the necessary features of their subjects.¹³⁰ If they did, nothing could be used to distinguish portraits from their subjects. Names are similar. They are also imitations of their subjects. So on the analogy between portraits and names, names must be incomplete imitations.¹³¹

Socrates encourages Cratylus to acknowledge that names differ in quality. Some names are better imitations of their objects than others because some names have more of the letters needed to guarantee resemblance between the name and its object while others have fewer. Cratylus should not insist that names have all the appropriate letters. He should permit names to have at least some inappropriate letters. Socrates even entreats Cratylus to permit statements to include inappropriate names so long as he permits names to have inappropriate letters. Arguments should also be allowed to include inappropriate statements. In all these cases, regardless of whether names are better or worse imitations, Socrates insists that names imitate things because names possess the pattern (τύπος) of

narrowly than Socrates intends. While Sedley speaks of representational art, Socrates speaks simply of art, not all of which—politics for instance—is representational.

¹³⁰ If names and things were completely identical then Cratylus could successfully argue, as he does at 439c, that names are the proper venue for philosophical inquiry. However, because names are not perfect imitations, they cannot be the proper subjects of philosophical inquiry. The problem with perfect imitation is that it duplicates reality. Instead of one reality, there would be two: the name and the being named. In this case, philosophical inquiry would be impossible because it could never be confident in its subject matter.

¹³¹ Although the account of imitation implies the impossibility of perfection, Barney 2001, 120, helpfully points out that such impossibility is already present in the tool analogy (388ff.). If a tool always succeeded in its task, it would obviate a user; skill would play no role in enabling tools to complete their task. However, in this case, such a tool would not be a tool at all, since without a user it could not be a tool in any normal sense of the word. This point provides further evidence for the view that Cratylus denies the important role of the dialectician in the crafts of naming.

things named. He adds that this account is the one that he and Hermogenes agreed upon earlier in their discussion of the name βῆτα (393d–e).¹³² In that discussion, they agreed that changes in pronunciation do not alter the meaning of a word. Now Socrates makes the reason for this explicit: names include the pattern of the thing named. In the case of βῆτα, β is in the name. To pronounce βῆτα forces the mouth to articulate the very sound the name hopes to reveal (τύπος itself connotes the imprint left of a blow). Names will mean (λεξέται) the things named regardless of any changes in pronunciation that occur, so long as they includes the thing's pattern.

Does this mean that names do not imitate nature? No. The pattern of a thing is responsible for the meaning of its name, but a name still imitates nature by means of this pattern, as one can see from the example of βῆτα. Βῆτα contains the pattern of the nature the name imitates in β. When βῆτα is pronounced the pattern is matched to the nature the name reveals, which in this case is the same. The β in βῆτα forces us to articulate the very thing we wish to imitate.

Socrates urges Cratylus to accept the view that names differ in quality, that some names imitate things better than others do. If Socrates and Cratylus do not accept this argument then they will be like men lost on the streets of Aegina late at night. The simile is obscure, but it seems to suggest that Socrates and Cratylus will accept the argument too late unless they accept it now. If Cratylus allows changes in pronunciation to alter the meaning of names, then he will be forced to deny that names imitate things in letters and syllables; consequently, he will need to come up with another account of the correctness

¹³² Barney 2001, 123, rightly argues that the present argument lowers the standards for correctness from disclosing nature developed in the examination of names and the account of imitation to disclosing any information about anything.

of names. However, since Cratylus admits that names imitate things by way of letters and syllables, he must accept that changes in pronunciation do not alter the meaning of names. Otherwise, he will contradict himself. Faced with the possibility of self-contradiction, Cratylus reluctantly admits that names differ in quality.

Socrates closes by examining the application of names. A name is applied well if the name possesses the appropriate letters. A name can possess some or most of the appropriate letters, but some of its letters must also be inappropriate if the name is ill applied. Hence, names are applied well when they have the appropriate letters; but applied poorly when they have only some or none of the appropriate letters.¹³³

Cratylus cannot grant without contradicting himself that painting and naming produce imitations while also holding that portraits and names differ to the extent that one kind of imitation can be made better or worse while the other cannot. He must deny that names are imitations or accept that some names are better imitations than others. However, Cratylus is not in a position to deny that names are imitations because such a denial would constitute a rejection of naturalism. If names are not imitations then they have no relationship to nature or reality. It would be possible to impose whatever name one wished on anything. This is Hermogenes' view. Anyone can name something, and any name will be correct so long as people agree to use it. Cratylus opposes Hermogenes, which is why he will ultimately have to accept the view that some names are better imitations than others even though his position ultimately agrees with Hermogenes'.

¹³³ This argument would appear to suggest that longer names with more letters would have a greater chance of being correct than shorter names with fewer letters. To use Sedley's example, "Hermogenes" would have a greater chance of being correct than "Plato" simply because it has a better chance of having enough of the letters needed to imitate Hermogenes' nature. However, more letters is no guarantee. A longer name with more letters may still have few or no appropriate ones such that a very short name with all or some of the appropriate letters would be more correct.

Cratylus indicates that he is not yet satisfied that a name-maker can poorly make a name (433c9–11). How can Cratylus remain obstinate after Socrates has refuted him twice? Cratylus remains unconvinced because he doubts that the portrait analogy is sufficiently similar. If portraits and names are only analogous, they must differ in some respect. Otherwise, they would be identical. Socrates will now explain that portraits and names differ insofar as portraits imitate incidental features of their subjects such as color and shape while names imitate the reality of their objects. Socrates already explained this difference when Socrates introduced the portrait analogy in the discussion of primary names (425a). In the present discussion, he will show Cratylus that the appropriate letters of names imitate reality while the inappropriate ones imitate incidental features.

Socrates begins his third attempt to sway Cratylus from the view that names do not differ qualitatively by verifying that Cratylus accepts the results of the previous discussion of primary names:

You *are* satisfied that a name is a way of expressing a thing?—I am.—And you think it's true that some names are composed out of more primitive ones, while others are primary?—Yes, I do.—But if the primary names are to be a way of expressing things clearly, is there any better way of getting them to be such than by making each of them as much like the thing it is to express as possible? Or do you prefer the way proposed by Hermogenes and many others, who claim that names are conventional signs that express things to those who already knew the things before they established the conventions? Do you think that the correctness of names is conventional, so that it makes no difference whether we accept the present convention or adopt the opposite one, calling 'big' what we now call 'small', and 'small' what we now call 'big'? Which of these two ways of getting names to express things do you prefer?—A name that expresses a thing by being like it is in every way superior, Socrates, to one that is given by chance.—That's right. But if a name is indeed to be like a thing, mustn't the letters or elements out of which primary names are composed be naturally like things? Let me explain by returning to our earlier analogy with painting. Could a painting ever be made like any of the things that are, if it were not composed of pigments that were by nature like the things that the art of painting imitates? Isn't that impossible?—Yes, it's

impossible—Then by the same token can names ever be like anything unless the things they're composed out of first have some kind of likeness to the things they imitate? And aren't they composed of letters or elements?—Yes. (433d1–434b8)

Cratylus is convinced that names reveal (δηλοῦν) things and that there are primary names that make up secondary ones. In doing so, he concedes that secondary names reveal things by means of the primary ones, which reveal things directly. Socrates makes this implicit premise explicit and asks Cratylus about the manner in which simple names reveal things: “is there any better way of getting them to be such than by making each of them as much like the thing it is to express [δηλοῦν] as possible” (433d8–e1)? Depending on Cratylus' answer, Socrates will prepare him to accept the conclusion that some names are better imitations than others. He will get Cratylus to accept that names differ qualitatively. If Cratylus grants that revelation involves imitation then he must also admit that a name can imitate more or less successfully. The reason is that imitation includes appropriate letters to a greater or lesser extent.

What if Cratylus denies that revelation involves imitation? Socrates ensures that Cratylus will not make such a denial by suggesting that convention is the only alternative. If names do not reveal things through imitation, which involves a scale of greater or lesser success, then they must reveal things through convention. Cratylus will never accept conventionalism. Thus, it looks as if he must grant that names reveal things through imitation, which implies that names differ qualitatively, in order to maintain his position that the correctness of names is natural.

Socrates stresses the implications of adopting conventionalism in order to ensure Cratylus' rejection of it. Socrates suggests, for instance, that accepting conventionalism would entail accepting the view that one convention can just as easily be exchanged for

another, that whatever convention is now generally accepted could easily be exchanged for another one which may be opposed to it. Socrates illustrates the point using “big” and “small.” If Cratylus were to grant conventionalism some role in determining the correctness of names, he would have to allow the name “big” to be arbitrarily exchanged for the name “small.” Whatever one happens to call “small,” one can just as easily call “big,” so long as everyone agrees to the change.

Cratylus does admit that names disclose reality through imitation. He argues that this view is superior to its alternative, conventionalism, because the alternative relies on chance (*ἐπιτυχόντι*).¹³⁴ A name like “big” can replace any other name under conventionalism so long as the users of the name agree to the replacement.

Conventionalism, therefore, relies on chance to determine which names disclose which things because the users of names can arbitrarily change how they use names. Imitation is preferable to conventionalism for Cratylus because there is no chance involved. Imitation guarantees that users cannot arbitrarily change how they use names. However, as we shall soon see, the admission that names disclose things through imitation requires Cratylus to acknowledge that imitation involves a scale of greater or lesser success. If he refuses to accept greater or lesser imitations then his position will be incoherent.

Finally, Socrates turns to the elements of primary names. Where the correctness of secondary names depends on the correctness of primary names, the correctness of primary names depends upon the articulation of their constituent sounds. Strictly speaking, the articulation of sounds constitutes imitation; and it is a consequence of the

¹³⁴ Commentators have taken Socrates’ agreement to this remark as evidence that he ultimately accepts naturalism—and not a mitigated conventionalism. Joseph 2000, 72 stresses that Socrates does not agree to the fact that names imitate things; he only agrees that it would be preferable. This he considers evidence that his position is ultimately a mitigated form of conventionalism.

articulation of their constituent sounds that primary and secondary names are able to disclose nature through imitation. To illustrate this, Socrates turns again to the portrait analogy. Cratylus denies that a portrait can imitate its subject without being composed of the colors that belong to that subject. In doing so, he denies that primary names can imitate something while not being made up of the proper oral articulations.

Socrates stresses that imitation is natural. In a portrait, each color imitates the color that naturally belongs to the subject; in a name, the articulation of each letter imitates the nature or reality of something. It may be easier to see how pigments on canvas naturally imitate the colors belonging, for example, to a tree, but it is much more difficult to see how the articulation of sounds naturally imitates being. Socrates and Cratylus have agreed that the articulation of sounds imitates nature or reality. Because Cratylus accepts the portrait analogy, the analogy holds; as a result, the object of elemental imitation need not be precisely determined. Regardless, Socrates and Cratylus finally agree that, while he and Cratylus believe that there are secondary and primary names that disclose nature through imitation, primary names must be composed of the proper oral articulations in order to imitate nature or reality.

To illustrate this, Socrates introduces the problem of the word σκληρότης:

Now, consider what I said to Hermogenes earlier. Tell me, do you think I was right to say that ‘*r*’ is like motion, moving, and hardness or not?—You were right.—And ‘*l*’ is like smoothness, softness, and the other things we mentioned.—Yes.—Yet you know that the very thing that we call ‘*sklērotēs*’ (‘hardness’) is called ‘*sklērotēr*’ by the Eretrians?—Certainly.—Then are both ‘*r*’ and ‘*s*’ like the same thing, and does the name ending in ‘*r*’ express the same thing to them as the one ending in ‘*s*’ does to us, or does one of them fail to express it?—They both express it.—In so far as ‘*r*’ and ‘*s*’ are alike, or in so far as they are unlike?—In so far as they are alike.—Are they alike in all respects?—They are presumably alike with respect to expressing motion at any rate.—What about the ‘*l*’ in these names? Doesn’t it express the opposite of hardness?—Perhaps it is

incorrectly included in them, Socrates. Maybe it's just like the examples you cited to Hermogenes a while ago in which you added or subtracted letters. You were correct to do so, in my view. So, too, in the present case perhaps we ought to replace 'l' with 'r'.—You have a point. But what about when someone says 'sklēron' ('hard'), and pronounces it the way we do at present? Don't we understand him? Don't you yourself know what *I* mean by it?—I do, but that's because of usage ('*ethos*'). (434b10–e4)

During the discussion of primary names, Socrates had argued that the name-giver used ρ to imitate motion because the tongue becomes agitated whenever someone articulates ρ (426e). Socrates had also argued that the name-giver employed λ to signify motion because the tongue passed smoothly through the mouth whenever someone articulated λ (427b). Socrates reminds Cratylus of these remarks in order to make use of them in his analysis of the word σκληρότης. Σκληρότης presents a serious problem for Cratylus because its letters contradict its meaning. What σκληρότης shows is that imitation is not sufficient to explain correctness (Barney 2001, 126). Socrates did not argue previously that ρ imitates hardness (cf. 426d–e). He now adds this meaning to ρ to ensure that Cratylus cannot argue that the Eretrian form of the words is superior to the Attic form (Sedley 2003, 144). This addition will also ensure that Cratylus sees clearly that σκληρότης presents a dilemma for naturalism. Cratylus agrees that ρ does possess this connotation and by doing so, he agrees implicitly that there is a conflict between hardness and softness in σκληρότης. Since the word means “hardness,” the majority of the letters in the word must convey hardness. However, there is only one rho in the Attic spelling of the word. Additionally, there is one λ. Thus, the word should equally mean hardness and softness; or it should mean neither because they cancel out (Sedley 2003, 143). If ρ and λ are removed, however, σ remains, which Socrates and Cratylus agree discloses motion much as ρ and λ do. Socrates had argued previously that σ is an instrument that signifies

motion because the tongue allows breath to pass through the mouth unimpeded (427a2). One could argue that σ shares with λ the connotation of “smoothness.” However, Socrates does not provide such an argument. If ρ and λ cancel out, it becomes more difficult to see how σκληρότης could mean “hardness.” The word seems to require ρ in order to retain its meaning. Fortunately, Socrates compares the Attic pronunciation of σκληρότης to its Eretrian spelling σκληρότηρ. Σκληρότηρ is better than the σκληρότης because it retains one of its two ρ’s after λ has cancelled the other one out.

Cratylus cannot choose the Eretrian pronunciation over the Attic because he agrees that ρ imitates “hardness” (Sedley 2003, 142–4). In addition, the Eretrian pronunciation does not account for the λ. When Socrates asks Cratylus about the λ in σκληρότης, Cratylus appeals to the previous argument that names sometimes include, exclude, or transpose letters (see Sedley 2003, 148–9, for a discussion of names with few inappropriate articulations versus names with all or mostly inappropriate articulations). Cratylus asserts that ρ replace the λ in σκληρότης so that the name does not possess any inappropriate articulations.¹³⁵ By appealing to this argument, however, Cratylus concedes that names can be mispronounced. If names can be mispronounced, they can imitate things more or less successfully. This appeal not only flies in the face of the assertion that one must pronounce names correctly or fail to disclose things at all, but also opens the door for convention. If names differ in quality, then convention is necessary to ensure that names remain meaningful. Socrates sounds the death knell of Cratylus’ naturalism when he asks whether Cratylus understands someone when he or she uses the word

¹³⁵ Barney 2001, 124, points out that there is an inconsistency in this move. Cratylus contended earlier that names are individual such that Hermogenes’ name is really someone else’s name (429e11). If this is true, insisting on the corruption of the pronunciation of σκληροτης is doomed to fail. Σκληρότης and σκληρότηρ are really the names of two entirely different things.

σκληρόν. This word clarifies the problem. Σκληρόν has just one ρ and one λ and yet somehow means “hard.” How can it mean “hard” when a different articulation contradicts the articulation that imitates hard? If Cratylus understands this word when Socrates uses it, he must admit that convention plays a part in the correctness of names.¹³⁶ The only way for σκληρόν to have any significance for Cratylus is if convention bears some responsibility for preserving its meaning.

Cratylus will not concede that convention enables him to understand the meaning of σκληρόν. What he will concede is that he understands it through habit (ἔθος). This concession does not of course grant that convention has a part to play in the correctness of names, but it does sanction Hermogenes’ unmodified conventionalism. Hermogenes originally claimed that names are correct through habit (ἔθος, 384d6). The way people use words determines the meaning of words. Cratylus gives credence to this view by admitting that he understands σκληρόν when someone uses it despite its pronunciation. Thus, he moves closer to Hermogenes’ position.

By way of clarification, Socrates asks if Cratylus means convention (νόμος) when he says habit. If Cratylus understands σκληρότης when it is used, he understands it by convention. Only convention could enable Cratylus to understand what Socrates has in

¹³⁶ Joseph 2000, 73, considers Socrates’ argument surprising. The fact that Socrates introduces understanding (μανθανεῖν) as the purpose of names seems to run contrary to his original position that the purpose of names is to distinguish nature (388b10). That understanding also comes to the fore in this discussion seems superficial, considering that Socrates has been a firm proponent of naturalism. On the contrary, Socrates introduces understanding to help names fulfill their purpose. It is because we can understand one another despite differences in pronunciation that names are able to distinguish nature. Names do not lose their purpose when they are mispronounced. It is the same for other tools. Holding a knife by its blade will prevent it from functioning correctly. Nonetheless, the knife retains its ability to cut things.

mind when σκληρής fails to make its meaning evident.¹³⁷ Cratylus gives only simple answers to Socrates' questions, but he affirms that he understands what the word means and what Socrates intends when he says it (Silverman 2001, 28).

Socrates stresses that, even if the name means something other than what he intends when he says it, Cratylus must acknowledge that he has entered into convention with himself. If Socrates utters the word σκληρότης and Cratylus understands what Socrates means when he utters the word, there need not be any convention between Socrates and Cratylus in order for them to understand one another when they speak. Instead, there need only be convention for Cratylus.

This argument is similar to the previous argument about the words “horse” and “man.” If Cratylus decided to exchange “man” for “horse,” whenever someone happened to use the word “man,” Cratylus would understand horse and vice-versa. Similarly, when Socrates says σκληρότης, Cratylus could understand softness if he decided that σκληρότης means “softness.”

Socrates also considers how habit and convention differ (434e4–7). If habit and convention are different, names can still disclose things by convention rather than by nature because habit allows names like σκληρότης, which possesses as many inappropriate letters as appropriate ones, to imitate things even when they do it poorly. Habit ensures that names disclose things even if many of their letters are inappropriate. People can mispronounce a name without taking its function away from it. Because of this, the way a name is habitually used can step in to ensure that a name functions properly even when the name-maker has failed to make it correctly.

¹³⁷ Barney 2001, 131 and Sedley 2003, 140, restrict the significance of conventionalism to σκληρότης. Compare “is communicating” with the expression “communicates.” See also Joseph 2000, 75, for an extended discussion of how habit undermines imitation.

Socrates does not state clearly whether convention supplements nature or completely replaces it. We are, consequently, in no better position to regard naturalism as refuted than we were after Socrates' refutation of Hermogenes. Nonetheless, if Socrates has thrown out naturalism, as Annas and Schofield contend, then he has implicitly directed his attack on imitation. Socrates would have to show that imitation is somehow faulty to disprove naturalism. Yet he does no such thing; he simply ceases to speak of naturalism and offers Cratylus a series of arguments defending the place of conventionalism in the correctness of names. It may be that names need not imitate or resemble things in order to make communication possible. People may use any name they wish so long as they can communicate with others. However, Socrates never denies that names resemble things nor does he deny that some do so better than others. Letter names remain inescapably naturally correct names. Convention can make communication possible for names that do not resemble things as well by explaining how people sometimes manage to communicate even when they use incorrect names. If one supposes that convention makes communication possible by associating names with specific things, one must admit that imitation or resemblance might still connect names to things.

Socrates gives further evidence for the role convention plays in the correctness of names (cf. Barney 2001, 133). Cratylus argued at 432a that the inclusion, exclusion, or transposition of letters altogether changed a name. Socrates replied that this view could apply only to numbers where the addition and subtraction of units would change a number (for discussion of the numbers example, see Bestor 1980, 324–325, Schofield 1982, 78–9, Reeve 1998, xxxix–xl, and Barney 2001, 132–4).¹³⁸ Socrates now returns to

¹³⁸ According to Sedley 2003, 142–3, the number example is “mysterious” because it is not obvious why the number-names should require convention. Arabic and Greek numerals name the first ten

numbers in order to show Cratylus that conventionalism will not be able to explain their names. Many numbers have names, e.g. ἓν, δύο, (one, two), but there is an infinite set of numbers because the addition of a unit will always produce a new number. If there is an infinite set of numbers then there must be an infinite set of names. However, there is a limit to names. The mouth can combine articulations in a limited number of ways (cf. *Philebus* 17b, 18d). So there is a limit to the number of names available to imitate numbers. Convention allows one to group number-names together into ever-larger names. I can combine two and one hundred to get two-hundred. Nature could be responsible for such combinations because “two” and “hundred” disclose the numbers two and one hundred. Yet nature cannot decide whether two-hundred means two plus one hundred or two times one hundred. For this, convention must decide how to combine number-names.

numbers and proceed to combine them to form larger and larger numbers. However, Socrates seems to suggest that, without convention, every number would require a unique name. One million would require a unique name entirely different from one or one thousand. Only a name consisting of a million sounds could imitate a million, and such a name would clearly be impractical because the name would not be an imitation but the thing itself (cf. 432b6–c4; cf. Silverman 2001, 29). Convention is necessary to ensure that names remain imitations and do not become duplicates. It is for this reason, Sedley thinks, that convention must take part in naming numbers: “the length of large numbers has to be captured through the devices of multiplication and addition; and it is the established conventions for the formation of compound number-names that provides this vital short cut.” Sedley appeals to the Greek numerals and argues that convention steps in to decide which numerals have which value. Each letter in the Greek alphabet had a specific numerical value similar to the way that each Hebrew letter has a numerical value. The first nine letters (alpha, beta, gamma, etc.) served as numerals for the one’s place (1, 2, 3, etc.); the next nine letters (iota, kappa, lambda, etc) served as numerals for the ten’s place (10, 20, 30, etc); and the final nine letters (rho, sigma, tau, etc.) served as numerals for the hundred’s place (100, 200, 300, etc. Note that this counting system includes three obsolete Phoenician letters: digamma, koppa, and san for twenty-seven). Larger numerals combined the first twenty-nine. One hundred and eleven was “PIA.” However, addition supplied the principle for combining numerals. A person arrived at larger numerals by adding together the values of the first twenty-nine. To get “PIA,” a person must start with one hundred, “P,” add ten, “I,” and then add one, “A.” No one could add them in reverse. If the Greeks had combined numerals in a different way, “AAA” might have been the numeral for one hundred and eleven. What this shows is that large numerals require a rule (νόμος) of some kind to decide which numeral has which value, and such a rule is a matter of custom (νόμος). Cratylus cannot account for the rules governing large numerals. He might accept that the first twenty-nine letters are the first twenty numerals, but he has no way to explain why one hundred and eleven is “PIA” instead of “AAA.” Without convention, there is no limit to how numerals may be combined, and which value numerals have (Silverman 2001, 29). Barney 2001, 133, argues that one of the points the number example makes is that imitation is insufficient to guarantee that a name attaches to a form. The vagueness of names as imitations suggests that they name things as well as their form.

Unless convention plays a role in the formation of different names, there cannot be an infinite number of names for each number.

Socrates prefers the view that names be as much like nature as possible, that names imitate nature.¹³⁹ He does not tell Cratylus why he would prefer imitation to convention; but it is clear from his conversation with Hermogenes that he has many reasons for upholding naturalism. It is only after he has finished his explanation of naturalism and his subsequent investigation of it in the etymologies that he takes the time to reflect on his explanation, discovering that it requires convention to account for imitation. However, Socrates fears that if he were to insist exclusively on naturalism, his defense of it would amount to “hauling a ship up a sticky ramp” (435c5). Here he quotes Hermogenes, who used this expression to characterize Socrates’ analysis of τέχνη (expertise, 414c) as contrived. Socrates argued that τέχνη comes from ἔξιτιν νοῦ (having intelligence).¹⁴⁰ This etymology seems contrived because of the extensive changes made to τέχνη. In order to get ἔξιτιν νοῦ out of τέχνη, Socrates had to remove τ, and add ο in between χ and the first ν, and in between the second ν and the η. The result of these subtractions and additions is ἐχονοή, the nominal form of which is ἔξιτιν νοῦ when parsed out. If these changes were as contrived as they seem then Socrates’ defense of imitation would also be highly contrived. So, instead of insisting solely upon naturalism, Socrates and Cratylus must incorporate convention into the correctness of names to preserve their account of it.

¹³⁹ See Sedley 2003, 147–148, for reasons why Socrates’ endorsement of imitation (435c2–3) does not force naturalism to succumb in any way to conventionalism.

¹⁴⁰ Sedley 2003, 159, mistakenly describes τέχνη as an anomaly because he thinks it discloses being at rest while the other names nearby disclose being in motion. Sedley overlooks the previous analysis of νοῦς (411e) as implying motion in his eagerness to embrace τέχνη as implying rest.

Socrates closes his third attempt to persuade Cratylus that some names are better imitations than others by emphasizing the importance of supplementing the natural correctness of names with convention: “For probably the best possible way to speak consists in using names all (or most) of which are like the things they name (that is, are appropriate to them), while the worst is to use the opposite kind of names” (435c8–d1). Names are like their objects and one should use names that entirely or mostly imitate things while one should not use names that do not imitate things somewhat or at all. In the end, Socrates and Cratylus agree—at least tacitly—that some names are better imitations than others and convention is necessary to ensure that names imitate the proper things.

8: Education (435c9–440d4)

If Cratylus were right that no name is better than another, what would follow? One implication would be that the makers of names would have no need of any supervision. If they can only absolutely succeed or fail to coin a name then dialecticians would not need to supervise their work. The job of a dialectician is to ensure that each name reveals the nature of the thing that it is designed to imitate. In the present chapter, Socrates examines this implication and exposes Cratylus' adherence to it. Cratylus will refuse to admit that name-makers require dialectical supervision. This will expose a contradiction inherent in Cratylus' commitment to Heracliteanism: while he maintains that nature and reality are in flux, his own nature will not budge.

Cratylus claims that the purpose of names is to teach (διδάσκειν, 435d4). Anyone who knows a name, he argues, also knows the thing disclosed by that name.¹⁴¹ Thus, Cratylus directs the conversation away from understanding towards a consideration of the purpose of names.¹⁴² If a person employs names to teach, a person must know the nature of the thing named so that a person may use the name correctly. Socrates attempts to

¹⁴¹ Berman 1993/4, 61, argues that Cratylus makes this concession because he accepts Protagorean relativism. Things are however they appear to us. Thus, when we know the name of something, we know the thing because the name determines the nature of the thing. Yet Berman supposes that Cratylus' commitment to Protagoras stems from his devotion to Heraclitus (1993/4, 63). However, one may admit that everything is in flux without also conceding that things are only how they appear. A top might appear to be still though it is actually moving. Thus, it is possible to accept Heraclitean flux without accepting Protagorean relativism. Cratylus certainly accepts Heraclitean flux (440e1), but he has nowhere explicitly endorsed Protagorean relativism.

¹⁴² Joseph 2000, 76, argues that Cratylus is justified in ignoring communication because Socrates has let the issue of mutual understanding slip away. However, Cratylus needs no justification for the assertion. Mutual understanding served to shake his strict adherence to naturalism, not to refute the position altogether. Cratylus is free to speak of teaching in the same way Socrates did earlier without having to refute Hermogenes' conventionalism. That teaching and discrimination are the purpose of names did not refute conventionalism. Socrates has forced Cratylus to accept that convention plays some part in the correctness of names, but he need not think that the correctness of names is solely conventional.

clarify the connection between names and natures by suggesting that knowledge of a name and knowledge of a nature is possible because names imitate nature. If someone knows what a name imitates then he or she will also know the nature imitated.

Knowledge of names entails knowledge of nature named because names imitate nature.

Cratylus accepts Socrates' clarification, which allows them to focus on the claim that teaching is the purpose of names. Cratylus argues that knowledge of names alone suffices for knowledge of beings. Teaching is the best and only way to learn about beings (435e8). To corroborate this claim, Socrates asks whether teaching is also the best and only way to *discover* beings (εὔρεσιν τῶν ὄντων, 436a2). If one discovers a name then does one also discover a being? Alternatively, if the discovery of a name does not entail the discovery of a being then must investigation and discovery (ζητεῖν μὲν καὶ εὐρίσκειν) be undertaken in another way? Cratylus rejects this alternative and affirms that the discovery of a name entails the discovery of a nature. His naturalism commits him to this view despite his refusal to deny that convention must play a part in the correctness of names.

Socrates objects: If someone uses names as his or her guide to investigate reality then he or she could be deceived about reality. Cratylus is unsure about this because he resists the view that some names are better imitations than others. He agrees that the original name-maker coined names “based on his conception of what those things were like (οἷα ἠγερῖτο εἶναι τὰ πράγματα, τοιαῦτα ἐτίθετο καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ὥς φάμεν; 436b5–6), but, he rejects the idea that the name-maker could have coined names incorrectly on the basis of a faulty belief. The name-maker had knowledge of the realities he named because otherwise he would not have been able to coin names at all. The name-giver

must have known about things before he named them. If he did not have knowledge of reality then he could not have named anything. This argument contradicts the previous one that knowledge of names entails knowledge of nature. Cratylus has not argued that knowledge of nature entails knowledge of names. Nonetheless, Cratylus is clearly committed to such a view because his naturalism identifies names and natures. Since names and natures are identical, knowledge of names entails knowledge of natures and vice-versa.

Cratylus asserts here for the last time his claim that names must be completely correct or they cannot be names at all (436b11–c6). The name-giver knew about nature because he coined names consistently. Most names reveal that beings are in motion because the original name-maker believed them to be so. Cratylus appeals to this demonstration to justify his claim that the name-makers coined names consistently. Because the name-maker believed that reality changes, the names he coined not only reflect this belief, but also do so consistently. That names consistently point out that reality changes indicates that this man's knowledge of reality was correct. The name-maker's ability to name things consistently is a reflection of his knowledge.

Socrates doubts that consistency is a sufficient condition for knowledge of reality. The name-maker could have had a mistaken belief about reality, which may have polluted his whole enterprise of naming. He may have forced the names he coined to be consistent with his mistake. Something similar happens in geometry (436d2). If a geometer adopts a mistaken assumption before he undertakes a geometrical demonstration, he or she will err because the mistake underlies the demonstration. If the geometer continues to overlook his mistake, he will force his subsequent demonstrations

to be consistent with the first one. Because consistency fails to prevent a mistaken assumption from infecting a geometrical demonstration, it cannot justify knowledge of reality.

There is a solution to the problem. Instead of looking merely for consistency, one must examine the fundamental principles underlying any demonstration in order to guarantee consistency *and* correctness. The name-giver's knowledge of reality is based on the assumption that reality changes. Consequently, he coins the names for things based on this erroneous assumption, making them consistent with one another. If the name-giver had carefully considered whether reality is in fact changing then he could have avoided a fatal error.¹⁴³

To see if names are consistent, Socrates proposes that they reconsider some of the names they have examined to learn whether they are consistent with the belief that reality is in motion (cf. 412a). They will consider ἐπιστήμη (knowledge), βέβαιον (certain), ιστορία (inquiry), πιστόν (confidence), μνήμη (memory), ἀμαρτία (error), ξυμφορά (mishap), ἀμαθία (ignorance), and ἀκολασία (licentiousness). Socrates argues that ἐπιστήμη combines ἐπι (on, upon) and ἴστησιν (to stop, 437a3–8). Thus, ἐπιστήμη names something that prevents the soul from moving toward things. This account of ἐπιστήμη contradicts the previous one (412a1–4). Socrates has argued that, after inserting an epsilon before the π and the ι in ἐπιστήμη, he has revealed the name to disclose that the soul follows the movement of things. Since reality is in flux, ἐπιστήμη names the soul's attendance on flux. However, if Socrates and Cratylus retain the current pronunciation of

¹⁴³ Notice that Socrates does not endorse any particular view of reality, nor does he reject the view that reality is in flux. He has here merely called into question the knowledge of reality that the name-makers possess. If the name-makers' opinions about reality are true then they will have coined names correctly. However, if they are false then the name-makers will have failed to do so.

ἐπιστήμη or aspirate the iota after the pi then the analysis of the word reveals that it discloses rest rather than motion. So while Socrates had shown previously that ἐπιστήμη discloses motion, he now proves that it could equally and more plausibly disclose rest.¹⁴⁴

Socrates bolsters the inconsistency of names with further examples. Βέβαιον discloses rest because it comes from βάσις, which is similar to στάσις (rest). Ἱστορία also discloses rest because it combines ἴστησι and ῥοῦν. Πιστόν also discloses rest because it comes from ιστάν as well. Μνήμη discloses rest because it comes from μονή (stay). Ἄμαρτία and ξυμφορά share the same meaning as σύνεσις and ἐπιστήμη insofar as ἄμαρτία comes from ὀμαρτεῖν (to accompany), and as ξυμφορά comes from συμφέρεσθαι (to move with). Finally, both ἀμαθία and ἀκολασία are nearly the same as ἀμαρτία and ξυμφορά because ἀμαθία seems to contract the phrase ἅμα θεῶ ἰόντος (going together with the gods), and because ἀκολασία seems to contract the phrase ἀκολουθία τοῖς πράγμασιν (movement according to things).

Most of these names did not appear in the previous analysis. Socrates introduces them now to show that it is doubtful the name-giver coined names consistently.¹⁴⁵ Earlier Socrates revealed that the names of the virtues among other positive names disclose reality in motion. Now, besides ἐπιστήμη, which he included in his demonstration of virtue as ambiguous, Socrates reveals that βέβαιον, Ἱστορία, πιστόν, and μνήμη disclose

¹⁴⁴ Sedley 2003, 152, argues that the contradiction Socrates observes in the etymologies of ἐπιστήμη and σύμφορα is philosophically correct but not exegetically correct (cf. Reeve 1998, xiii and xxxii), but Sedley's argument assumes that Socrates prefers his second analysis of ἐπιστήμη and σύμφορα to the first. Yet he indicates that the purpose of these new analyses is to show that names may have alternative etymologies (cf. 440d1ff.).

¹⁴⁵ Sedley 2003, 161, argues that the second survey of names challenges only the philosophical correctness of the first survey by uncritically exposing the beliefs of the original name-makers. I agree, but the conflict between these surveys highlights the importance of evaluating the beliefs of the original makers of names *before* determining which survey is more correct.

being at rest despite the fact that these words are positive.¹⁴⁶ On the contrary, Socrates reveals that words such as ἀμαρτία, ξυμφορά, ἀμαθία, and ἀκολασία, all of which are negative, disclose beings in motion. Hence, where before the positive names disclosed being in motion and negative names disclose beings at rest, here they are reversed. Positive words disclose beings at rest and negative words disclosed beings in motion. The name-giver seems to have coined names inconsistently despite his presumed knowledge of reality.¹⁴⁷ These analyses suggest that he may have even intended his names to disclose beings at rest rather than in motion.

Cratylus directs Socrates to consider the fact that most names disclose beings in motion. However, Socrates is skeptical: “Are we to count names like votes and determine their correctness in that? If more names signify motion does that make *them* the true ones?—No, that’s not a reasonable view” (437d2–6). Just because the majority of names disclose beings in motion does not prove that these names are more correct than the minority. If Cratylus were to base the correctness of names on the majority of names then he would be introducing conventionalism by arbitrarily accepting the majority opinion over the minority. Since there is no reason to accept one over the other, motion cannot serve as a basis for the correctness of names.

¹⁴⁶ Joseph 2000, 78, suggests that the importance of βέβαιον and πιστόν for ἐπιστήμη and ἱστορία indicates that these analyses are “another ironical commentary on the dialogue itself, since Socrates’ point here is precisely that the knowledge he has been producing is not firm (and therefore not really knowledge and his enquiry not trustworthy (and therefore not really an enquiry).”

¹⁴⁷ Barney 2001, 145–146, suggests that the second survey of names has the effect of Socratic *elenchus*. An *elenchus* refutes knowledge claims by exposing an inconsistency in the claimant’s knowledge (cf. e.g. *Republic* I). In our case, the original makers of names coined names inconsistently. Some names imply rest while others imply motion. Moreover, while some names bearing positive connotations implied motion, others did not. The maker of names, therefore, did not coin names consistently. Socratic *elenchus* in this case has the effect of showing that one cannot rely on the authority of the original makers of names by itself if one wishes to learn how names might be correct. *Elenchus* also has the effect of showing that there may be no way to discover nature at all. If names are the only means of discovering or inquiring about things then names cannot guarantee that they disclose nature accurately.

Socrates returns to Cratylus' claim that the original makers of names had knowledge of reality in order to name things (435d). The etymologies of ἐπιστήμη and σύμφορα show that the original makers of names may have based the names they coined on a false view of reality. Socrates and Cratylus must consider whether the original name-makers had a true or false view of reality before they can decide whether names are naturally or conventionally correct. Does Cratylus still accept this claim?

Cratylus believes that the original makers of names—both primary and secondary ones—possessed knowledge of reality (438a1–7). This belief poses a problem: if Cratylus grants that knowledge is a condition for naming things whether original or subsequent, and teaching is the purpose of names, then coining a name for something is impossible. The reason is a name-giver must already have knowledge of reality in order to coin names, but he can acquire knowledge of reality only through names. Cratylus admits that this is a problem (438b5, cf. Berman 1993/4, 65). If learning can occur only through names, how do the original makers of names learn without any names? Cratylus introduces a *deus ex machina* as a solution (Benardete 1981, 134). He proposes that a power greater than human established the primary names to ensure that they are correct (438c1–3). That Cratylus would suggest that the gods or something like them is originally responsible for names indicates that he had not been paying careful attention to poetry's reliance on the gods to untangle its knotted plots (cf. 425d). A comprehensive account of the correctness of names must exclude such explanations because they merely avoid the problem. Cratylus is willing to assign responsibility to the gods in order to enjoy both sides of the problem: that teaching is the purpose of names and that the original makers of primary names had knowledge of reality.

Yet there is another problem. Socrates reminds Cratylus that the makers of primary names did so inconsistently. Is Cratylus willing to assert that these men are daemons or gods and that they coined names inconsistently? Cratylus inflexibly maintains that they coined names inconsistently because the inconsistent names are not names at all. His persistence flies in the face of Socrates' attempts to show Cratylus that some names are better imitations than others as well as the evidence that the name-maker coined names inconsistently (see chapter seven).

Cratylus hopes to resolve the problem by demolishing its foundation. If he denies that some names are better imitations than others, he is free to deny that the name-maker coined names inconsistently. This, however, only shifts the problem. Which names are inconsistent: those that disclose beings at rest, or those that disclose them in motion? The problem is that some of the names that signify motion are positive and some are negative. If Cratylus wants positive names to disclose only beings in motion, he must account for the positive names that disclose beings at rest, as well as the negative names that disclose beings in motion. Any attempt, however, to solve this problem runs up against the argument that whichever group of names is correct depends simply upon one's preference. There is no reason for Cratylus to prefer that positive names disclose beings in motion rather than at rest, except because more of them happen to disclose beings in one way instead of another. To prefer one, however, over the other is to concede conventionalism, which Cratylus wants to avoid. Thus, Cratylus finds himself in an impossible dilemma. He must either give up the view that knowledge of names entails knowledge of beings or grant conventionalism.

Cratylus chooses to deny conventionalism (438e2; cf. 438d1). This denial will force him to give up his view that knowledge of names entails knowledge of beings. Socrates summarizes the problem: since the name-makers appears to have coined names inconsistently, they must begin an examination of these names to account for their apparent inconsistency. Socrates confesses that they cannot investigate the inconsistency of names by examining names themselves because it will only aggravate the inconsistency. The only option available to them is to examine the reality itself. By focusing their investigation on reality instead of on the names, Socrates and Cratylus may determine which names are correct and which ones are not.

What does Socrates mean by an investigation of beings without names? Thomas 2008, 342, tries to make sense of the nature of such an inquiry. An inquiry without names, she suggests,

is best characterized as transcendental metaphysics. The sort of transcendental metaphysics at issue in the closing pages of Plato's *Cratylus* is inquiry conducted by language users, but without appeal to definitional accounts of individual real natures. As such, inquiry without names is inquiry beyond or outside of names.

An inquiry without names does not mean that it takes place outside of language. Only that the results of such an inquiry reach beyond the limits of language.¹⁴⁸

Socrates adds that an inquiry without names would depend on the kinship between beings:

How else would you expect to learn about them [beings]? How else than in the most legitimate and natural way, namely, learning them through one another, if they are somehow akin, and through themselves? For something different, something that was other than they, wouldn't signify

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Silverman 2001, 34. The beauty of Thomas' interpretation is that it fits nicely with Socrates' autobiographical account of his coming to philosophy in *Phaedo*.

them, but something different, something other.—That seems true to me.
(438e7–12)

Socrates proposes that one can learn about beings through their relationship to other beings (cf. *Meno* 81d). If a person wants to learn about beauty then he may accomplish this by examining beauty itself and its relationship to other beings, such as goodness or ugliness. Knowing how beings differ helps one to learn about beings by themselves (cf. 388c1).

The kinship of beings presents enormous implications for names. If one can know about beings by themselves and their relation to one another, their names would also be meaningful by themselves and in relation to other names. This confirms Socrates' account of the purpose of names. Names disclose and discriminate reality (38810–c2). It has these two functions because knowledge of beings requires an inquiry into beings themselves and into their relationship with one another. As a result, the name of each being must capture each being by itself and its relationships to other beings.

Silverman 2001, 31, and Thomas 2008, 364, stress that just because the best way to learn about reality is by investigating it directly does not mean that the study of names cannot be helpful. According to Silverman,

The very fact that we are seeming to determine whether language accurately reflects the world leaves open the possibility that by studying language we can gain insight into the way the world is. The final argument shows that it cannot be the only way, or even the best way, to learn about the world.

However, the present argument emphasizes that the study of names can never suffice for knowledge of reality. Studying names permits a person to learn only about names. If the study of names teaches a person anything about the world, it does so purely by accident.

Cratylus concedes that it is best to inquire about reality itself instead of inquiring about it through names (439b2), but Socrates hesitates to conclude that one *cannot* learn about reality by examining names. He and Cratylus have agreed that some names are better imitations than others. Each name, therefore, imitates each being. If it is possible to learn about beings by examining their names and to learn about beings by examining them directly, which approach is a better way to learn about beings? If one examines names, then one first learns about names and how well they imitate beings and then one learns about beings themselves. However, if one examines reality directly then one will learn first about reality and then about names, particularly how well names imitate reality, even while using names to conduct the investigation. Because Socrates and Cratylus have already agreed that knowledge of reality is a condition for knowledge of names, one cannot accurately determine how well a name imitates reality without any knowledge of reality. Thus, learning about reality by examining names yields uncertain knowledge because it tries to determine how well a name resembles reality before reality is known. Learning about reality by directly examining it guarantees knowledge of reality and knowledge of names because it gains knowledge of reality before it determines how well names resemble reality.

Can one directly examine reality without names? Socrates gives us no reason to think that an investigation of reality avoids thought and speech altogether. He directs the force of his argument against the view that the proper way to get at reality is through a careful study of the names we use to speak of it. We should instead pursue an investigation of reality unmediated by names. This need not suggest that names play no part in the investigation of reality. Their use may be limited to speaking about the way we

perceive or think about reality. The *Cratylus* as a whole demonstrates this. The interlocutors employ the very phenomenon they are investigating to help them conduct the investigation. Using names, they have been trying to understand the correctness of names.

Cratylus grants that it is better to learn about reality directly in order to guarantee knowledge. In doing so, he acknowledges that their investigation of names is misdirected. If they hope to have knowledge, they must examine beings themselves and their relationship to one another. Unfortunately, such an enterprise is beyond the scope of their current discussion because it is a large task (439b4). So they should be satisfied to know that an investigation of reality is more worthwhile than an investigation of names because an investigation of reality guarantees that they will acquire knowledge of it.¹⁴⁹ This is precisely the sort of inquiry Socrates undertakes next. However, as we saw in chapter five, Socrates does not settle the dispute over whether nature is in flux. He simply sketches an argument for the alternate view that nature is fixed (438cff.). Thus, he leaves the entire dispute over the correctness of names inconclusive.

Left with competing views of reality, Socrates directs Cratylus to keep investigating whether being is fixed or in flux, and he should take a position on the matter only after an exhaustive investigation of it (440d4–8). When he has done so, he should teach Socrates which view is correct. Cratylus indicates that he will follow Socrates' advice. However, he has already investigated the issue a great deal. Heraclitus seems more correct. Nature and reality are in flux (440d9–e2).

¹⁴⁹ Silverman 2001, 40 contends that the point of the foregoing argument is not to show that a study of names is useless. The point is that there must be a way of learning about nature or being without resorting to the help of names.

Is it clear that Cratylus has thoroughly investigated reality?¹⁵⁰ Sedley 2003, 171, following Kirk 1951, 227, argues that Cratylus adopts the view that reality changes for the first time in the *Cratylus*. The etymologies expose the original name-makers' belief that reality is in motion and provides Cratylus with support for his naturalism. However, he does not mention any conversion.¹⁵¹ His only remark prior to engaging in conversation with Socrates is his recalcitrant answer to Hermogenes' query at 383a2, which indicates Cratylus' refusal to accept conventionalism. Whether Cratylus converts to Heracliteanism or has already adopted it after the examination of names, he does not betray that he has spent much time or energy investigating reality. He seems only to have accepted the results of the previous discussion.

The discussion with Socrates reveals that Cratylus rigidly commits himself to the view that reality changes despite his adherence to flux. He tried vigilantly to repel Socrates' onslaught but he fails to prove that names are exclusively naturally correct. His commitment to naturalism runs contrary to the view that nature is in flux. If names disclose nature then nature must be stable enough to allow a name to capture it. Despite the inconsistency, Socrates retreats from refuting Heracliteanism and chooses instead to cast doubt on the truth of the view. This allows Cratylus to maintain the view, but forces him to think more about it. Though Socrates argues that there may be alternatives to Heracliteanism, his arguments do not permit Cratylus to embrace Heracliteanism. That Cratylus embraces Heracliteanism anyway, even in the face of contradiction, shows that

¹⁵⁰ Allan 1954, 280–281, claims that Cratylus has considered Heracliteanism carefully: “σκοποῦμένῳ and πράγματα ἔχοντι [at 440d–e] are here equal to a clause containing an *imperfect* indicative, which would imply protracted or frequent enquiry.”

¹⁵¹ Cratylus' obstinacy casts doubt on the view that Socrates persuades Cratylus to become a Heraclitean. The idea that Cratylus could wholeheartedly embrace Socrates' account of naturalism without his criticisms of it is simply unbelievable.

he is an inflexible advocate of flux. If he were truly committed to the view that reality changes, he would be willing to go with the flow, to accept the possibility that nature and being are not in flux, and thereby prove that it is possible to admit such a possibility without fundamentally rejecting that nature and being are in flux.

The beginning of Cratylus' conversation with Socrates foreshadows his obstinacy. According to Socrates, the account of imitation depends on Cratylus if it is to resolve the dispute over the correctness of names (427c9). Hermogenes challenges Cratylus to accept imitation or to propose an alternative (427d3–e5). Cratylus yields, but evades the issue. He excuses himself from explaining what the correctness of names is by insisting that it is a difficult subject to teach and even more difficult to learn. The difficulty of the correctness of names may account for the difficulty involved in learning it, but it does not explain the difficulty of teaching it. If the correctness of names were too difficult to teach then Cratylus would not be able to teach it at all. However, there is a more serious problem. If Cratylus' view of the correctness of names is too difficult to teach and too difficult to learn then how could anyone—including Cratylus—be sure of it?

Cratylus also emphasizes the difficulty involved in learning the correctness of names over teaching it. Teaching the correctness of names may be difficult but it is nothing compared to learning about it. This emphasis implies that Cratylus' students are more responsible for their failure to understand Cratylus' account of the correctness of names than he is for teaching it. Cratylus brought the same charge against Hermogenes at the beginning of the dialogue. Instead of confessing that his silence was because of the difficulty involved in teaching the correctness of names, Cratylus blamed Hermogenes for expecting Cratylus to be able to make him understand his view of the correctness of

names (384a). Cratylus admits that teaching the correctness of names is difficult, but he denies that his failure to teach Hermogenes is due to any difficulty inherent in the subject. Cratylus blames Hermogenes for assuming that teaching the correctness of names is easy.

Hermogenes acknowledges that the correctness of names is difficult to teach and difficult to learn. Nevertheless, the difficulty should not prevent Cratylus from trying to teach them now. Socrates deserves Cratylus' help because of the tremendous effort he has exerted in arbitrating their dispute. Socrates seconds the request and implores Cratylus to teach him about the correctness of names:

Yes, Cratylus, please do. As far as I'm concerned nothing I've said is set in stone. I have simply been saying what seems right to me as a result of my investigations with Hermogenes. So, don't hesitate to speak, and if your views are better than mine, I'll gladly accept them. And it wouldn't surprise me if they were better, for you've both investigated these matters for yourself and learned about them from others. So, if indeed you do happen to have something better to offer, you may sign me up as a student in your course on the correctness of names. (428a6–b5)

According to Socrates, Cratylus should not hesitate to share with them his view of the correctness of names, especially if it is better than theirs, because Cratylus has spent a great deal of time investigating the correctness of names. Cratylus has also apparently spoken with experts on the subject from whom he has learned a great deal about the correctness of names.

Cratylus acknowledges that he has spent a great deal of time investigating the correctness of names (428b6), but he denies that he has anything to teach Socrates and Hermogenes. He fears that Socrates and Hermogenes will have nothing to learn from him because he accepts the account in its entirety. In support of this claim, he cites Homer, who writes, "Ajax son of Telamon, seed of Zeus, lord of the people, all you have said to me seems spoken after my own mind" (*Iliad* 9.644–5). These lines occur when Odysseus

and Ajax try to placate Achilles in book nine. Before departing, Ajax turns to Odysseus and tells him that he does not think they will persuade Achilles to accept Agamemnon's gifts and return to battle because he refuses to lay aside his anger. In these lines, Achilles responds to Ajax, agreeing with the reasons Ajax has to persuade him to return to battle. Nevertheless, in the lines that follow, Achilles explains that he remains angry with Agamemnon and will not return until Hector has set ablaze the Greeks' ships.

Like Achilles, Cratylus agrees with Socrates' account of the correctness of names. He even recognizes that Socrates is not entirely responsible for the results that led to this account: "Your oracular utterances—whether inspired by Euthyphro or some other Muse who has long inhabited your own mind without your knowing about it—seem to be pretty much spoken after my own mind" (428c5–9). Here, Cratylus compares Socrates' mind with his own. If a muse inhabits Socrates' mind, so a muse must inhabit Cratylus' own mind. In addition, if Euthyphro has inspired Socrates, so Euthyphro must have inspired Cratylus. Yet there is reason to doubt the truth of Cratylus' comparison. By appealing to Achilles' reply to Ajax, he draws himself into comparison with Achilles and Socrates into comparison with Ajax. While this comparison may suit Cratylus' need, it miscarries. By comparing himself to Achilles, Cratylus associates himself with Achilles' obstinacy. Cratylus is stubborn insofar as he is unwilling to admit any responsibility for failing to teach Hermogenes. We will also see in the course of the present conversation how Cratylus obstinately rejects the possibility of better and worse names (429bff.). Neither does a muse inhabit Cratylus' mind, nor does Euthyphro inspire him. Instead, his agreement with Socrates' account of the correctness of names is a consequence of his own obstinacy. Moreover, by comparing Socrates to Ajax, Cratylus associates Socrates

with both Ajax' criticism of Achilles' pigheadedness and Ajax's willingness to compromise. Socrates has certainly demonstrated his willingness to compromise in order to obtain Cratylus' agreement, but he has not yet criticized Cratylus' obstinacy because he has not yet had the opportunity. Socrates will criticize Cratylus' obstinacy later; when he does, he will show that it involves a contradiction.

Cratylus' unconditional approval means that the interlocutors agree about the correctness of names. One might expect the dialogue to conclude, but Socrates remarks that his account surprises him:

Cratylus, *I* have long been surprised at my own wisdom—and doubtful of it, too. That's why I think it's necessary to keep re-investigating whatever I say, since self-deception is the worst thing of all. How could it not be terrible, indeed, when the deceiver never deserts you even for an instant but is always right there with you? Therefore, I think we have to turn back frequently to what we've already said, in order to test it by looking at it "backwards and forwards simultaneously," as the aforementioned poet puts it" (428d1–9)

Socrates explains that he has doubts about his wisdom because it shows that the original makers of names did not reflect on their opinion of nature. They appear to have confused their own changing condition with nature (cf. 411b). Consequently, they believed, perhaps mistakenly, that nature and being are in flux. Worse still, they seem to have coined names on this assumption without considering it sufficiently. Nature and being may be in flux, but it is also possible that they are not (cf. 440d). If the original makers of names had reflected on their opinion of nature, they might have realized that they had conflated their own changing condition with nature, and seen that nature is not at all in flux. Because they did not reflect on their assumption, they might have coined names based on a mistaken view of reality. For this reason, Socrates must reflect on his account of the correctness of names to ensure that he has made no mistakes and is not deceiving

himself. Self-deception, he argues, is the “most difficult thing of all” (αὐτοῦ πάντων χαλεπώτατον) because “the deceiver never deserts you even for an instant but is always right there with you” (428d4). Self-deception is the worst kind of deception because it makes one prone to making repeated mistakes.

Socrates proposes to escape self-deception by reflecting upon his account of the correctness of names. Reflection, he argues, involves looking at his account “backwards and forwards simultaneously” (*Iliad* 1.343). Socrates quotes Homer to explain how best to reflect on his account. The passage he cites occurs early in the poem, when Talthibios and Eurybates, two of Agamemnon’s men, come to Achilles’ shelter to retrieve Briseis, over whom Agamemnon and Achilles began their quarrel. When they arrive, Achilles greets them and hands over Briseis willingly, but he asks them to bear witness to Agamemnon’s cruelty. Agamemnon does not have the intelligence to look “backwards and forwards” to consider whether the Greeks owe their accomplishments in this war to Achilles, and whether they can defeat the Trojans without him. Agamemnon’s failure, according to Achilles, is his inability to reflect upon their successes in the last ten years and to utilize this reflection in planning any future assault upon the city. In citing this passage, Socrates compares his account of the correctness of names to Achilles’ claim about Agamemnon’s failure. If he and Cratylus do not reflect on the account, they are likely to make mistakes regarding its future success. Thus, they must review Socrates’ account of the correctness of names to make sure he made no mistakes.

By comparing his own account of the correctness of names with Achilles’ remarks about Agamemnon, Socrates also compares himself to Achilles. This contrasts with Cratylus’ comparison of himself with Achilles. Socrates’ quotation overturns

Cratylus' quotation. Instead of Achilles representing Cratylus, he represents Socrates. Even if Achilles were to represent Cratylus, he would represent him as stubborn. On the other hand, Achilles represents Socrates as one who kindly receives his guests, gives up his prize willingly, and explains Agamemnon's failure. Thus, while Achilles represents Socrates as one who reflects, Achilles represents Cratylus as one who will not change his mind. Cratylus has accepted Socrates' account of the correctness of names without any exceptions. We must wait and see if Cratylus will continue to approve of this account after he and Socrates reflect upon it or if Cratylus will—like Achilles—stubbornly refuse to change his mind.

Cratylus' stubborn commitment to flux reveals him to be a tragic hero (Benardete 1980/1, 139).¹⁵² His refusal to acknowledge the contradiction inherent in his position makes the contradiction manifest itself in his character. Because Cratylus will not recognize that naturalism and Heracliteanism are contradictory, his naturalism and Heracliteanism force him to become the very contradiction he fails to acknowledge. In doing so, Cratylus loses sight of himself. His refusal to face the contradiction inherent in his position blinds him to the contradiction inherent in his own actions.

Forgetting himself in this way will eventually lead Cratylus tragically to deny the possibility of speech (see Introduction). Socrates hints at Cratylus' tragic end in his closing remarks.

¹⁵² That Cratylus is a tragic hero explains why Plato named the dialogue after him. Plato named the dialogue in tribute to the Greek tragedians, who named their tragedies after their tragic heroes. Aeschylus named *Agamemnon* for the Greek warlord, who refused to acknowledge the possibility that his wife's may be unfaithful and died tragically as a result. Sophocles named *Oedipus Tyrannus* for the Theban king, whose refusal to admit that he was subject to fate led tragically to his confronting it. Plato named the *Cratylus* in a similar fashion because Cratylus is an inflexible advocate of universal flux. He will not consider that nature may not be in flux.

9: Hermogenes' Name (440d4–e7)

After reaching an impasse, Cratylus and Socrates part ways. Before they go, Socrates hints at the correctness of Hermogenes' name, which has served as a touchstone for the dispute, to hint at Cratylus' tragic fate. It turns out that Hermogenes may be the son of Hermes after all because he shares one of Hermes' essential tasks: guidance. By way of summary, I will argue that the correctness of Hermogenes' name illuminates each stage of the dialogue's argument, especially the examination of names.

Part of the dispute over the correctness of names involves the allegation that Hermogenes' name is incorrect. Hermogenes tells Socrates,

So, I ask [Cratylus] whether his own name is truly 'Cratylus'. He agrees that it is. "What about Socrates?" I say. "His name is 'Socrates'," he says. "Does this also hold for everyone else? Is the name we call him his name?" "It certainly doesn't hold of you. Your name isn't 'Hermogenes', not even if everyone calls you by it." Eagerly I ask him to tell me what he means. He responds sarcastically and makes nothing clear. He pretends to possess some private knowledge which would force me to agree with him and say the very things about names that he says himself, were he to express it in plain terms. So, if you can somehow interpret Cratylus' oracular utterances, I'd gladly listen. (383b1–384a4)

In a previous conversation, Cratylus apparently asserted that Hermogenes' name does not belong to him, and refused to explain why the name is incorrect.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ We could speculate that Cratylus denies the correctness of Hermogenes' name based on Hermogenes' conventionalism. Since Hermogenes thinks that names are correct because people agree to use them then all Cratylus has to do is refuse to call Hermogenes "Hermogenes" to show—on Hermogenes' own terms—that Hermogenes' name is incorrect. If Cratylus did so, he would quickly dispatch Hermogenes' conventionalism. Mackenzie (1986, 126–127), however, considers this reasoning flawed. She argues that Cratylus' denial of the correctness of Hermogenes' name is paradoxical because he denies that it is correct at the same time as he calls Hermogenes "Hermogenes"; but Cratylus is more careful than she gives him credit for being. He never calls Hermogenes "Hermogenes" in the dialogue. So he is not subject to the obvious paradox he would face if he continued to call Hermogenes "Hermogenes" while simultaneously denying the correctness of the name.

This refusal frustrates Hermogenes because it seems obvious to him that his name is correct: any name is correct so long as someone gives it to something (384dff.). The fact that anyone calls him “Hermogenes” should be enough to prove that the name is correct. However, Hermogenes’ view is not so straightforward (see Barney 2001, 36–42). He also says, “I call a thing by the name I gave it; you call it by the different name you gave it” (384d2). This applies to individuals and communities. If an individual calls a horse a “man” or a man a “horse” contrary to the use of his community (which naturally calls a horse a “horse” and a man a “man”) his use would be just as correct as his community’s (385a). The names “horse” and “man” would apply interchangeably to a horse or a man merely because someone gave them these names. In the case of the name “Hermogenes,” it is correct because someone gave it to Hermogenes. However, Hermogenes allows that another name could be correct. Cratylus could decide to call Hermogenes “Ethos” if he wished and it would be correct. To change Hermogenes’ name in this way would not upset his view because he permits name-changes (384d).

Unfortunately, Cratylus will not explain why he thinks Hermogenes’ name is incorrect. So Hermogenes turns to Socrates, who suggests that Cratylus thinks Hermogenes’ name is incorrect because Hermogenes is no good at making money (384c4). “Hermogenes” means “son of Hermes,” and Hermes is the patron god of moneymaking.¹⁵⁴ If Hermogenes is no good at making money, he cannot be the son of the god of money-making.

Socrates’ suggestion makes more sense later on when he explains that the name of a father should determine the name of his son, but only if they share the same nature

¹⁵⁴ Fine 1977, 293, calls this a disguised description and observes that if Plato treats “Hermogenes” this way then he evidently assumes that all names have “descriptive content.”

(394d2–4). The fact that Astyanax is Hector’s son and that “Hector” means to “hold the city” should justify Ἀστυάναξ (lord of the city) as his name (393a3–b1). Since Astyanax and Hector share the same nature, they share the same name. On this account, “Hermogenes” names Hermogenes only if he shares Hermes’ nature. However, if Hermogenes’ inability to make money is a sign that he does not share Hermes’ nature then he must not be Hermes’ son. The name “Hermogenes,” therefore, cannot be correct.

Nevertheless, fathers often name their sons in the hope that someday they will live up to the name they are given. A pious father may name his son Θεόφιλος (God’s beloved) or Μνησίθεον (mindful of God) in the hope that his son will turn out to be pious. Yet the son may grow up to be impious, dashing the hopes of his father (cf. 394e4–7). In such a case, Θεόφιλος and Μνησίθεον would be incorrect because they fail to reveal the nature of the son. This may explain Hermogenes’ name. Hermogenes is the son of Hipponicus, who was reputed to be the wealthiest man in Greece (384a8, see Nails 2002, 163). Hipponicus may have named his son “Hermogenes” in the hope that he would prove to have talent at making money.¹⁵⁵ Yet if Hermogenes has no talent at making money, his name turns out to be incorrect, and he fails to live up Hipponicus’ expectations.

Cratylus does eventually give an account of the correctness of Hermogenes’ name. Socrates asks,

What about the case of Hermogenes, which we mentioned earlier? Has he not been given this name at all, unless he belongs to the family of Hermes? Or has he been given it, only not correctly?—I think he hasn’t been given it at all, Socrates. People take it to have been given to him, but

¹⁵⁵ Hermogenes’ paternity is controversial. Nails (2002, 163), tells us that Hermogenes may have been the adopted son of Hipponicus, who married Pericles’ widow. Hipponicus, however, could still have named Hermogenes if he had adopted him at an early age.

it is really the name of someone else, namely, the very one who also has the nature. (429b11–c5)

Here, Cratylus challenges Hermogenes' claim that a name is correct simply because someone has given it to something. According to Cratylus, no one has given the name "Hermogenes" to Hermogenes. So Hermogenes cannot even maintain that his name is correct based on his own conventionalist view of the correctness of names.

Cratylus does not deny that people call Hermogenes "Hermogenes." He only disputes the legitimacy of the name. A name, for Cratylus as for Hermogenes, is correct because someone gave it to something (429b10). However, not just anyone can name something, as Hermogenes seems to think. Only an extraordinary kind of artisan who specializes in the making of names has the expertise to give something a name (428e7); and such artisans are divine (438b2). No divine artisan named Hermogenes.

So how does Cratylus explain the fact that people actually call Hermogenes "Hermogenes"? Cratylus has no explicit answer for this, but his position implies that people call Hermogenes "Hermogenes" because Hipponicus gave him this name. As Hermogenes' father and the wealthiest man in Greece, people trust Hipponicus to have the authority to name his children. They accept the name "Hermogenes" because Hipponicus gave it to him. On Hermogenes' view, such trust is fine. If anyone may name something to justify its use, then Hipponicus' naming of Hermogenes justifies the use of the name. However, on Cratylus' view, such use of a name is inappropriate. Hipponicus is neither divine nor an expert maker of names. Thus, when he named his son, he did so without justification, and the subsequent use of the name is unjustified. That Hipponicus named Hermogenes explains why people call Hermogenes "Hermogenes," but it does not justify the correctness of the name.

Then what are people doing when they call Hermogenes “Hermogenes”? Cratylus argues that they are not speaking in the manner they should. Names are correct or they are not names at all. When people call Hermogenes “Hermogenes,” they are either speaking of someone other than Hermogenes or they might as well be “banging a brass pot” (430a4). If the person to whom the name refers is present then the people who are using the name are addressing that person; or if the person is absent then the name is meaningless in this context. It is merely noise.

If Cratylus is right that only divine and expert makers of names can name things, he will have a hard time explaining why any other proper names is correct. Parents are usually responsible for naming their children, but they are not obviously divine and expert makers of names. However, the makers of names are qualified to name things, according to Cratylus, because they have knowledge of the nature of those things they wish to name (436c, 438a). On this view, parents would count as divine and expert makers of names if they have knowledge of their child’s nature. Since fathers and sons generally share the same nature, fathers would have knowledge of the nature of their son (cf. 393b-c). Proper names, then, would be correct so long as parents know the nature of their children and name them accordingly.

This argument would explain why Cratylus takes Hermogenes as an exception to the rule. Hermogenes may have been the legitimate son of Pericles. Dying when Hermogenes was an infant, Pericles would not have had the chance to name his son according the nature they shared (Nails 2002, 163). Instead, Hipponicus, Hermogenes’ adopted stepfather, would have named him.¹⁵⁶ Because Hipponicus would not have

¹⁵⁶ I am told that it was customary in Athens to name bastard children after Hermes, the patron god of illegitimate children, but I have been unable to confirm the truth of this claim.

shared Hermogenes' nature, he would have known how to name him correctly, and would have given Hermogenes an incorrect name instead.

Despite Cratylus' denial of the correctness of Hermogenes' name at 383b5 and 429b10ff., Socrates hints at the end of the dialogue that it may be correct after all. As Cratylus and Hermogenes depart, Socrates says, "Instruct me about [Heraclitus] another time, Cratylus, after you get back. But now go off into the country, as you were planning to do, and Hermogenes here will see you on your way [πρόπεμψει]" (440e3–5). The word Socrates uses to describe Hermogenes is πρόπεμψει. In Homer, πρόπεμψει was a traditional epithet for Hermes (*Iliad* 24.360, cf. Cunliffe 1924, 321–322). Among his many tasks, Hermes guided (πρόπεμψει) the souls of dead men to Hades. Socrates applies the same epithet to Hermogenes. In suggesting that Hermogenes guides Cratylus, Socrates justifies Hermogenes' name by arguing that it is correct because Hermogenes shares Hermes' nature. Like Hermes, Hermogenes guides men such as Cratylus.

Commentators disagree about this attempt to justify the correctness of Hermogenes' name. Reeve (1998, liii), and Sedley (2003, 171–173), believe that it fully vindicates Hermogenes' name against Cratylus' allegation. But Barney (2001, 160) suggests that it could prove only how Hermogenes' name is correct when he guides Cratylus away, since Hermogenes does not demonstrate that his name is correct anywhere else in the dialogue. On the contrary, Hermogenes demonstrates that his name is correct during the etymological section of the dialogue where he exhibits his talent at guiding the discussion.

Hermogenes opens the examination at 397a2 and reminds Socrates to analyze ἥρωσ at 398c5, but lets him direct the examination until they reach ἄνθρωπος (398c5ff.).

Here Hermogenes takes a more active role, taking responsibility for the direction and extent of the analysis. He asks Socrates to analyze ψύχη and σῶμα (399c8–d8); the gods’ names (400c11–d3), including “Tethys” (402c3–4), “Demeter,” “Hera,” “Apollo,” “Athena,” “Hephaestus,” “Dionysus,” “Aphrodite,” and “the other gods” (404b5–7; 406b8; cf. 406d2–4 and 407c3); the names of astronomical phenomena (408d5–6e1), including σελήνη (moon, 409a7), μεῖς and ἄστρο (month and stars, 409c3), πῦρ and ὕδωρ (fire and water, 409c10), ὥραι, ἐνιαυτος, and ἔτος (season and year, 410c3–4); the names of the virtues (411a1–4), including κακόν (bad, 415e2–3), αἴσχρον and καλόν (beautiful and ugly, 416a7–9 cf. b7), συμφέρον, κερδαλέον, λυσιτελοῦν, ὠφέλιμον (advantageous, profitable, beneficial, gainful, and their opposites, e1–417a1; cf. b7 and d1), βλαβερόν and ζημιῶδες (harmful and hurtful, 418a4–6), ἡδονή, λυπή, ἐπιθυμία (pleasure, pain, appetite, and similar names, 419b5–6), δόξα (opinion, 420b4–6); the finest and important names, such as ὄνομα, ἀληθεῖα, ψεῦδος, ὄν (name, truth, falsehood, and being, e5–421a3), as well as names like ἰόν, ῥέον, δοῦν (going, flowing, and shackling, c3–5). Hermogenes even insists that Socrates analyze “Hermes” when Socrates grows fearful that his etymologies might offend the gods. Socrates declares,

For god’s sake let’s leave the subject of gods because it frightens me to talk about them [...].—I’ll do that, but there is still one god I want to ask you about, and that’s Hermes, since Cratylus says that I am no Hermogenes (‘son of Hermes’). So let’s examine the name ‘Hermes’ and its meaning, to see whether there’s anything in what he says. (407d8–e4)

The request is surprising given that Socrates has already explained why Cratylus thinks Hermogenes cannot be the son of Hermes. Nevertheless, Socrates humors him. Ἑρμῆς, he says, comes from εἶπειν and ἐμήσατο, which together mean, “to contrive speech,” and the name-maker gave Hermes this name because he was the first to contrive speech (408a).

On the strength of this etymology, Hermogenes concludes that Cratylus must be right. He is no son of Hermes because he has no talent at contriving speech (408b). He does not share his father's nature, and, therefore, cannot share his father's name. Hermogenes' name is incorrect.

However, Hermogenes' request proves the opposite. His eagerness to hear the etymology in the face of Socrates' fear of offending the gods demonstrates his ability to lead, which proves that his name is correct. Hermogenes embraces his role of guiding the examination in the same way Hermes guides the souls of the dead into the underworld.

Nevertheless, Hermogenes is reluctant to lead Socrates. He leaves a door open many times for Socrates to take over (400c11–d3; 404b1–4; 411a1–4; e2–417a1; 419b6; 420b7). In doing so, Hermogenes hesitates to embrace his nature and demonstrate that he is able to guide Socrates through the examination of names. Nonetheless, Socrates constantly defers to Hermogenes' leadership. He frequently asks Hermogenes whether he should analyze certain names (e.g. 397c4–6, d8–10, 401b1–2, and 402d 7–8), and, at crucial moments, invites Hermogenes to recommend names for him to examine (e.g. 402d3, 407c11–12, 408e5–7). Socrates intends to encourage Hermogenes to prove that he shares Hermes' nature, to show that his name is correct.

We might ask why Socrates should want Hermogenes to demonstrate the correctness of his name. Socrates tries to get Hermogenes to do so because Socrates is interested in showing that the correctness of names depends on the truth or falsehood of one's opinion of nature. Socrates' purpose in the examination of names is to learn “whether names themselves will testify to us that they are not given by chance, but have some sort of correctness” (397a6–b1). The correctness of names, then, can be determined

by examining a name to see if it fits the nature of its object. The correctness of names, therefore, will depend on the opinion the original makers of names have about nature.

Socrates exemplifies this in his competing etymologies of ἐπιστήμη. Ἐπιστήμη is correct only if it discloses the nature of knowledge as stable when it is stable (412a, 437a). However, ἐπιστήμη is incorrect if it discloses the nature of knowledge as stable when it is not. One could say the same thing of ἐπιστήμη if it discloses the nature of knowledge as in flux when it is in flux (i.e. correct), or if the name discloses the nature of knowledge as in flux when it is stable (i.e. incorrect). In each case, one's understanding of the correctness of a name depends on the truth or falsehood of the opinion that the original maker of the name had about nature. In the case of Hermogenes' name, if Hipponicus named his son on the supposition that Hermes's nature is to help people make money, then Hermogenes' name cannot be correct because Hermogenes does not share this nature with Hermes (384c5). If one supposes that Hermes' nature is to contrive speech, then again Hermogenes' name cannot be correct because Hermogenes does not share this nature (407e5ff.). However, if one supposes that Hermes' nature is to guide people then Hermogenes' name would be correct because Hermogenes shares this task. He leads Socrates through the examination of names and will lead Cratylus into the country.

Socrates' attempt to get Hermogenes to exhibit the correctness of his name explains the purpose of the etymologies. Socrates is aware that Hermogenes will guide Cratylus into the country when they finish their conversation, and he is aware that Hermes escorts the souls of the dead into the underworld. Thus, he is aware that Hermogenes will eventually demonstrate that he shares Hermes' nature, which will prove

that his name is correct. Consequently, Socrates encourages Hermogenes in the course of the etymologies to exhibit the correctness of his name by taking charge of the direction of the examination. Hermogenes obliges Socrates and is responsible for proposing every significant set of names for examination. Thus, he shows that he can take the lead, and that he shares the nature of Hermes.

Ultimately, the correctness of Hermogenes' name serves as a touchstone for the dispute over the correctness of names. It exposes expertise (τέχνη) as the main difference between Cratylus' naturalism and Hermogenes' conventionalism, shedding light on Socrates' view—that names imitate nature, although their correctness depends on the truth of one's opinion of nature. If one believes, as Socrates asserts Cratylus does, that Hermes' nature is to make money then he or she will believe that Hermogenes' name is not correct. If one accepts, as Hermogenes does, that Hermes' nature is to contrive speech then he or she will admit that Hermogenes' name is not correct. For, as Hermogenes indicates, he is no good at making speeches. However, if one thinks, as Socrates does, that Hermes' nature is to guide people, he or she will grant that Hermogenes' name is correct. Only after nature has revealed itself can a person decide whether any name is correct.

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