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LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING IN PLATO

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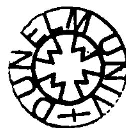

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Abstract

This thesis explores and links some of Plato's ideas on both language and understanding. There are close readings of the whole of the Cratylus and the Phaedrus from 257b7 to the end which conclude that: no knowledge can be found from etymology; Greek as a language is not perfect; and we must search for a knowledge outside language. Using various other texts, but particularly the Statesman, there are comments on the difference between the physical world we inhabit and the ideal world of abstracts that we must try to understand through using paradigms, a category in which I include myths. There is a broad conclusion that, despite language being imperfect and problematic, we must use it since it is our only tool with which we can create an approximation of the ideal in order to progress towards understanding.

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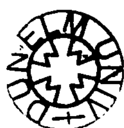

Introduction

Before any study of the content of an author's work can be carried out, it seems important first to look at the method that author used in setting out his[1] beliefs. There has been much written on Plato's use of the dramatic dialogue as a genre, and on his use of myth within those dialogues. But it seems to me that it is also important to consider the building blocks of those dialogues: they are all, of course, made out of language. I do not believe that there can be any good understanding of Plato unless there is an understanding of his views on the thing from which he constructs his dialogues. The dialogues are only possible because of language, and we must look at how Plato viewed the tool of his philosophical trade. In order to do this, I begin with a detailed and close reading of the Cratylus[2], where Plato plays with names, etymologies and language as a whole. I finish off the section on language with a close reading of the end of the Phaedrus (257b7 to the end). I hope to show that Plato was very aware of the inadequacies of language in our search for pure knowledge, both individual words as themselves and their use in combination. They will never describe the ideal world of abstracts. From there, I will proceed to try to explain how I believe Plato attempts to use this imperfect tool to get his readers going in the process of understanding those pure abstracts. I will try to show how paradigms and myths perform the same task, in attempting some kind of explanation of the inexplicable. I hope to show that they are the routes towards the goal of the ideal, a

[1] I will use the male pronoun to stand for any unspecified human for the sake of convenience and conciseness.
[2] In the translations given, for the Phaedrus and the Statesman I will quote Rowe, Warminster, 1986 and 1995 respectively, and for all other translations I will quote Jowett, The Dialogues of Plato, 4th edition, Oxford, 1953, unless I indicate otherwise.

goal which we may never reach because we are physical beings in a physical world attempting to understand non-physical abstracts such as 'statesman' or 'justice'. We will always have to compromise, because even in our attempts at describing or defining ideal abstracts, we have to use physical language. But language's usefulness must be the starting point.

The Argument with Hermogenes

The Cratylus is a puzzling dialogue. The arguments between the characters develop along structured lines, but the main points of the dialogue seem to be shown to us rather than told to us: we cannot just listen to the words, but we have to think about what Plato means more generally; we have to try to understand what is going on behind the face value of the words that the characters use. With the Cratylus, it seems best to start from the end: "*οὐδὲ πάνυ νοῦν ἔχοντος ἀνθρώπου ἐπιτρέψαντα ὀνόμασιν αὑτὸν καὶ τὴν αὑτοῦ ψυχὴν θεραπεύειν*" ("no man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind in the power of names") (440 c3-5). This occurs in Socrates' conclusion. The result of all that has gone before is that *ὀνόματα* are not to be trusted. Bearing in mind this conclusion, it is now safe, or safer, to go back to the beginning and examine how this conclusion is reached, not only the arguments but also the style of conversation. It is playful, language is manipulated. Socrates seems to argue in the second half against the point of view he seemed to hold in the first: he enters at Hermogenes' request to solve a debate on the nature of language, whether a name is a name because men say so, or whether each thing has an appropriate and correct name, and any other name which men use to refer to it is not a name at all. By the end, Socrates appears to have dismissed both theories, and the debate is on language's relationship with the world. The book ends up talking explicitly about Heracleitean flux, and it seems to me that that was a major theme of the dialogue.

The dialogue opens with Hermogenes asking whether Socrates might join the discussion he has been having with Cratylus. He explains that the discussion was about names, sets

out what he believes Cratylus' position to be and asks Socrates what his is. Socrates' reply begins slightly mysteriously: "*ὦ παῖ Ἱππονίκου Ἑρμόγενες, παλαιὰ παροιμία ὅτι χαλεπὰ τὰ καλά ἐστιν ὅπῃ ἔχει μαθεῖν· και δὴ καὶ τὸ περὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐ σμικρὸν τυγχάνει ὂν μάθημα*" ("Son of Hipponicus, there is an ancient saying that 'hard is the knowledge of the good'. And the knowledge of names is a great part of knowledge") (384a8-b2). However, in his first words of the dialogue, Socrates hints at all that will follow. Any knowledge or exploration (*μαθεῖν*) of names is linked to a knowledge or exploration of *τὰ καλὰ*. He goes on to say that he could only afford the one drachma course on names rather than Prodicus' fifty drachma course. If he had attended that, then he ironically says he would be able immediately to give an answer. But he did not, so they have to explore the question themselves. Socrates starts with an ironical attack explicitly on Prodicus, but presumably aimed at all who claimed to impart knowledge through language in lectures, a form of education which Plato did not believe in. It is no good just listening; one must actively engage and think; passive attempts at knowledge by osmosis through hearing another's words are no good. We will discover just how difficult and philosophically unreliable a thing language is, and that the only way to knowledge is through active applied thought aimed not at words, but at the concepts which they try to stand for. It is unfortunate that language is our only tool for looking at *τὰ καλὰ*, but it is all we have. We must use it, but be aware of its limitations and problems.

It is surely significant that it is Hermogenes who sets out Cratylus' position to Socrates and does not let him do it himself. Just as Socrates usually does not give a doctrine but

expresses his ideas as a reported conversation (Symposium) or a model or a myth (Republic or Phaedrus), so Cratylus' position does not come from his own mouth but is reported by another. Cratylus is comparable to Socrates when Hermogenes says of him "*καὶ ἐμοῦ ἐρωτῶντος καὶ προθυμουμένου εἰδέναι ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, οὔτε ἀποσαφεῖ οὐδὲν εἰρωνεύεταί τε πρός με, προσποιούμενός τι αὐτὸς ἐν ἑαυτῷ διανοεῖσθαι ὡς εἰδὼς περὶ αὐτοῦ, ὃ εἰ βούλοιτο σαφῶς εἰπεῖν, ποιήσειεν ἂν καὶ ἐμὲ ὁμολογεῖν καὶ λέγειν ἅπερ αὐτὸς λέγει*" ("And when I am anxious to have a further explanation, he is ironical and mysterious, and seems to imply that he has a notion of his own about the matter if he would only tell, and could entirely convince me if he chose to be intelligible") (383b7-384a4). Plato is feeding Socrates' enemies, those who saw him as a sophist and a fraud. It seems that one of Socrates' adversaries in this dialogue is a version of Socrates himself, but rather than having no theory, just refusing to say what his theory is. But Socrates will prove that there cannot be two Socrateses, and Cratylus will end up seeming arrogant, extremist and of little use to mankind because of what he seems to believe about language. After Cratylus has been built up as another Socrates, we have to wait until 427e5 before he re-appears. In the meantime, Socrates has argued against Hermogenes, which Cratylus had previously done, and at 428e6 Cratylus agrees with Socrates that correct names reflect the true nature of the nominata. However, as becomes clear very quickly, Socrates and Cratylus are using words to mean rather different things. Their conversation is required to show this.

However, first Socrates must talk to Hermogenes, who sets out his position at 384c10-e2: "*καὶ μὴν ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, πολλάκις δὴ καὶ τούτῳ διαλεχθεὶς καὶ ἄλλοις*

πολλοὶς, οὐ δύναμαι πεισθῆναι ὡς ἄλλη τις ὀρθότης ὀνόματος ἢ συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία. ἐμοὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ ὅτι ἄν τίς τῳ θῆται ὄνομα, τοῦτο εἶναι τὸ ὀρθόν· καὶ ἂν αὖθίς γε ἕτερον μεταθῆται, ἐκεῖνο δὲ μηκέτι καλῇ, οὐδὲν ἧττον τὸ ὕστερον ὀρθῶς ἔχειν τοῦ προτέρου, ὥσπερ τοῖς οἰκέταις ἡμεῖς μετατιθέμεθα· οὐ γὰρ φύσει ἑκάστῳ πεφυκέναι ὄνομα οὐδὲν οὐδενί, ἀλλὰ νόμῳ καὶ ἔθει τῶν ἐθισάντων τε καὶ καλούντων. εἰ δέ πῃ ἄλλῃ ἔχει, ἕτοιμος ἔγωγε καὶ μανθάνειν καὶ ἀκούειν οὐ μόνον παρὰ Κρατύλου, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρ' ἄλλου ὁτουοῦν" ("I have often talked over this matter, Socrates, both with Cratylus and others, and cannot convince myself that there is any principle of correctness in names other than convention and agreement; any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you change that and give another, the new name is as good as the old – we frequently change the names of our slaves, and the newly imposed name is as good as the old: for there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and the habit of the users"). The *ὀνόματα* only mean what they do by "*συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία*", but Hermogenes seems to believe that this kind of convention can be set up by anyone at any time. This would mean that there would not be any development of language: words would not grow out of other words, but would just be invented and somehow put into common use. Hermogenes does not seem to think that the conventions he talks of stem from anywhere. Socrates wants to show that there must be at least some reason as to why words are agreed to mean what they do, even if that reason is not necessarily a useful or good one. Language as a whole evolves. It is true that it would be possible for two people to create a language starting from scratch by using their own convention. But that is not how the language that both Socrates and Hermogenes actually do use came about. One must speak "*ὀρθῶς*"

("correctly") according to the convention one is born into, because any other method of speaking "*ἐξαμαρτήσεταί τε καὶ οὐδὲν ποιήσει*" ("will result in error and failure") (387b11-c4).

However, they can clarify their own conventions within that language by making sure that they both mean the same thing by the same word. So, at the start of the discussion, Socrates lays down some ground rules as to the purpose of *ὀνόματα*: "*οὐκοῦν τοῦ λέγειν μόριον τὸ ὀνομάζειν; ὀνομάζοντες γάρ που λέγουσι τοὺς λόγους*" ("is not naming a part of speaking? for in giving names men speak") (387c6-7); "*ἆρ' οὐ διδάσκομέν τι ἀλλήλους καὶ τὰ πράγματα διακρίνομεν ᾗ ἔχει*" ("[in naming] do we not give information to one another, and distinguish things according to their natures?") (388b10-11); "*ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστιν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας*" ("a name is an instrument of teaching and of distinguishing natures") (388b13-c1). Words have both a practical and a didactic nature. They are our means of distinguishing Reality in communication, and our means of trying to find out more about it. They are the tools of the philosopher.

Socrates starts exploring language as if Hermogenes is completely wrong, as if each word is correct in nature. At 388e7-389a3, Socrates comes up with the idea of a *δημιουργός*, a creator who made their language. He is given his job description at "*ἆρ' οὖν, ὦ βέλτιστε, καὶ τὸ ἑκάστῳ φύσει πεφυκὸς ὄνομα τὸν νομοθέτην ἐκεῖνον εἰς τοὺς φθόγγους καὶ τὰς συλλαβὰς δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι, καὶ βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα, πάντα τὰ ὀνομάτων θέτης; εἰ δὲ μὴ εἰς τὰς αὐτὰς

συλλαβὰς ἕκαστος ὁ νομοθέτης τίθησιν, οὐδὲν δεῖ τοῦτο ἀ<μφι>γνοεῖν" ("then, as to names: ought not our legislator also to know how to put the true natural name of each thing into sounds and syllables, and to make and give all names with a view to the ideal name, if he is to be a namer in any true sense? And we must not misinterpret the fact that different legislators will not use the same syllables") (389d4-e1). The *δημιουργός* must create each name so that there is a connection between the name and thing being named. But this *δημιουργός* is not meant completely literally: he exists only for the purposes of this discussion so that they can look at language as if it were created by just one person.

At 390d5-8, they reach the conclusion that the dialectician, as user of words, is the one to direct the *δημιουργός* on how he should make them, by analogy with other tools, whose users know how to use them but whose makers know how to make them. This leads Socrates to pledge his allegiance to Cratylus (d9-e1) and say "*καὶ Κρατύλος ἀληθῆ λέγει λέγων φύσει τὰ ὀνόματα εἶναι τοῖς πράγμασι, καὶ οὐ πάντα δημιουργὸν ὀνομάτων εἶναι, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀποβλέποντα εἰς τὸ τῇ φύσει ὄνομα ὂν ἑκάστῳ καὶ δυνάμενον αὐτοῦ τὸ εἶδος τιθέναι εἴς τε τὰ γράμματα καὶ τὰς συλλαβάς*" ("and Cratylus is right in saying that things have names by nature, and that not every man is an artificer of names, but he only who looks to the name which each thing by nature has, and is able to express this name in letters and syllables") (390d11-e5). Hermogenes cannot answer this because they are talking completely at cross-purposes. Hermogenes is talking about the language he sees around him, Greek, whereas Socrates is talking about language as perhaps it should be, a language which is naturally and correctly linked to the world it describes. This confusion allows Socrates to claim at

391a8-b2 that together they have shown names to have a natural correctness. However, they did not prove it but assumed it in the analogy with the shuttle. It was taken as obvious that anyone making a shuttle would look to the ideal shuttle as a model, and that the maker of names would do the same, that is look to what would ideally do the job required of it. If indeed such a thing were possible for a man, then we would have an ideal language, one which worked and performed the tasks which we want it to. But the ambiguous use of *τὸ ὄνομα* proves in itself that Hermogenes is at least partly correct. Socrates, mimicking Cratylus, used it to mean the ideal name, whereas Hermogenes assumed it referred to the names in everyday use. They needed to set up, however artificially, a convention on what *τὸ ὄνομα* referred to. They needed to impose some separation and distinction on the meaning of the word, or else no learning can occur. They are currently no further forward than when Socrates was called into the discussion, except perhaps that Socrates has shown how difficult it will be to be able to come up with definite answers on this problem of what language is and how it works.

Socrates demonstrates this point with reference to Homer (391c10-392e5). He quotes "'"*ὃν Ξάνθον' φησί, 'καλέουσι θεοί, ἄνδρες δὲ Σκάμανδρον*'" ("'whom' as he says, 'the gods call Xanthus, and men call Scamander'")(391e5-6), "*περὶ τῆς ὄρνιθος ἣν λέγει ὅτι καλκίδα κικλῄσκουσι θεοί, ἄνδρες δὲ κύμινδιν*" ("about the bird which, as he says, 'the gods call Chalcis, and men Cymindis'") (392a3-5) and the examples of Batieia and Myrina and Hector's son, who is referred to as both Scamandrios and Astyanax. By using Homer, Plato has a wealth of examples available which he knows his audience will be familiar with. The point seems to be that the same thing can have two

names: both refer to and are understood to refer to one thing, but one may be more descriptive than the other. Homer can give his characters 'appropriate' and 'inappropriate' ones as he wishes: Homer can be, to some extent, the *δημιουργός* of names. Sometimes the names help the audience to an understanding of the thing named, but what is important is the understanding of the nominata, not the name, for that is subject to the arbitrary will and judgement of the namer, in this case Homer. In the ideal language the name will describe and therefore help, but in our language it may not, it will probably be just a label. What must be examined is the thing itself: "*εἰ δὲ ἐν ἑτέραις συλλαβαῖς ἢ ἐν ἑτέραις τὸ αὐτὸ σημαίνει, οὐδὲν πρᾶγμα*" ("and whether the syllables of the name are the same or not the same, makes no difference, provided the meaning is retained") (393d1-5). Having just concluded that names should not be studied but the things they refer to, Plato will turn the discussion, apparently rather oddly, to a section of etymologising by Socrates. These apparent contradictions of Socrates' force the reader to try to work out what it is that he means by what he says in this dialogue. He will not be, perhaps cannot be, straight forward and explicit on this subject.

This section begins with Socrates giving some etymologies of the names of people from mythology. At first it is not immediately clear how serious he is being. The etymologies themselves sound fairly plausible until Zeus is introduced, when we are told that his name derives from a combination of Zena, Dion and "*δι' ὃν ζῆν ἀεὶ πᾶσι τοὶς ζῶσιν ὑπάρχει*" ("[the god] through whom all creatures always have life") (396b1). The dubious nature of Socrates' explanation of Kronos (from "*τὸ καθαρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκήρατον τοῦ νοὺ*" ("his pure and clear mind") (396b6-7)) and Uranus ("*ὁρωσα τὰ*

ἄνω" ("looking up") (396c1)) is hinted at by Socrates, when he says that if only he could remember more Hesiod "then I might have seen whether this wisdom, which has come to me all in an instant, I know not whence, will or will not hold good to the end" ("*οὐκ ἂν ἐπαυόμην διεξιὼν ὡς ὀρθῶς αὐτοῖς τὰ ὀνόματα κεῖται, ἕως ἀπεπειράθην τῆς σοφίας ταυτησὶ τί ποιήσει, εἰ ἄρα ἀπερεῖ ἢ οὔ, ἥ ἐμοὶ εξαίφνης νῦν οὑτωσὶ προσπέπτωκεν ἄρτι οὐκ οἶδ' ὁπόθεν*") (396c5-d1). Hermogenes, with a degree of irony considering that the talk is of gods, says "*μοι δοκεῖς ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐξαίφνης χρησμῳδεῖν*" ("he seems to me like a prophet newly inspired, and seem to be uttering oracles") (396d2-3), to which Socrates replies that the reason for this is his attendance at a lecture given by Euthyphro, so that "his wisdom and enchanting ravishment has not only filled my ears but taken possession of my soul" ("*κινδυνεύει οὖν ἐνθουσιῶν οὐ μόνον τὰ ὦτά μου ἐμπλῆσαι τῆς δαιμονίας σοφίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπειλῆφθαι*") (396d6-8). Again there is the emphasis on hearing and not thinking. The words, supposedly, have entered Socrates' ears and become wisdom in his soul without any questioning or consideration. But this is all ironic. As is common in Plato, we have to be wary of the tone of "*σοφία*" and ask how much irony is contained in it. Here, I believe, it is meant to be completely ironic. It is not uncommon for Socrates to be inspired by a Muse before he tells a myth (in Phaedrus for example), but here his soul has been inspired by an etymologist. This must indicate to the reader that what follows is not to be taken at face value, indeed it is to be viewed with the same suspicion we would reserve for the possibility of Socrates quietly attending a lecture on etymology and being inspired by it. Euthyphro will be referred to again, for example at 400a1, where Socrates says that his etymologies might not be good enough for Euthyphro's disciples because

they would consider them "*φορτικὸν*" ("banal") (400a2). Socrates promises to be more imaginative; he wants to 'discover' things that are entertaining and witty. Socrates is at play.

Socrates points out his own sophistic behaviour with "*ἐὰν μὴ εὐλαβῶμαι, ἔτι τήμερον σοφώτερος τοῦ δέοντος γενέσθαι*" ("if I am not careful, before tomorrow's dawn I shall be wiser than I ought to be") (399a4-5). This is a reference back to 396d1ff, where he said that he would rid himself of his Euthyphronic inspiration tomorrow if a priest or sophist can be found. Again "*σοφώτερος*" is heavily ironic, as Plato points out that he is making Socrates perform a sort of satire on etymologists: they claim a wisdom that they cannot possess, and we will discover that wisdom does not lie inside words anyway.

But the tone of the satire fluctuates. The following section deals with some etymologies that lead to key Platonic thoughts, even though the etymologies themselves are not to be taken too seriously. At 399c1-7, we are told that *ἄνθρωπος* comes from *ἀναθρεῖ* and *ὄπωπε*, because man is the creature who looks up to what he sees. For Plato, 'up' is good and to be sought after and 'down' is bad and to got away from; we need look no further than Phaedrus for this idea. This tends to indicate that *ἄνθρωπος*, according to this etymology, is in his natural element when philosophising in order to move upwards towards knowledge and divinity. Socrates has created an etymology to reflect his view of the importance of philosophy. The point on philosophy is serious, how it is reached is entirely playful.

At 399d10-400b7, Socrates talks about *ψύχη*. He manages to derive it from two different etymologies so that he can get at what he believed to be the nature of the soul. It either comes from *ἀναψῦχον* (399e1), which means to revive, so that *ψύχη* is the 'living' part of *ἄνθρωπος*, or it is a shortened form of *φυσέχη*, the noun from the phrase "*ἡ φύσιν ὀχεῖ καὶ ἔχει*" ("that which carries and holds nature") (400b2) so that *ψύχη* is that which connects man to his environment and a natural, and therefore correct, way of being. The circle is completed at 400c1-10, where *σῶμα* (body) is connected to *σῆμα* (grave) and *σημαίνει* (to indicate), along with *σῴζεται* (to be kept safe). This means that the body can be not only a safe place for the soul to stay while it is there and the driving force of life, but also a grave in which the soul is incarcerated. This idea is also found at Phaedrus 250c2-6 and Gorgias 293a1ff in equally playful circumstances. But as Socrates says at Gorgias 493c3-5 about this idea and a comparison of the soul to a seive, "*ταῦτ' ἐπιεικῶς μέν ἐστιν ὑπό τι ἄτοπα, δηλοῖ μὴν ὃ ἐγὼ βούλομαι σοι ἐνδειξάμενος, ἐάν πως οἷος τε ὦ πεῖσαι μεταθέσθαι*" ("these notions are strange enough, but they show the principle which, if I can, I would fain prove to you"). The verbal connection itself reveals nothing, but this does not mean that it does not provoke some interesting imagery that may be useful; we should not trust this linguistic connivance or coincidence to show us anything in itself, but we should exploit it as an aid to philosophy. So, for example, we may be able to connect this idea with a previous etymology so that perhaps in order to free itself, the soul must escape by being within a proper "*ἄνθρωπος*", who is a philosopher and looks up to find divinity and knowledge as is the natural way. Only then can the *ψύχη* fulfil itself and escape its benign captor, grow its wings and fly upwards into knowledge. Plato is encouraging us as readers to play with language as Socrates is

doing and see what we come up with, but we cannot trust the results in a literal sense. Language may have its 'niceties', but these in themselves prove nothing.

But there is an overall point in what Socrates says. At 401e5, he says "*ὠγαθέ, ἐννενόηκά τι σμῆνος σοφίας*" ("my good friend, I have discovered a hive of wisdom"). This is a fantastic metaphor if viewed in the light of the rest of the dialogue and especially what immediately follows it. The coherent whole of the argument (the swarm) is made up from the chaotic, fast flying particles (the bees) that are its constituent parts: each individual etymology flies around apparently rather randomly, but the result is a movement of an understandable argument if one looks at the bigger picture and tries to take it all in at once. Socrates immediately follows this with the idea that the first idle chatterers may have been Heracleitean, because both Cronos and Rhea are connected with streams. This is the first explicit reference to Heracleitus and his theory of flux which will play such a large part in Socrates' etymologising. We may be able to go back to the metaphor and say that the internal flux of the constant movement of all those bees leads to a relatively stable argument on the bigger scale. We should look not to the flux, but to what Plato uses it to form.

In the section on Hades, 403a5-404b4, Socrates tries to change our notions of death so that it becomes a positive thing. Socrates manages to conclude that Hades is "*φιλοσόφου*" ("a philosopher") (404a2) because he does not have to deal with the evils of the body, but can exploit the desire for virtue that dwells in every soul when it is freed from the mistaken desires of the physical. It is for this 'reason' that Plato has Hades come

from "*εἰδέναι*" ("to know") (404b3), because he knows "*πάντα τὰ καλὰ*" ("all noble things") (404b3). Whilst the general principles of what Socrates is saying are not unPlatonic, it seems very odd that Hades should be a philosopher. Humans should aim to become philosophers: this section seems to indicate that as humans, we should use Hades as a model; in other words, we should aim at death. For Plato, the physical body did detract from philosophy, where true happiness lies, but we should not aim at death, rather use our lives as best as we can. To make Hades so positive shows how language can be manipulated to 'prove' a point that should not be examined through words and etymology, but through ideas. The words should be expressing the ideas, rather than the ideas coming from the words. To 'prove' that Hades is the model for *ἄνθρωποι* is very clever, but it shows us that Socrates here is being as much of a "*σοφιστής*"[3] (403e4) as he claims Hades to be, whilst in the same breath declaring him a philosopher.

Another example of truth within playfulness is "*τὰς δὲ 'Μούσας' τε καὶ ὅλως τὴν μουσικὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ μῶσθαι, ὡς ἔοικεν, καὶ τῆς ζητήσεώς τε καὶ φιλοσοφίας τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο ἐπωνόμασεν*" ("the name of the Muses and of music would seem to be derived from their desire to make philosophical inquiries") (406a3-6). Music and philosophy are strongly linked throughout Plato, and here Socrates makes the names derive from the same source. But this idea about music and philosophy appears amid some etymologies concerning the gods that are, at the very least, eyebrow-raising. For example, Apollo is so called either because he is a purifier, "*ἀπολούων*", or he is sincere,

[3] "*σοφιστής*" here, I think, carries an extended meaning to indicate the arrogance of the 'over-wise', those who believe themselves to be wise, but are not. It can be used in a positive sense, at Republic 397a, 404a and 596d and Symposium 203d8, but the context of a sort of attack on etymological practices calls this 'wisdom' into question.

"ἁπλοῦς", or he is "ἀεὶ βάλλων" or the one who moves things, such as harmony, together, "ὁμοπολῶν" (405b9-406a2). All these etymologies have some relevance to the character of Apollo; even the one Socrates claims is to be avoided, "ἀπολῶν", is important at the start of the Iliad, for example. But they cannot all be true, indeed I hope to show that Plato does not really believe any of them. However each one is revealing of Apollo, and so in some sense correct, even if not the correct etymology. It is Socrates' skill in language that allows him to play in this way, to bring out truths through dubious word games. We do not have to take what Socrates says seriously: we can still appreciate that philosophy is somehow connected to the Muses, but not because *Μοῦσαι* and *μουσική* are said to derive from *μῶσθαι* (to search). We know from elsewhere, like Socrates' speeches in the Phaedrus, that he will call on a Muse before embarking on fanciful philosophy and myth-making with a serious centre. But in this dialogue, his Muse is Euthyphro the etymologist. There is no real explanation as to why Muses are connected to philosophy, only "μῶσθαι". The words themselves can appear to 'prove' something, but as we see from Apollo's multiple etymologies, these are created as much as discovered. They may be true, they may not be. If two words do come from the same source, which stands for one concept, then the two derivative words also link back to that same concept: but this does not help us unless we understand that original concept. It does not matter whether Socrates is correct or not in his etymology, because what are important are the ideas behind the words: these are not explained to us here, we have to import them from other dialogues. The words given to us here are not enough unless we understand what lies behind them. We should enjoy the wit and the fanciful pictures created for us, but must also examine what is said in order to look behind it.

There is an admission of the playfulness at "μεγάλα, ὦ παῖ Ἱππονίκου, ἐρωτᾷς. ἀλλὰ ἔστι γὰρ καὶ σπουδαίως εἰρημένος ὁ τρόπος τῶν ὀνομάτων τούτοις τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ παιδικῶς. τὸν μὲν οὖν σπουδαῖον ἄλλους τινὰς ἐρώτα, τὸν δὲ παιδικὸν οὐδὲν κωλύει διελθεῖν" ("son of Hipponicus, you ask a solemn question; there is a serious and also a facetious explanation of both these names; the serious explanation is not to be had from me, but there is no objection to your hearing the facetious one") (406b8-c3). We are forced to ask why is it that Socrates cannot give the serious explanation? What is it that prevents him giving that, but does not prevent him attempting play? One answer may lie in his lack of knowledge in this area as expressed earlier at 384c1. Perhaps Socrates is giving the one drachma course, and the fifty drachma one would be serious. But, I feel, the fifty drachma course would be not as much use, perhaps even dangerous, because it would express itself as truth. If there is no truth to be discovered by studying[ὀνόματα, as will become clear, then anything that charges fifty drachma for admission and then professes to be serious is nothing but a confidence trick. Socrates cannot give a serious explanation of etymologies because he does not believe that a true one, one which will lead to a better understanding of the world, exists. Sophists may give them, and they may charge a good deal, and they may both believe that they are right and convince others, but those who believe them are those who only listen, not those who think and enter into dialogue.

However, all this time Socrates has been arguing against the theory that all names are merely conventional. But his argument is ironic, as we will see when he argues against

Cratylus' and seems to adopt the view that language itself holds no answers; that it has no connection to any truth. Socrates is being playful, but within this game there is a point: one can use language to argue any position if one is clever enough because language is different from the truth. Socrates is not being solemn and serious, and if he happens to chance upon something that is right in his playful etymologies then he has still proved nothing. Superficially, Socrates argues against conventionalism in language: in fact, he shows that language is unreliable and open to abuse and not to be taken seriously in itself. They have to use it to study abstracts as best they can. This cannot be done through looking at language, but any study of abstracts, unfortunately, has to be carried out in language. Plato does not want to find the language to explain why language has its problems, this might be seen as a self defeating argument[4] and would certainly be very difficult, but rather wants to demonstrate these problems in order to engage the reader. In this way, the reader cannot simply read Plato's views on language and believe he understands them, but must actively think about what Socrates says and in this way approach an understanding of the concepts that Plato wants to get across. Plato's ideas on language are conveyed through an understanding, however minimal, of what lies behind Socrates' words and tone, rather than merely a reading of the words themselves.

Both interlocutors seem aware of the game that Socrates is playing. At 407c8-9 Hermogenes says "*κινδυνεύει, ἐὰν μή πῇ σοι, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἔτι ἄλλῃ δόξῃ*" ("that is very probable, until some more probable notion gets into your head") after Socrates has given his explanation of Hephaestus coming from "*φάεος ἵστορα*" (the lord of light). He knows that Socrates' statements are suggestions, guesses and games, but that this does

[4] This may be Cratylus' idea, as explained below.

not necessarily mean that he is not getting at some truth. Just because it is said in playful, potentially ironic tones, does not mean there is no wisdom to be found within it[5], and Hermogenes seems to appreciate this. This whole escapade is in the tradition of Zeno and his Achilles and the tortoise game: everyone knows that Achilles will catch the tortoise, but the language game 'proves' that he can't and so gets at some truth concerning language and its essential difference from reality. Socrates' reply, "*ἀλλ' ἵνα μὴ δόξῃ, τὸν Ἄρη ἐρώτα*" ("to prevent that, you had better ask what is the derivation of Ares") (407c10), is in itself playful, and shows that he wants to carry on with this game for at least a while yet. Socrates, however, when he has had enough of the gods and wants to move on to other words, emphasises that this game has a target at "*περὶ δὲ ἄλλων ὧντινων βούλει πρόβαλλέ μοι, 'ὄφρα ἴδηαι οἷοι' Εὐθύφρονος 'ἵπποι'*" ("ask about anything but them, and thou shalt see how the steeds of Euthyphro can prance") (407d7-9). He wants to expose the 'inspiration' he has from the etymologist to show what the driving force behind (or in front of) these etymologies really is – a satirical attack on anyone who believes there is wisdom to be found in the study of etymology.

Hermogenes explicitly introduces an important concept with "*οὔκουν εὐμηχανός γέ εἰμι λόγου*" ("for I am not a good hand at speeches") (408b5-6). Liddell and Scott translate *εὐμηχανός* as "skilful in contriving", "ingenious" or "inventive" when in relation to persons, but Socrates will demonstrate what this word refers to. There is a sinister undertone to this word. The implication seems to be either that using language involves necessarily twisting it and producing something out of it or with it, it has to be

[5] I cannot help but wonder what Plato would have thought of a painter such as Miro at this point.

worked in an inventive way, or that to be good at language one has to be able to work it in an inventive, contriving manner: adding or changing meaning and being clever with the intricacies. The idea that Socrates *τέχνη* lies in language is explored later.

The problematic nature of language is touched upon just after the issue of it being part of a skill one can use, a tool of a trade, is brought up. At 408c2-3, Socrates says "*οἶσθα ὅτι ὁ λόγος τὸ πᾶν σημαίνει καὶ κυκλεῖ καὶ πολεῖ ἀεί, καὶ ἔστι διπλοῦς, ἀληθής τε καὶ ψευδής*" ("you know that speech makes all things known and always makes them circulate and move about, and is twofold, true and false"). Both Jowett and the Loeb translate "*λόγος*" as speech, so that it seems speech can signify everything, which would have to include Forms. But it is *λόγος* that can *σημαίνει* (indicate towards?) *τὸ παν*. *Λόγος*, of course, extends to embrace so many ideas that speech specifically does not have to be able describe Forms, but perhaps argument, rationality or even thought can without speech. But then Plato exploits this complexity and ambiguity and prompts his reader to examine it, by saying that *λόγος* circulates and turns everything. The thing itself seems to be affected by its own communication so that it is spun around by the very act of communicating itself by *λόγος*. It mutates in the process of being said, read or even thought, and yet there remain only two categories, true and false. There is a correct and an incorrect *λόγος*, but still *λόγος* seems to be in a constant state of churning.

There follows an extended joke to demonstrate just how problematic, even deceptive, language can be: "*οὐκοῦν τὸ μὲν ἀληθὲς αὐτοῦ λεῖον καὶ θεῖον καὶ ἄνω οἰκοῦν ἐν τοὶς θεοῖς, τὸ δὲ ψεῦδος κάτω ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τραχὺ καὶ*

τραγικόν· ἐνταῦθα γὰρ πλεῖστοι οἱ μῦθοί τε καὶ τὰ ψεύδη ἐστίν, περὶ τὸν τραγικὸν βίον" ("is not the truth that is in him the smooth or sacred form which dwells above among the Gods, whereas falsehood dwells among men below, and is rough like the goat of tragedy; for tales and falsehoods have generally to do with the tragic or goatish life, and tragedy is the place of them") (408c5-9). There is ironic rhetoric with the rhyming of "*λεῖον καὶ θεῖον*" and the exaggerated alliteration of "*καὶ τραχὺ καὶ τραγικόν*". Whilst the gist of what is said Plato thought was along the right lines, in that up is good and divine, whereas down is human and tainted, Socrates is made to be ironic to prove a point. He is *εὐμηχανός*, he can play with language and tone so that he can dress up what he says with rhetorical skill to make it appear more appealing. The skin that is the style bears a significance over the substance of what is said. But being *εὐμηχανός* in speech does not make us wise with regard to *τὰ καλά*. This is the explanation of the joke that is to follow.

What does *τραγικός* really mean? It describes the life of *μῦθοι* and *ψεύδη* where it seems to carry a conventional meaning, but then Socrates declares "*ὀρθῶς...'Πὰν αἰπόλος' εἴη*" ("rightly... Pan is the goat-herd")(c11-d1). The joke lies in a pun on *τραγικός* also meaning goat-like, because *τραγῳδία* has come to mean tragedy, but originally, and literally, means goat song (*τράγος* means goat, and *ᾠδή* means song)[6]. This pun shows how simple it is for language to deceive, intentionally or not. It is also, once pointed out, a fairly simple example of the progression of meaning in language, because the great tradition of tragedy which one first assumes Socrates is referring to is a

long way from anything to do with goats. The language has grown and taken on new meaning. An example in English might be to ask whether a left handed person can be dextrous. But what is the true meaning of *τραγῳδία*, tragedy or goat-song? Plato makes it mean both, using its modern meaning to describe human life at c6-9, and its roots to make his point about the problems inherent in a living language. Language is not precise, but is malleable. It attempts to stand for absolute things, but when it comes to things such as *τὰ καλὰ*, it cannot. They are divine and perfect: language is human and imperfect. But this joke also points out that language is not an arbitrary thing either: the language that Socrates and Hermogenes are arguing in has not just been invented, but has evolved. Language is a constant movement, connected to its history. But this does not mean that an understanding of its history will reveal truth to us. We can and indeed should be aware of language's history, but must understand that truth is separated from it. Socrates can show this so adeptly because he is so skilled in the use of language. If his trade is in dialogue, then his tool is language and his *τέχνη* lies in using it.

The etymologies continue, but when *πῦρ* is brought up, Socrates claims he cannot give any etymology because "*τὸ 'πῦρ' ἀπορῶ· καὶ κινδυνεύει ἤτοι ἡ τοῦ Εὐθύφρονός με μοῦσα ἐπιλελοιπέναι, ἢ τοῦτό τι παγχάλεπον εἶναι*" ("I am at a loss to explain *πῦρ*; either the muse of Euthyphro has deserted me, or there is some very great difficulty in the word") (409d1-3). He has run out of ideas on how to give an etymology, and uses the opportunity to point out again that what he is saying is not his own, but is inspired by an etymologist. The playful nature of the conversation is pointed out in the very next line

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[6] The reasons given for the progression of meaning range from the first actors wearing goat-skins, to there being goat-skins as prizes in theatrical contests, or as a reference to sacrifices made when theatre was a

"*σκέψαι οὖν ἣν εἰσάγω μηχανὴν ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἃ ἂν ἀπορῶ*" ("please, however, to note the contrivance which I adopt whenever I am in a difficulty of this sort") (409d3-4). We are about to be shown just how well Socrates can use a "*μηχανὴν*", but by pointing out the trick, he attacks Euthyphro and his sort, hinting that they use tricks and are not always etymologising from any basis of fact. His get out is to say that the word is foreign, and therefore cannot be talked about in the Greek language. This allows Socrates to play with those words for which he can find an etymology or two, but discard those he cannot. There is not necessarily any truth behind this *μηχανή*, it is just what Socrates adopts when he is stuck. This looks like an admission that Socrates is making it all up on the spot, and can use the Muse of Euthyphro as his inspiration for these etymologies which themselves are not aimed at individual truths as to the etymologies of the individual words, but are rather pointed at a larger truth about language, how it works and how it can be worked.

Socrates rounds off this section of the etymologies with a ring structure by referring again to Zeus, and then saying "*πόρρω ἤδη, οἶμαι, φαίνομαι σοφίας ἐλαύνειν*" ("you think, perhaps, that these are daring flights of wisdom") (410e3). This is both ironic, in that Socrates does not believe what he has been saying was truly wise, but also meant in earnest to the extent that he has already identified the major problems with language which will become more explicit later: its nature that is deceptive and necessarily different from the truth it is meant to describe.

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more religious experience.

Heracleitus becomes more heavily involved: "*καὶ μὴν, νὴ τὸν κύνα, δοκῶ γέ μοι οὐ κακῶς μαντεύεσθαι, ὃ καὶ νυνδὴ ἐνενόησα, ὅτι οἱ πάνυ παλαιοὶ ἄνθρωποι οἱ τιθέμενοι τὰ ὀνόματα παντὸς μᾶλλον, ὥσπερ καὶ τῶν νῦν οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν σοφῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ πυκνὰ περιστρέφεσθαι τὰ πράγματα καὶ πάντως φέρεσθαι· αἰτιῶνται δὴ οὐ τὸ ἔνδον τὸ παρὰ σφίσιν πάθος αἴτιον εἶναι ταύτης τῆς δόξης, ἀλλὰ αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα οὕτω πεφυκέναι, οὐδεν αὐτῶν μόνιμον εἶναι οὐδὲ βέβαιον, ἀλλὰ ῥεῖν καὶ φέρεσθαι καὶ μεστὰ εἶναι πάσης φορᾶς καὶ γενέσεως ἀεί*" ("by the dog of Egypt I believe that the notion which came into my head just now was not ill founded; that is, that the primeval givers of names were undoubtedly like too many of our modern philosophers, who, in their search after the nature of things, are always getting dizzy from constantly going round and round and moving in all directions; and this appearance, which arises out of their own internal condition, they suppose to be a reality of nature; they think that there is nothing stable or permanent, but only flux and motion, and that the world is always full of every sort of motion and change") (411b3-c6). But this is not only a satire on Heracleitus and his followers' methods, saying that because their arguments go around and around, they get dizzy and see everything else going around and around. It also explicitly points out that if Socrates is in any way or at any time right in his etymologising then the greek language is itself based on a fallacy. If the philosophy of those original "*μετεωρολόγοι...καὶ ἀδολέσχαι*" ("idle chatteres and talkers" [my translation])(401b8-9), who, for the purposes of this argument at least, created language, was misguided, then there is another reason why we cannot rely on language as a route to discovering truth: not only is truth different from language, but also that language which may be meant, in some sense, to represent that truth, has been based on a philosophy that

does not take account of the consistent and eternal nature of *τὰ καλὰ*. This does not mean we cannot use it, of course. We have to use it, since it is our only method of communicating ideas about those most important things, but we have to be careful that we keep it as our tool and do not allow it to become our master. All this etymologising reveals the truth about nothing but language, because that is all the study of language can ever do.

With this idea in the forefront of his mind, Socrates gives a speech etymologising some 'important' words assuming that they derive from a belief in flux (411d4-412d2). *Φρόνησις* comes from either "*φορᾶς...καὶ ῥοῦ νόησις*" ("perception of motion and flux") or *φορᾶς ὄνησις* ("the blessing of motion"); *γνώμη* is from "*γονῆς...νώμησιν*" ("the consideration of generation"); *νόησις* is "*νέου...ἕσις*" ("the desire of the new"); *σωφροσύνη* is "*σωτηρία...φρονήσεως*" ("the salvation of wisdom"); *ἐπιστήμη* is from "*ἑπομένης*"[7] because the wise soul follows the motion of things; *σύνεσις* comes from "*συνιέναι*" to mean the soul goes along with things; *σοφία* is apparently "*ξενικώτερον*" ("rather foreign"), which was Socrates' *μηχανή* for escaping words he can not etymologise, so his explanation involving a man called *Σοῦς* (literally meaning "Rush") and "*ἐπαφὴν*" ("a touching") does not carry much conviction; *ἀγαθόν* is from "*ἀγαστόν*" and "*θοός*" because swiftness is admirable. The problem over *σοφία* is presumably a joke, because Socrates cannot find an etymology for it, and instead has to resort to what he has admitted is nothing but a clever trick. Plato's view of those who call themselves *σοφος* is clear: even the word they use to describe themselves is based on a

fallacy. We are not meant to read a passage such as this and then believe that we know these words' etymologies. The point is much wider. Socrates can find these etymologies working from the basis that language has developed from Heracleitean tendencies: if it has, then it can teach us nothing; if it has not, then it can be bent so easily to demonstrate a point that is not true, that we can never really trust it. We cannot find the answers to the most important questions by just looking at what previous generations thought, either in what they wrote or in the language itself in which they wrote. The truth does not lie in words.

Then he moves on to *δικαιοσὺνη*. This gets the lion's share of the speech, from 412c7-413d2. Socrates claims that he learnt *δίκαιον* is so called because it is the cause of all things.[8] He then confuses both his teacher and himself with questions and being questioned. The conclusion is that, despite being "*πολὺ ἐν πλείονι ἀπορίᾳ*" ("in a far greater perplexity") (413c8) than before he set off on his inquiry into *δικαιοσὺνη*, he still stands by his etymology. The confusion has arisen because the nature of what was being explored changed. When it was just the name, there was no problem, but as soon as the argument moved onto what *δικαιοσὺνη* actually was, and what therefore was *δίκαιον*, then Socrates encountered apparently unanswerable problems. He was told it was to do with the sun, fire, heat and mind, but could make sense of none of them. This section seems as though it could have been written in response to someone who said: "if you

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[7] This will become significant when Socrates is talking to Cratylus, and makes it as much to do with stopping as moving.

[8] He learnt this "*ἐν ἀπορρήτοις*" ("in secret" or "in forbidden circumstances") which I believe must be significant, but do not myself have any idea why. Some suggest that it refers to Prodicus' course on names and is ironic, or it may be Socrates toying with Hermogenes, suggesting to him, and of course the reader, that Socrates knows more than he is letting on.

want to know what *δικαιοσὺνη* means, then just examine the word." The point is, however, that the word is different from the thing, and their connection at best obscure, at worst based on an obscure error. It is the concept that the word refers to that both matters and is hardest to understand. Those who etymologise know no more about the nature of the meaning of a word, what it is that that word refers to, after a 'successful' etymology than they did before. Knowledge of the word and its roots in no way equates to knowledge of the concept of which that word is a label. As Plato will show towards the end of the dialogue (439d3-440c1) it is the essence of justice precisely not to be in flux because it, along with all other 'Forms', is permanent. Anyone who says that because *δικαιοσὺνη* includes "*δια*" or any other word of motion it must be to do with motion is approaching the subject from the wrong angle. The 'Form' is permanent, the word is just a human, and therefore inevitably flawed, construct used to represent that idea which no-one can satisfactorily define. Socrates can stick by his etymology, but cannot trust it to reveal anything about the true nature of justice. The etymology may even be right, but it teaches us nothing about what *δικαιοσὺνη* is.

Immediately after this rather confusing speech, Plato gives his reader a reminder of the tone of the discussion: "*ΕΡΜ: φαίνῃ μοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ταῦτα μὲν ἀκηκοέναι του καὶ οὐκ αὐτοσχεδιάζειν. ΣΩ: τί δὲ τἆλλα; ΕΡΜ: οὐ πάνυ. ΣΩ: ἄκουε δή· ἴσως γὰρ ἄν σε καὶ τὰ επίλοιπα ἐξαπατήσαιμι ὡς οὐκ ἀκηκοὼς λέγω*" ("HERM: I think, Socrates, that you are not improvising now; you must have heard this from someone else. SOC: And not the rest? HERM: Hardly. SOC: Well, then, let me go on in the hope of making you believe in the originality of the rest."(413d3-8). This indicates two related things.

There is an intellectual conquest game going on between Socrates and Hermogenes. It is a playful power struggle as much as a conversation aimed at truths – although that would be a trump card to win, or indeed beat, any trick. But both "*αὐτοσχεδιάζειν*" and "*ἐξαπατήσαιμι*" show that the interlocutors are here aware of, and interested in, the tricks that Socrates is creating. This is also a reminder that one cannot just listen (or read), one must think. If the reader takes the dialogue at purely face value because they do not think about what they are reading, they will do worse than learn nothing, they will be deceived. The reader must consider the words and the tone, and then what they mean together to learn anything.

Socrates continues this self-conscious talk at "*ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ ἐπισκοπεῖς με ὥσπερ ἐκτὸς δρόμου φερόμενον ἐπειδὰν λείου ἐπιλάβωμαι*" ("pray observe how I gallop away when I get on smooth ground") (414b2-4). This is a peculiar metaphor. If he is not running on the course, he is not taking part in the race properly, he is cheating and cannot 'win' because he'll never have a finishing line to cross. He may cover the distance quickly, but he won't really achieve anything. There is another chariot race metaphor at 420d3, and we have already come across the reference to Socrates being pulled by Euthyphro's horses. These metaphors are, as Baxter puts it, "hardly the paradigms of orderly motion."[9] Socrates is racing through , with no particular order or method, but is making it up on the spot, trying to get through as many words as he can, almost as a competition with himself. In this example there is the possibility that "*λείου*" might be picking up "*λεῖον καὶ θεῖον*" of 408c5-9. If it is then there is the further ingredient here

[9] Baxter, The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming, Leiden, 1992, page 90.

that although Socrates is not 'on course', he is dealing in the smooth and divine, and therefore getting towards truth. Perhaps truth can be reached by running along the track, but it would take too long (longer than our lifetimes), so Socrates cheats and runs outside the track. Perhaps only those capable of giving Hermogenes a serious answer can run along the track, but Socrates knows that he does not know the truth and is only capable of play and running outside the track. He can be playful with his etymologies, rather than professing to be serious. But while Socrates is getting at some truth, even if it is just the ambiguities and difficulties of language, those who think they succeed and believe they are really in the race for the truth about language, or have even won it, are severely mistaken.

A good example of Socrates' play having a greater truth about it is his etymology of *τέχνη* at 414b7-c2. He makes it come from "*ἕξιν νοῦ*" because the possession of the mind explains the *τέχνη*: "*οὐκοῦν τοῦτό γε ἕξιν νοῦ σημαίνει, τὸ μὲν ταῦ ἀφελόντι, ἐμβαλόντι δὲ οὖ μεταξὺ τοῦ χεῖ καὶ τοῦ νῦ καὶ τοῦ ἦτα,*"("that may be identified with *ἐχονόη*, and express the possession of mind: you only have to take away the *τ* and insert two *ο*'s, one between the *χ* and *ν*, and another between the *ν* and *η*") (414b10-c2). It is surely significant that *τέχνη* has this rather ridiculous etymology claimed for it. Here Socrates has attempted an explanation of what the word might mean, but has presented it as a joke etymology. The linguistic side is ridiculous, the concept side more interesting and believable: he who has a *τέχνη* has his mind possessed. But there is a much broader play. Socrates, with a nice irony, demonstrates his *τέχνη* in argument by persuading Hermogenes of a rather unbelievable etymology of *τέχνη* itself. The truth of the word

itself is nothing when compared to what the word tries to represent, and the truth surrounding the words.

Socrates makes it explicit that Hermogenes should not examine the individual etymologies too hard, but should look for something else with "*ἀλλὰ μὴ λίαν, ὦ δαιμόνιε, ἀκριβολογοῦ 'μή μ' ἀπογυιώσῃς μένεος*'" ("but do not be too much of a precisian, or 'you will unnerve me of my strength'") (414e2-415a2). Socrates' strength comes not from the detail of his etymologies, but from the wider principle that no truth about the world will be found in etymologies, only truth about language. Socrates puts forward some potential etymologies for us to ponder, but the heart of what he says is that words themselves contain no truths, but merely stand for them in communication.

At 415a3 Socrates wants to etymologise *μηχανή*. His explanation is that *μῆκος* (length) is added to *ἄνειν* (to accomplish) because *μῆκος* is nearly the same as "*τὸ πολὺ*" ("the many/greatest/much") (a5-6). However length is not similar to much in any sense other than that they are both quantitive, but they refer to different things, distance and number. They nearly mean the same thing, but they do not. It is no coincidence that Socrates pulls this trick on the word *μηχανή*. Socrates demonstrates what the word means by deliberately toying with a suspect etymology of it – its meaning comes not from its etymology but rather the way Socrates goes about the word's etymology.

Having shown he is *εὐμήχανος*, Socrates declares that he wants to move on to *ἀρετή* (virtue) and *κακία* (vice) (415a9-b1) because he is at "the summit of his inquiries" ("*τὴν*

κορυφὴν...τῶν εἰρημένων") (a8-9). Yet their etymologies are so unsatisfactory that Hermogenes pulls Socrates up on them. First, Socrates claims he knows nothing about *αρετή* (a9-b1). Instead he talks about *κακία* in terms of *κακῶς ιὸν* (going badly) (b3), then justifies it because *δειλία* (cowardice) comes from *δεσμός* (chain) and *δει* (it is necessary) put together with *λίαν* (strength), and *ἀπορία* (difficulty) comes from *α* (not) plus *πορεύεσθαι*. Therefore, still on the motion image, *κακία* must be to do with lack of, or wrong, motion (b3-c9). This gives Socrates the idea that *αρετή* must come from good or permanent motion: a shortened form of *ἀειρείτη* (d4), which itself comes from "*ἀεὶ ῥέον*" ("always flowing") (d3). However, he invites the attack with "*καὶ ἴσως με αὖ φήσεις πλάττειν*" ("I daresay that you will deem this to be another invention of mine") (415d5-6).

This elicits what can only be described as the right response from Hermogenes: "*τὸ δὲ δὴ 'κακόν,' δι' οὗ πολλὰ τῶν ἔμπροσθεν εἴρηκας, τί ἂν νοοῖ τοὔνομα;*" ("but what is the meaning of *κακόν*, which has played so great a part in your previous discourse") (416a1-2). Socrates based everything on his explanation of *κακία* as coming from *κακός*, without ever touching on *κακός* itself, but accepting it as a root in itself. But why, we must ask, is it only here that this behaviour is questioned? It is at its most obvious here because *κακ-* is the same root for both words, but in the other etymologies Socrates never explains the roots of the sometimes rather long words he condenses and uses as roots. It must be significant, even if little more than a neat authorial twist, that it is when talking about badness that this rottenness is finally exposed by Hermogenes.

Socrates is rather stumped. He calls an end to this section of the game with "ἀτοπόν τι νὴ Δία ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ καὶ χαλεπὸν συμβαλεῖν. ἐπάγω οὖν καὶ τούτῳ ἐκείνην τὴν μηχανήν" ("that is a very singular word about which I can hardly form an opinion, and therefore I must have recourse to my ingenious device") (416a3-4). The contrivance is the trick of saying it is of foreign origin. Socrates cannot think of or imagine a root for κακός and so must stop the game. No claim to truth is made but the use of τὴν μηχανήν must be considered. It is ironic in that Socrates' trick is not clever at all and is given no further thought, but it is its dismissal from the conversation by Hermogenes that is important. If "καὶ ἐοικάς γε ὀρθῶς λέγοντι" ("very likely you are right") (416a7) is ironic then both parties are aware of the irony of μηχανήν and are consciously playing this game, aware of the hollow nature of sophistic trickery, how an argument can be won with an undefended proposition and well timed μηχανή so that an audience is bamboozled with words. If, however, it is to be taken literally, then Socrates' sophistry exposes Hermogenes as a fool. That we cannot tell exposes the unreliable nature of language. In just reading, we cannot know whether Hermogenes the character 'understands' in this fiction and is being ironic, or whether the character is serious and it is only the author, Plato, who is being ironic. The interpretation of the character's tone and intent is left entirely to the reader, who may have to bring knowledge from other parts of this text or even from other texts in order to try an work out what Plato might mean by getting his characters to say what they do.

At 416b7-d11 there is the discussion concerning καλόν, with some intense and detailed word play. Socrates parallels "κατανοῆσαι" (to understand, perceive) (b8) with "τῆς

διανοίας" (understanding) (b11), so that while *καλόν* is hard to get one's intellect around, it also means just that, intellect. But both words are rooted in *νοῦς* (mind), and their similarity and distinction is made clear by the *κατα* and *δια*. So here in this game, beauty is the intellect which finds itself so hard to understand – understanding understands other things but not itself. The proof that *καλόν* equals mind is wonderful, and proves that Socrates is definitely *εὐμήχανος*. Each thing is named because it has a principle, a power, something to do (c1-2) and that power is *διάνοια* of gods or men or both (c4-5). At c7-8, the pun on *καλοῦν* is brought into play with "*οὐκοῦν τὸ καλέσαν τὰ πράγματα καὶ τὸ καλοῦν ταὐτόν ἐστιν τοῦτο, διάνοια*" ("and that which called and calls things by their names, is, once again, the mind"). By using the aorist for the original namer and the present for us who still call by name, Plato can bring out the similarity between *καλοῦν* and *καλόν* to link calling with beauty on a purely linguistic level. The difficulties of puns and near puns and their understanding, because the reader may not know in what way to understand the word, have been admirably proved by various editors of the Cratylus confusing and emendating *καλοῦν* for *καλόν* (Badham c7) and *καλόν* for *καλοῦν* (Burnet d4). Plato's baffling argument to help us *κατανοεῖν διάνοιαν* (perceive perception) has led interpreters to question the text, that is the wo rds and language, and play with it to try and make it mean something or something else. The pun is at its most confusing at d4. Plato has just gone through a fairly standard, if rather abstract, analogy that medical power performs medical work and that the power of carpentry performs the work of carpentry. The *τέχνη* in the person carrying out the task is associated with that task's power or principle, and so when "*τὸ καλοῦν/καλὸν ἄρα καλά*" ("the principle of beauty/calling does the work of beauty"), the *τέχνη* associated

with making beautiful things is either beauty itself, or the ability to call something something.

But this confusion sorts itself out. At d6, *τὸ καλὸν* is confirmed as *διάνοια*, because as agreed at c4-5 mind gives names and the association between *καλοῦν* and *καλα* via *καλὸν* is now entrenched. The only difference between *καλοῦν* and *καλὸν* is the 'u' that sneaks in, and Plato has already decided that for the sake of this game at least, or perhaps more seriously, that letters can come and go (399a6-9). He sees the two words as practically the same, or at least so much like each other that they must be around a central source. Neither word is 'right', but they both float around beauty in linguistic appearance.

At 417e6-418a1, Hermogenes says "*ποικίλα γέ σοι, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἐκβαίνει τὰ ὀνόματα*" ("what intricate names you come up with, Socrates"). Hermogenes seems to be gently goading Socrates, especially with what follows about pipes and Athena. Socrates says that it is not his fault that the words are as they are but the words makers'. However, Hermogenes seems to be pointing out that it is Socrates who is making the words come from his suggested etymologies, rather than definitely finding their real ones.

This is shown when Socrates gives two explanations of *ἡμέρα* (day): that it is from "*ἱμείρω*" ("desire") because men desire the light (418c9-d2); or it is to do with "*ἥμερος*" ("gentle") because the day makes things so (418d4-5). Hermogenes agrees that both explanations could be given by people with "*φαίνεται*" ("so it seems" [my translation]) (418d3) and "*δοκεῖ μοι*" ("it seems so to me" [my translation]) (418d6). It is impossible

to say whether he is assenting to one or the other, because it might seem to him that Socrates first explanation is correct, or he might just be saying that it could appear that way; or Socrates' second explanation might seem correct to him, but he also may just be agreeing with Socrates that there are people who think that; or he might just be agreeing with everything Socrates is saying because he knows that none of these etymologies is anything other than, at best, a possibility[10]. For example, Socrates says *δέον* (obligation) is similar to *δεσμὸς* (chain), but if this is its root, then it goes against the principle of naming that Socrates is using, which is that things to do with the good have an etymology that reflects Heracleitean flux. But he saves himself and his 'rules' by making it come from an ancient form ,*διόν*, which is connected to *διιὸν*, which is to do with the good. Socrates is thinking and speaking on the spot; he is coming up with whatever answers he can find; we are not to take what he says as any sort of well thought out theory, but rather an improvised intellectual game.

Hermogenes asks Socrates to etymologise *δόξα* (opinion), which he does at 420b6-c9. Socrates puts forward two possible explanations: that it comes from *δίωξις* (pursuit), because the soul goes in pursuit of knowledge; or that it derives from *τόξον* (bow), because opinion is like hitting the target. Socrates favours the *τόξον* idea, but does not say it is definitely that rather than the other, again it just seems that way ("*φαίνεται*" (c5)). So, on the etymology of *δόξα*, Socrates has no definite truth to propose, but two

[10]At Timaeus 45b4-6, Timaeus has the eyes filled with a gentle (*φῶς ἥμερον*) fire that is akin to daylight, so that the two can 'combine' to allow the soul to see. This is playful, but nevertheless clearly connects the two. This might be taken to give a hint at which etymology Plato preferred, but the point is not the etymology, whose correctness is irrelevant, but rather the metaphorical connection so that the light of day, when we can see things more clearly, is more agreeable than the darkness of the night: the light of knowledge is better than the darkness of ignorance. But none of this is serious.

alternative options, both of which are appropriate. *Δίωξις* has the idea of going in the right direction, and *τόξον* is about hitting upon truth, but not knowing why it is true. Socrates expresses no knowledge as to which etymology is true, both are meant as ideas getting towards knowledge and both are *δόξαι*. Therefore Socrates cannot settle on one in favour of the other and both have equal status. In this way, Socrates can very cleverly define *δόξα* through giving examples of what *δόξαι* are, but does not necessarily say anything constructive on its etymology. Rather he searches for the meaning of the word. He cannot get away from looking towards the ideas behind the words.

At 421a6-b1, he makes *ὄνομα* derive from "*ὂν οὗ μάσμα ἐστίν*" ("that for which there is a search"), which is seen more clearly in the adjective *ὀνομαστόν* (notable). But this is another joke. The dialogue up to this point has been a playful search for the etymologies of words, the reason why *ὀνόματα* are as they are. Now we are told that *ὄνομα* itself means that which is searched for. The *ὄνομα* has always been the object of this search, so in this context, that is exactly what *ὄνομα* has come to mean. Socrates is being ironical and *εὐμήχανος*: the etymology is a joke that demonstrates how words can be abused to 'show' whatever the speaker wants to.

But when it gets to words concerning matters of importance, Socrates demonstrates little with their etymologies. At 421b1-c1, he deals quickly with *ἀλήθεια* (truth), which apparently comes from "*θεία ἄλη*" meaning divine wandering, and *τὸ ὄν* (being), which is just *ἰόν* (going) without the '*ι*'. They are very important words, indeed the concepts they stand for are the focal points of philosophy. It is not surprising if Socrates passes

over the words and their meanings without trying to define or demonstrate them because that would just not be possible since abstracts such as these defy language and cannot be captured in it. There is no point in going into detail about these words, because it is the concepts that matter, concepts which cannot be revealed in a short and witty joke.

There follows a section where Plato explains, in a way, this whole section of essentially satirical etymologies. Socrates admits that what has proceeded was not to be taken at face value with "*ἕν μὲν τοίνυν ἄρτι που ἐπορισάμεθα ὥστε δοκεῖν τὶ λέγειν ἀποκρινόμενοι*" ("one way of giving the appearance of an answer has already been suggested") (421c9-10). This is a remarkably 'cynical' sentence for Socrates to utter, especially with the 'invention' aspect of *πορίζω*. But the answer will only ever be an appearance of an answer because no real answer as to the meaning of the word will be found in etymology, only an answer that is itself about language rather than concepts. It would look like an answer; it would get towards answering 'what does x mean?', but is s a long way from answering 'what actually is x?'

At 422a1-b9, Socrates explains that once one finds a word that cannot be broken down into other words, one must stop trying to do so and accept that word as a "*στοιχεῖον*", an element. Etymology is no longer a possible tool of 'investigation', so another method has to be found. Socrates says "*ἀλλὰ μὴν ὧν γε νῦν διεληλύθαμεν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἡ ὀρθότης τοιαύτη τις ἐβούλετο εἶναι, οἵα δηλοῦν οἷον ἕκαστόν ἐστι τῶν ὄντων*" ("but now in the explanation we have just completed, names were judged correct

according to their power to show what each thing is like") (422d1-3). As the conclusion of the dialogue with Hermogenes starts, Socrates points out that what has been said is particular to this conversation: names have been judged correct if Socrates has made their etymologies reveal a Heracleitean flux in the essence of the thing that word stands for. But Plato does not believe that everything flows: there are eternal constants[11]. The criterion for judging the correctness of a name has been incorrect: the correctness of language has been 'shown' from what language has been made to 'reveal', rather than language's etymological correctness being judged against the results of an examination of the universe. An examination of language carried out in language reveals nothing that is positive, only: a) language may have some Heracleitean tendencies in its roots; but more importantly, b) language can be manipulated to reveal anything as long as its manipulator is skilful enough.

The argument progresses to cover the idea that the namer in some sense imitates something in naming: "*ὄνομ' ἄρ' ἐστίν, ὡς ἔοικε, μίμημα φωνῇ ἐκείνου ὃ μιμεῖται, καὶ ὀνομάζει ὁ μιμούμενος τῇ φωνῇ ὃ ἂν μιμῆται*" ("then a name is, it seems, a vocal imitation of any object; and a man is said to *name* any object when he imitates it with the voice" [Jowett's italics]) (423b9-11). Then Socrates argues at 423c1-9 that actually that is not the case, because if it were, then a man imitating an animal would necessarily also be naming it. He set a trap for Hermogenes which he fell straight into. The trick is that Socrates can take two different meanings of "*μιμέομαι*", one to mean represent in an abstract sense, and the other to mean to do a literal impression of. This in itself exposes some problems with language, because the meaning has shifted over the space of just a

[11] See 439d3-6.

few lines without any warning. It sounded reasonable at the introduction when it seemed to carry a more metaphorical sense, but ridiculous when it had its literal sense imposed upon it. The word *μιμεῖται* seems to be able to 'reflect' two things at once. There are two similar, but different, ideas which the one word stands for. A dissection of the word could not explain how it has its metaphorical sense as well as its literal one: for that we must look to the word's meaning not its roots. This means that Socrates' suggestion at 423e7-10 bears no relevance to the Greek language that they are using: "*εἴ τις αὐτὸ τοῦτο μιμεῖσθαι δύναιτο ἑκάστου, τὴν οὐσίαν, γράμμασί τε καὶ συλλαβαῖς, ἆρ' οὐκ ἂν δηλοῖ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν;*" ("and if anyone could express that essence of each thing in letters and syllables, would he not express the real nature of each thing?"). He has just demonstrated how "*μιμεῖσθαι*" does not have one single essence for its letters to reflect, rather it has its precise meaning chosen for it by its context. Maybe there is the possibility of a language that works purely on the basis of a word's meaning being somehow expressed in that word itself[12], but the one they are using does not. In order for Socrates to be able to use "*μιμεῖσθαι*" meaningfully, he has had to set up a sort of convention with Hermogenes over what it is that they want it to mean in this context by dismissing its 'doing an impression of' meaning in favour of "express". This does not mean, of course, that all language is set up purely by convention: there is an historical background to language[13], but within that, conventions must be set up in communication for the sake of clarity: terms must be defined before a meaningful dialogue can take place[14].

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[12] Although Socrates goes on to show that a perfect representational language is not possible with his two Cratyluses argument (432a8-d10).
[13] See the *τραγῳδεῖν* joke above
[14]But there will always be those terms which are undefinable, those things that language cannot express in words and that cannot be found in etymology.

At 424b7-425a3 Socrates explains that he will end this exploration of language by looking at how *στοιχεῖα*, as either individual letters or syllables, can be put together to reflect the meaning of *τά πρῶτα ὀνόματα* (the original names) in the very composition of *τά πρῶτα ὀνόματα*. If there is not a method "*ἄλλως δὲ συνείρειν μὴ φαῦλον ᾖ καὶ οὐ καθ' ὁδόν*" ("the composition of them will be a sorry piece of work, and in the wrong direction") (425b3-4). But he gives a disclaimer as to the worth of what is to follow about names: "*οὐδὲν εἰδότες τῆς ἀληθείας τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων δόγματα περὶ αὐτῶν εἰκάζομεν*" ("of the truth about them we know nothing, and do but entertain human notions of them") (425c2-3).

At 425d1-426b2, Socrates starts his final speech to Hermogenes about how the sounds in language came to be used. He suggests that there are three "*ἐκδύσεις...μάλα κομψαὶ*" ("ingenious excuses") (426a2) which can be used as an avoidance of giving a real explanation: to do what *οἱ τραγῳδοποιοὶ* (tragic poets) do with their *θεοι ἐπὶ τὰς μηχανὰς* (gods from the machines), and say that gods gave the earliest names so they are therefore just right; to say that the Greek language comes from foreigners; or to claim that antiquity has cast a veil over them. But at 426c1-d1 Socrates, in explaining the roots of *κίνησις* (motion), undercuts himself by claiming that it is from a foreign word, *κίειν*, and that the ancients used epsilon where modern Greek has an eta, as well as the word acquiring a nu. In the first word he examines after he has set out his own rules, Socrates clearly breaks one of them. But the words he uses are different: in the excuses, Socrates uses "*βάρβαροι*" to mean foreigner; but in his etymology, he does not use the adjective

βαρβαρικός to mean foreign, but "*ξενικὸν*". *Βαρβαρικός* is probably more judgmental than *ξενικός* because it carries a meaning of 'uncivilised' rather than just a geographical foreigness, but in switching to the latter, Socrates is still referring to the idea 'foreign'. Hermogenes does not pull him up for this trick. This shows that we should not look at the letters of the words used, but the concepts to which they refer. Socrates, before this final section where he will talk about what *στοιχεῖα* show about the word they are a part of, demonstrates that unless we think about what a word means, and do not concentrate only on the composition of a word, then we will not be able to use them properly. This has shown that two words can be used to mean the same thing and therefore should not be considered as very different, just as the earlier problems over *μιμεῖσθαι* show that the same word can be used to mean two different things. Finding out what a word means is different to finding out how a word has to come to be composed as it is.

Socrates can get away with these tricks because he is so adept at using language; it is where his *τέχνη* lies. But none of his etymologising has been serious, it has all been playful suggestions that may have been right, but equally may not have been. He claims at 426a7-b3 "*τὸν φάσκοντα περὶ αὐτῶν τεχνικὸν εἶναι περὶ τῶν πρώτων ὀνομάτων μάλιστά τε καὶ καθαρώτατα δεῖ ἔχειν ἀποδεῖξαι, ἢ εὖ εἰδέναι ὅτι τά γε ὕστερα ἤδη φλυαρήσει*" ("the professor of the science of language should be able to give a very lucid explanation of the first names, or let him be assured he will only talk nonsense about the rest"). Socrates has not given very clean and genuine explanations but neither has he talked nonsense. His skill in language has allowed him to demonstrate that an etymological knowledge is not what is important because what counts are not the words,

but the concepts behind the words. He has no etymological knowledge, only some guesses, and his emphasis on what words mean, rather than how they have developed, means that he can concentrate on *τά καλά*, rather than putting his faith in a language which, if his etymologies hit upon any truth, is based, at least to some degree, on a mistaken philosophy anyway.

The explanation at 426d3-427d1 of the way that sounds are the tongues' gestures and are meant to resemble, in a very abstract and symbolic way, certain ideas, seems reasonable. This is different from an etymology, and requires no belief that the world can be revealed through the examination of words, only that some sounds in some words are used because the are onomatopoeic. It is sensible to suggest that *ρ* can be expressive of movement, or that there is a smoothness in *λ* that, when a *γ* is added to make *γλ*, becomes sticky, even 'glutinous'. But this does not mean that language should be studied in order to find truth for two reasons: the original names may have been created in a mistaken belief; and even if they were created well and in accordance with the way things are, we should try, as far as possible, to study the 'original' concepts rather than their linguistic representations. This sensible speech at the end of a playful performance by Socrates, supported by Hermogenes, does not rescue etymology and the study of words. It does indicate, however, that there is some method to naming and an evolution in names. They are not subject to the arbitrary will of someone who suddenly decides that a particular combination of sounds now means such-and-such, but neither are they vessels who will give up some truth about the world if only examined hard enough. Their history does not make them reliable, and if Socrates has stumbled on the method of their evolution, that is

Heracleitean flux, then any study of them will 'reveal' the world to be other than how Socrates believes it actually is.

The argument with Cratylus

The argument starts with Socrates referring back to his own reference to Prodicus at 384b3-c2 with "*δοκεῖς γάρ μοι αὐτός τε ἐσκέφθαι τὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ παρ' ἄλλων μεμαθηκέναι. ἐὰν οὖν λέγῃς τι κάλλιον, ἕνα τῶν μαθητῶν περὶ ὀρθότητος ὀνομάτων καὶ ἐμὲ γράφου*" ("for you have evidently reflected on these matters and have had teachers, and if you have really a better theory of the truth of names, you may count me in the number of your disciples") (428b2-5). The comparison is between Socrates and Cratylus and Prodicus, who both believe that "*παρ' ἄλλων μεμαθηκέναι*" is good enough. Socrates is expecting a similar lecture to be replayed for him now, but this time, it will not just be heard, but will be questioned too. Cratylus responds by saying that he agrees with what Socrates has said, but he enters into the spirit of the dialogue by saying it in a playful way, comparing Socrates to the hero Ajax with a quote from the Iliad (428c4-5). He refers to Socrates' joke concerning Euthyphronic inspiration, and adds that perhaps another Muse could be the cause of Socrates' outpouring. All this goes to show that Cratylus has both been listening to what Socrates has been saying and that he has partially caught the tone, and also that in his arrogance he has misunderstood Socrates somewhat. Cratylus has assumed that, since Socrates was arguing against Hermogenes, Socrates therefore agrees with him, although we are as yet still not sure what it is that Cratylus does believe, only that he disagrees with Hermogenes. Cratylus has listened, but not thought. He has only heard what he wants to. He will soon learn that Socrates, despite arguing with Hermogenes, by no means agrees with Cratylus' position. Socrates' attack was against Hermogenes' extreme position that a private language, one

where names can be decided on at any time by anybody, is possible. His tactic was to assume a perfect language, where there is a clear and natural link between name and thing named. But as will become clear, Socrates no more agrees with that idea in reality than he does with Hermogenes' initially extreme position.

At 428d1-2, Socrates wraps up the inspiration joke before moving on to the more serious argument with Cratylus. Socrates, as we know, knows nothing and yet appeared to give something like a doctrine in his conversation with Hermogenes, even if in fact he did not. *Σοφός* is such a dangerous word in Plato anyway, so it is no surprise to see it so close to *ἀπιστῶ*. As we have seen, Socrates has good reason not to trust what he calls *σοφία*, and here draws attention to its trickery and playful deception to prove the danger in the vagaries of language that can be abused by anyone with a *τέχνη* in language. If Socrates does not trust what he said, then we certainly should not either. We should remember that Socrates' inspiration was Euthyphro, and that the whole section could, and I believe should, be read as a satirical attack on Euthyphro and anyone who believes in his ways, that is, anyone who puts too much trust in language. This can be seen by "*τὸ γὰρ ἐξαπατᾶσθαι αὐτὸν ὑφ' αὐτοῦ πάντων χαλεπώτατον*" ("for the worst of all deceptions is self deception") (428d3-4). He must not let himself be deceived into taking his own satire seriously. Cratylus may have been taken in by it to the extent that he thinks Socrates is on his side, but Socrates must remember that Cratylus is still the enemy. Any satire is now over and it is time for a more serious argument.

It begins with the two agreeing that correct names are given by namers, who are operating within the *τέχνη* of name-giving. But the problem occurs over Hermogenes' name. Cratylus wants to claim that it is not merely a wrongly given name, because it does not describe Hermogenes' real character, but that it is therefore not his name at all. He should be called something else, something which reflects and instructs others on his character. That *ὄνομα* and only that *ὄνομα* would be his name. A word, even if everyone knows it to refer to the particular individual, even if it conjures up images and connections to do with that person in everyone who hears it, even if it is known as the tool of communication 'representing' that man, is not his name unless it describes him. This is Cratylus' position.

This dialogue may have its difficulties because the starting ground for each interlocutor is so far from the other's that they do not share much common ground, if any. They will be in the difficult situation of talking about language, but disagreeing about it on such fundamental issues that any understanding of the other's position is virtually impossible. The conventions they will be working in do not have very much in common. Hence Socrates refuses to get into the old argument about whether it is possible to speak lies, say that which is not, by saying "*κομψότερος μὲν ὁ λόγος ἤ κατ' ἐμὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἡλικίαν, ὦ ἑταῖρε*" ("your argument, friend, is too subtle for a man of my age") (429d7-8) This is very dismissive, especially since "*κομψός*" was used by Socrates at 425d1-426b2 to mean "evasion". What Socrates seems to be saying here is that I am an old man and have not got time or inclination to go into that very clever, evasive and old argument here. The words may say that a man cannot say that which is not, but we all

know that a man can lie. This is the beginning of an answer: the point is precisely that man can *say* what is not because language is separated from truth. Language is not the same as, or a mirror image of, reality. Before Socrates could convince Cratylus that he is wrong in this argument, he must show him that a philosopher must love and trust truth and knowledge, not words. Cratylus, of course, may not believe this argument either, but is merely engaged in an argument. He does not press Socrates for an answer to the riddle. He then does not expand on his idea that a foreigner addressing him as Hermogenes would be doing any more than talking a meaningless non-sense (429e3-430a7), thus leaving the reasons for his position ambiguous. Socrates will have to press him to give a positive answer as to what it is that he does believe about language, rather than these mysterious and rather negative riddles.

At 429a2-11 it is established that the art of naming is comparable to the art of painting. The assumption here is that names must be constructed in a similar way to paintings; they must in some sense represent whatever it is that they refer to. But unlike painting, one cannot, according to Cratylus, have a badly made name. It would not be a bad name, but would be no name at all: names are only names if they are correctly given: Cratylus says "*ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν οὔ, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαῖον ᾖ ἀεὶ ὀρθῶς*" ("not in the case of names – they must necessarily be always right") (430e1-2). Whilst the analogy with painting is useful for Socrates in his present situation, it is also useful for Plato in the long run. His famous attack on painting in Republic X is inevitably brought to mind, and so his apparent philosophical problems with that art form. This comparison with words does not bode well for Plato's final assessment of language.

The argument then seems to take an unexpected turn when, at 431a6-7, Cratylus appears to agree with Socrates that names are like pictures in that someone can be shown a pictorial representation of themselves and see it as themselves even if it is not particularly good. But, while Cratylus is happy to accept that pictures can represent with varying degrees of quality, he is not prepared to allow the analogy to run that far in the case of words. At 431e9-432a4, Cratylus makes the very good point that a word that has been written incorrectly is not so much an incorrectly written word, but is a different word from the intended original, such as whole or hole, or is nonsensical, such as whol. Socrates takes this point and turns it around to form a very important argument against the possibility that words can be perfectly representational of their subjects.

At 432a8-d9, Socrates says that an image must necessarily be different from the original, or there would not be an original and an image, but rather two 'originals'. His example is that if there were an exact copy of Cratylus, then there would not be Cratylus and the copy-Cratylus, but two completely indistinguishable and interchangeable Cratyluses. This seems rather unfair. Socrates is comparing a metaphysical representation (the name) with a physical one (another Cratylus) and assuming that the results will be the same. A name is an intellectual representation of an idea; its only representational function is mental, and without the human mind to understand it, a word represents nothing. But this argument is not designed as proof to those who already agree that language is, to some extent, a human convention. It is aimed purely at Cratylus and people like him. In their case, with their predicates involving the painting analogy, a perfect representation of a

thing in language must mean that the thing is completely reproduced in a linguistic form. There could be no difference between the nominatum and the name. In effect, we would end up in a situation where there is no language. It would be impossible to tell the names and the named apart because the name could not stand for the named, but would actually have to be it in order for it to be a perfect representation. However, if language does not work in this completely and perfectly representational style, then it would be perfectly possible for Cratylus to stand next to his name, and for anyone to be able to tell them apart. This is clearly the way it works; no-one could mistake Cratylus the man for the written or spoken word 'Cratylus'. Cratylus the word does not have some natural representational connection to Cratylus the man, but the human mind, once taught how, interprets that collection of letters or sounds to stand for the idea of Cratylus. This reductio ad absurdum has made it apparent that they were not using *ὀρθότης* correctly in relation to naming. They must reconsider what they mean by it, hence "*ἢ ζήτει τινὰ ἄλλην ὀνόματος ὀρθότητα, καὶ μὴ ὁμολόγει δήλωμα συλλαβαῖς καὶ γράμμασι πράγματος ὄνομα εἶναι. εἰ γὰρ ταῦτα ἀμφότερα ἐρεῖς, οὐχ οἷός τ' ἔσῃ συμφωνεῖν σαυτῷ.*" ("you must find out some new notion of correctness of names, and no longer maintain that a name is the expression of a thing in letters or syllables")(433b1-3) The meaning of *ὀρθότης* that will emerge is double-edged. They will, in the following discussion, find a sort of correctness, or consistency, in the application of names in Heracleitean flux. This is not surprising: Socrates, in his games with Hermogenes, has just shown how language does indeed flow as it evolves over time. It is not constant, but letters and sounds change over the ages for whatever reason: laziness, a wish to sound grander, the influence of foreigners. As it is, Plato has shown that this idea of a perfect

language is not even a possibility, and can have Socrates say that language necessarily has faults (432d11-433a2).

At 433d7-434e4, Socrates gets Cratylus to agree that *πρῶτα* ("the first nouns" [Jowett] or "the primary names" [Fowler]) were representative of their subjects: "*ὅλῳ καὶ παντὶ διαφέρει, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ ὁμοιώματι δηλοῦν ὅτι ἄν τις δηλοῖ ἀλλὰ μὴ τῷ ἐπιτυχόντι*" ("representation by likeness, Socrates, is infinitely better than representation by any chance sign") (434a1-2). However, he then attacks Cratylus by using *σκληρότης* to show that it means 'hard' to both of them, even though it contains a lamda, which was agreed to be a soft sound. Cratylus agrees, and concedes that this word carries its meaning because of custom, "*διά γε τὸ ἔθος*" (434e4). The idea that language may have been built up out of elements, so that certain letters represent certain sounds which indicate certain things ('*ρ*' for rapidity, for example), and then the combination of these representative sounds in a word give it its meaning, is not entirely dismissed. But even if there may have been an original language that directly represented its nominata, either through onomatopoeia or some other way, language now is different. Perhaps in an ideal world it would have a direct connection to things, but in the language that Plato was using, Cratylus admits that language works through custom.

Socrates goes on to explain that Cratylus can only recognise Socrates', or indeed anybody's, meaning through his words which he recognises as part of a convention[15]. The process of communication is complex. There is the idea in Socrates' mind which he

[15] That convention is the one into which we are born in society, so the convention has the history of that society.

represents or expresses (“*δήλωμα*”) by the use of a word. That word has its connection to an idea only through convention. When Cratylus hears the word, he recognises it and knows what it refers to within that convention, and so he can understand, to whatever extent, Socrates. The word is used as an oral representation of the idea, but that representation only occurs because of convention: it is not an abstract oral painting, but a set of sounds that is known to stand for a particular idea rather than ‘being like’ it. The word is a reference point for an idea that must already exist in both communicating minds for any sort of communication to take place. The success of the communication depends on how close the conventions are of the two interlocutors. It is for this reason that one must define terms before a philosophical debate. It is necessary to set up a convention in a rather artificial way so that everyone means the same when they say the same. If language were in the ideal state that Cratylus wants it to be in, then there would presumably never be any problems over definitions. The fact that there have been, with *ὀρθότης* and *μίμησις*, shows that convention is necessary for communication.

This is not to say that Socrates likes the conclusion he is coming to: “*ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν καὶ αὐτῷ ἀρέσκει μὲν κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ὅμοια εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν· ἀλλὰ μὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς, τὸ τοῦ Ἑρμογένους, γλίσχρα ᾖ ἡ ὁλκὴ αὕτη τῆς ὁμοιότητος, ἀναγκαῖον δὲ ᾖ καὶ τῷ φορτικῷ τούτῳ προσχρῆσθαι, τῇ συνθήκῃ, εἰς ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητα.*” (“I quite agree with you that words should as far as possible resemble things; but I fear that this dragging in of resemblance, as Hermogenes says, is a kind of hunger, which has to be supplemented by the mechanical aid of convention with a view to correctness") (435c2-7). Socrates, in an ideal world, would prefer an ideal language that

worked through ὅμοια. But he must succumb to the products of his dialectic, and accept that language is not perfect.

Having established this, the dialogue moves on to cast some doubt over how much we can rely on words in education. At 435d4-436a8, Cratylus says that knowing the name means knowing the thing. Socrates interprets that as meaning that the name is somehow connected to the thing in having the same nature, so that, according to Socrates' interpretation of Cratylus' theory, by examining the name, one should alight on the truth behind them, on the truth of the world. But of course there is a major problem with this idea, especially when the previous etymologies are taken into consideration. If the first name giver was mistaken in his belief about how the world was, then in examining his language in the search for answers, all that one could come up with would be falsehoods (436b5-11). Words change, but the truths they try to stand for are eternal.

Cratylus responds by saying that the original name giver must have had knowledge of the world for his names to mean anything, and that if he did not, then they would not be names at all. Cratylus is a Heracleitean[16], and Socrates' 'discovery' of Heracleitean principles in words is turned back against him. Cratylus' 'proof' that the name giver had knowledge is that all names are consistent in their representation of the world as being in flux. Socrates sets out to show that this is not the case, despite what he said to Hermogenes.

[16] See 440d8-e2

He starts his response by saying (436c7-d4) that if the name giver was mistaken, then that error would consistently penetrate the whole language, and then takes a side-swipe at all the mathematicians by comparing the error in language to that in a geometrical diagram which goes unnoticed before throwing everything into confusion. The calculations are consistent, but wrong. Then Socrates says "*δεῖ δὴ περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς παντὸς πράγματος παντὶ ἀνδρὶ τὸν πολὺν λόγον εἶναι καὶ τὴν πολλὴν σκέψιν εἴτε ὀρθῶς εἴτε μὴ ὑπόκειται· ἐκείνης δὲ ἐξετασθείσης ἱκανῶς, τὰ λοιπὰ φαίνεσθαι ἐκείνῃ ἑπόμενα.*" ("every one must therefore give great care and attention to the beginnings of any undertaking, to see whether his foundation is right or not. If that has been considered with proper care, everything will follow") (436d4-8). This reads almost like a justification for philosophy. It is entirely necessary for Socrates to ask "what is x", because if 'x' is properly defined then there is no problem in finding the right conclusion. It flows 'naturally' from the correct foundations. It also highlights the problems occurring in this dialogue because Cratylus is approaching the subject from such a completely different basis from Socrates. Cratylus is impossible to persuade because he just reverts back to his slogan that only a naturally correct name is a name at all. He is unwilling, or perhaps unable, to examine this assumption. He may have been to all the best lectures, but he does not think and question himself and others. He "*εἰρωνεύεται*" in the way suggested by Hermogenes at 384a1. Socrates has already shown that the language they are communicating with does have at least an element of convention in it, and yet Cratylus persists in his belief that language is only a language if it is perfectly representative of what it describes. He will not consider the very basis on which he bases all his thoughts on language.

At 436d8-437c8 Socrates says that there is no consistency in the elemental construction of names. He shows that 'good' words such as *ἐπιστήμη* can be made to stem from the stopping of motion rather than its continuation. This puts them in the same category as the 'bad' words. Some 'bad' words' etymologies contain motion, such as *ἀμαθία* (ignorance) and *ἀκολασία* (unrestraint): *ἀμαθία*, we are told, is from "*ἅμα θεῷ ἰόντος πορεία*" ("the progress of one who goes with god") (437c1) and *ἀκολασία* from "*ἀκολουθία τοῖς πράγμασι*" (movement in company with things") (437c2). However, the roots again seem suspiciously playful. Socrates even refers to his earlier explanation of *ἐπιστήμη* here. At 412a3-4 it is derived from *ἕπεται* and explains that which follows the motion of things correctly; here Socrates keeps the iota, and has it deriving from *ἵστησιν* (437a4), meaning standing still. We believed him before, but now he tells us the 'answer' is "*ἀμφίβολον*" ("ambiguous") (437a3). This is an odd game for someone to play who is concerned with the truth. Perhaps the truth is that Socrates is playing a game. There are three levels to this game. One is that if the participants in the dialogue (which include the reader) just listen (or read), and do not question what is being said, then it is all too easy to deceive with words precisely because they are not truth, but are a tool for talking about it which can easily be misused or abused. Another is that even if one does start questioning these derivations, there is still a problem because each seems equally believable and unbelievable. How could anyone claim one to be right and another wrong? They both 'explain' the meaning, and yet neither can be confidently trusted because both are given and both seem equally plausible - or implausible, depending on how one approaches them. Knowing the derivation is irrelevant when compared to knowing a

word's meaning: what counts is the truth which the word is an indicator of: that is the relationship which we have to explore. The third idea at play here is that of Socrates' τέχνη. There remains only one truth as to the derivation of ἐπιστήμη, but Socrates has the verbal skill to provide two. Both derivations, however, carry a similar meaning, that of the soul being around, and in an affinity with, truth. The nominatum remains the same, even if the word play of the derivations changes.

Cratylus now agrees with Socrates that the number of words which can be shown to contain an Heracleitean etymology does not prove anything because some can be made to contain opposite ideas depending on the argument, and anyway, democracy has nothing to do with correctness (437d1-7). Cratylus' word-counting argument does not seem to be one he believes in because he gives it up so fast, but rather it is an attempt at an *ad hominem* argument to catch out Socrates, and thus allow Cratylus to be the victor. His belief that language is only language when it is correct remains. His loss in this smaller argument about the Greek they are using does not affect his argument concerning language-as-it-should-be. He can still claim that true and ideal names were given by some god and that no other sort of name is a real name but something else (438b8-c6), and that therefore if one knows the true, ideal name then one knows the thing it refers to. He does not seem to view the language of their conversation as meaningful at all.

At 438b4-7, Socrates points out the circularity in Cratylus' argument that a name must necessarily be right to be a name at all, and that if one therefore

knows the name, one knows the thing named: "*τίνα οὖν τρόπον φῶμεν αὐτοὺς εἰδότας θέσθαι ἢ νομοθέτας εἶναι, πρὶν καὶ ὁτιοῦν ὄνομα κεῖσθαι τε καὶ ἐκείνους εἰδέναι, εἴπερ μὴ ἔστι τὰ πράγματα μαθεῖν ἀλλ' ἢ ἐκ τῶν ὀνομάτων*" ("but if things are only to be known through names, how can we suppose that the givers of names had knowledge, or were legislators, before there were names at all, and therefore before they could have known them?") (438b4-7). He is accusing Cratylus of confusing the relationship between what there is to be known, knowledge itself and how we attempt to express, and come by more, knowledge through language. Truth came first, then a knowledge of truth, and then finally words as an attempt to express that knowledge. After all "*ἔστιν ἄρα ... δυνατὸν μαθεῖν ἄνευ ὀνομάτων τὰ ὄντα*," ("it is possible to learn things without names")(438e2-3). One can, for example, understand the concept of the number five - there being the same number of things as fingers on one's hand - without knowing the word 'five'. In order to attempt to communicate that concept, however, one needs to have a sound that stands for it.

This model of language's relationship to truth is also explained by: "*καὶ τῶν μὲν φασκόντων ἑαυτὰ εἶναι τὰ ὅμοια τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, τῶν δ' ἑαυτά*" "some [words] asserting that they are like the truth, others contending that *they* are" (438d3). It must be significant that no name claims to be the truth, but the right ones are 'like the truth'. Cratylus does not object to this. If Cratylus meant the language of their conversation to be perfect, then their words would actually *be* truth in some way, because their connection to what they describe would be so close and rigid. If there is only one true name for any particular thing, then that name has to be somehow a shape and a sound that is

completely equivalent to the truth it stands for. The word would completely encapsulate the idea it would there to communicate. But for Socrates, and presumably Plato, the closest a word that humans use can get to truth is to be like it. It represents truth, or has an affinity to it. Our knowledge of truth seems to work on a similar level: "*ἆρα δι' ἄλλου του ἢ οὗπερ εἰκός τε καὶ δικαιότατον, δι' ἀλλήλων γε, εἴ πῃ συγγενῆ ἐστιν, καὶ αὐτὰ δι' αὐτῶν;*" ("What other way can there be of knowing them [*τά καλά*] except the true and natural way, through their affinities, when they are akin to each other, and through themselves?")(438e6-8) Literally, *συγγενη* means 'born with', 'congenital', or 'relative to'. It expresses the idea of something being 'akin' to something else, being of a like kind. Plato is aware of the limitations of language, but also conscious that it is the only tool we have to discuss and progress towards truth. But truth is different and separate from language, and so all we can do with language is talk about what truth is like, not truth itself. Therefore we can have long, apparently rambling and wandering conversations with no conclusion, and we can have myths and allegories. All language use, all discussion, becomes a kind of story because it cannot get straight at the truth and express it directly, but must describe it second hand, or at a second remove from the subject of the speech. All are as much a part of philosophy as the 'rational' question and answer dialogue. Our tool for discussing truth has, after all, in a way only an allegorical connection to truth, in that it is like it. Whilst truth is independent and true by its nature, in our search for it, comparisons are helpful, perhaps even necessary, hence "*δι' ἀλλήλων*"[17]. However, the possibility of a direct knowledge of truth remains in "*αὐτὰ δι' αὐτῶν*", but this is outside language. Truth can only be 'translated' into language, so

[17] See below on the Statesman for the importance of paradeigms and comparisons.

that that interpretation is necessarily not truth, because, as we have already established, there could not be two truths. If language were truth, we would be in difficulty because there would not be a truth and its representation in language, but there would be two indistinguishable truths.

The ambiguities of written language are then exploited by Plato in an extended philosophical joke. Socrates has just said that language cannot be truth, and Cratylus agrees with him by saying "*ἀληθῆ μοι φαίνῃ λέγειν*" ("what you are saying is, I think, true") (438e10). That is exactly what has just been established that one cannot do, and yet everyone knows what Cratylus means. Socrates has not spoken 'The Truth', but has used language to communicate a truth. It is unclear whether Cratylus is supposed to be aware of the irony in what he has said. If he is not, then he is not practising what he is preaching about language; the position he has taken is just a stand for the purposes of the argument and he is not serious about philosophy. If he is aware of the irony, then he is confirming his position that the language they are using is not perfect, because he can say this but not literally or entirely mean what he says. Socrates certainly is aware of the irony, because his response, "*ἔχε δὴ πρὸς Διός*" ("stop for heaven's sake") (439a1), seems to mean stop playing, presumably because Socrates feels they are finally getting somewhere, and he is an old man and cannot play games forever. The extra level that this is a made up dialogue, reported as if true, means that the author, Plato, can make his characters do and say whatever he wants them to. Plato's words are not an exact replica of a conversation that actually took place, but are about what sort of dialogue might occur between these men. We have to trust Plato that his dialogues contain an element of truth, however vague

or specific. We, as readers, know that the words we are dealing with are in one sense untrue because they were never said in the way that Plato presents them, but we trust that they are also concerning some truth, and contain some too. The truth of what he gets his characters to say is not literally true in the sense that it happened, but true in the sense that it contains general truths. When we are reading an invented dialogue, we must be aware of the difficult relationship between words and truth, but must also realise that there is another 'gap' between what the characters say and what the author means. Of course, we can only really ever guess, in a sense, at any extra-linguistic truth or meaning by using the language because that is all the 'reported' dialogue is. We can look at it in the light of other dialogues, but still the basis for any judgement we can make on what Plato meant in what he wrote is the text. If Plato gave oral lessons, there may be things we can never know. All we have is what Plato wrote; we will never know what Plato said. He is not available to be questioned, he can never explain any further what he meant. The reader has to take on the role of questioner and answerer. He has to get involved in any debate on Plato's words from both sides: he has to ask what Plato means and he has to try to find out the answers, either from the dialogues or from intelligent guess work. He has to approach the subject from all sides: he has to try to understand it, by himself, as a whole, with the characters who's words he reads to help him. We cannot just read the dialogue as if it were a true to life record, we have to remember it was written by one man with the advancement of philosophy in mind.

With all these problems surrounding it, we are in need of a defence of language. This Socrates gives at 439a6-b9 "*ΣΩΚ: εἰ οὖν ἔστι μὲν ὅτι μάλιστα δι' ὀνομάτων τὰ*

πράγματα μανθάνειν, ἔστι δὲ καὶ δι' αὐτῶν, ποτέρα ἂν εἴη καλλίων καὶ σαφεστέρα ἡ μάθησις; ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος μανθάνειν αὐτήν εἰ καλῶς εἴκασται, καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἧς ἦν εἰκῶν, ἢ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτήν τε αὐτὴν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτῆς εἰ πρεπόντως εἴργασται; ΚΡΑΤ: ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας μοι δοκεῖ ἀνάγκη εἶναι. ΣΩΚ: ὅντινα μὲν τοίνυν τρόπον δεῖ μανθάνειν ἢ εὑρίσκειν τὰ ὄντα, μεῖζον ἴσως ἐστὶν ἐγνωκέναι ἢ κατ' ἐμὲ καὶ σέ· ἀγαπητὸν δὲ καὶ τοῦτο ὁμολογήσασθαι, ὅτι οὐκ ἐξ ὀνομάτων ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον αὐτὰ ἐξ αὐτῶν και μαθητέον και ζητητέον ἢ ἐκ τῶν ὀνομάτων. ΚΡΑΤ: φαίνεται, ὦ Σώκρατες." ("Soc: Let us suppose that to any extent you please you can learn things through the medium of names, and suppose also that you can learn them from the things themselves – which is likely to be the nobler and clearer way; to learn of the image, whether the image and the truth of which the image is the expression have been rightly conceived or to learn of the truth whether the truth and the image of it have been duly executed?

Crat: I should say that to learn of the truth must be the best way.

Soc: How real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, beyond you and me. We must rest content with the admission that knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No; they must rather be studied and investigated in their connexion with one another.") To study the truth would be best, but that is beyond even Socrates. Instead we are forced into using language, and Socrates can use his *τέχνη* therein to describe what truth is like, rather than try to discover it directly, which cannot be done through studying language or words or names but rather what lies behind them. Cratylus' idea of a perfect language is not available to us. Our words can never be replica Forms. Socrates has shown that the basis of our language is wrongly conceived, and this means that his search

for truth using this ill-prepared tool is all the harder. But, as has also been shown in this dialogue, there is no one better equipped in the ways of language.

Socrates says at 439b10-c6 that he can easily believe that the names were given with this idea of motion and flux (“*ἰόντων ἁπάντων ἀεὶ καὶ ῥεόντων*” (“all things are always in motion and flux”) (439c2-3))in mind, in the mistaken Heracleitean belief that the world worked in that way. This really throws open the debate on the tone of the etymological section. There is so much playfulness in it that it could never be described as completely serious philosophy, and yet here Socrates seems to be admitting that he may have been right in that section as regards the basis of his etymologies. This indicates more of the difficulties of language: Socrates tells something like the truth in his etymologies in that they can be made to ‘reveal’ Heracleitean flux, but this does not mean that truth itself, being as being, is in constant flow. Socrates’ words, and language in general, have the potential to be deceptive. But Plato is never completely serious. He wrote dialogues about relaxed, social situations. The Cratylus is slightly odd in that Socrates does not start the discussion, but is dragged into it. He becomes involved during somebody else’s argument and plays the devil’s advocate. Plato’s Socrates could only treat this position with humour. Most human verbal interaction is littered with irony, jokes and non-seriousness; having Socrates, with all his verbal talent, as the discussion leader could only increase the playfulness. Even at this point, a crucial step in the completion of the dialogue, Socrates makes a joke with “*ἀλλ’ οὗτοι αὐτοί τε ὥσπερ εἴς τινα δίνην ἐμπεσόντες κυκῶνται καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐφελκόμενοι προσεμβάλλουσιν*” (“and having fallen into a kind of whirlpool themselves, they are carried round, and want to drag us in after them”) (439c4-6). This is

the idea that if someone sees everything as being in motion, then they themselves get caught up in that constant whirl, and get dizzy: they are in the dizziness of error, because as far as Socrates is concerned there are constants which are not in a state of flux (c4), and that dizziness begets a second dizziness, because if the world were constantly flowing around them, then it would make them dizzy. The concept of motion itself gets up speed and whirls everyone around in a blur, rather than the clarity that constants, like beauty itself in the abstract, could give us if we could only 'see' them[18]. A point is made, but it is done in an apparently light-hearted fashion. Socrates may have found a consistency in his etymologising, as far as their connections to flowing are concerned, but the satire was on the basis for that whole method of inquiry: if Socrates was right in his explanation of the etymologies, then that whole exercise is useless because it will reveal nothing about truth since words have been wrongly given. It may appear that the world is in flow (439d3-4) because the examples of the constants that we see around us do change as time continues, but for Socrates there are things which never change. This means that Socrates could poke fun at the style of some etymologisers, and at etymology itself as a route to truth: if language has been developed based on a misguided philosophy, then no truth will emerge from its study. All that will happen if trust is put in words as holders of truth is that the original mistake will be perpetuated, and everyone will be dizzy. It is not words themselves that will reveal truth to us, but we must use them in well understood conventions to talk about truth, whilst being aware of our tool's limitations and problems. Words are the creations of men, and not perfect. They can be picked apart to reveal a

[18]It is also interesting that they are falling into this idea of motion, because, of course, they should be ascending into divine eternity and knowledge.

consistent philosophy in the same way that they can be twisted in a sophistic manner to 'prove' almost anything.

The dialogue concludes with the explicit introduction of constant abstracts. At 439c6-d1 Socrates brings them into the conversation: "*σκέψαι γάρ, ὦ θαυμάσιε Κρατύλε, ὃ ἔγωγε πολλάκις ὀνειρώττω*[19]. *πότερον φῶμεν τι εἶναι αὐτὸ καλόν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἓν ἕκαστον τῶν ὄντων οὕτω, ἢ μή;*" ("There is a matter, master Cratylus, about which I often dream and should like to ask your opinion: Tell me, whether there is or is not some permanent nature of goodness, beauty, and several other things?") This is in direct contradiction to the Heracleitean flux. The argument is finally set up between the view that everything is always changing, and the idea of some stable things such as *τὸ καλὸν* and *τὸ ἀγαθὸν*. Socrates very quickly brings the subject to its core, which rests on the nature and possibility of knowledge. Socrates sets out what seems to be a 'double' view of everything: what is around him, "*δοκεῖ ταῦτα πάντα ῥεῖν*" (all such things appear to be in flux) (439d4), but there is a stable level of reality, "*τὸ καλὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον ἀεί ἐστιν οἷόν ἐστιν;*" (does not true beauty always retain its essential quality?) (439d5-6), to which Cratylus, the Heracleitean, agrees[20]. Absolute beauty cannot change, because as soon as it does, then it is no longer absolute beauty. It is independent of any examples. In examples of beauty, there is always a change (439d8-

[19] Why does Socrates 'dream' these things? Is the waking world incapable of discovering these things in their pure form? Perhaps the conventions of 'real' life hold us back in our search for truth. If we pull out of that world and instead immerse ourselves in pure thought (i.e. dreams) we may gain an extra method of creating an affinity between us and Truth. Perhaps Socrates only knows these things in the same sense as one knows what one has dreamt: the dreaming experience is very different from trying to recollect it when awake. Dreams are slippery things that escape our grasp as we try to remember what they were. We know that there is a memory of something, but we cannot pin that thing down exactly.

[20] See below for an explanation of why he might do this.

12), but because we are still able to call it beautiful, and therefore identify it as partaking in beauty, then there must be a stable 'beauty'. That cannot change, because if it ever did, then it would no longer be beauty (439e1-6). And furthermore, any change in these stable entities would rule out the possibility of knowledge. If it is always in a process of change, then it is never the same, which means it is unknowable because it is different, and so unrecognisable, each time it is approached. A world of fluctuating general principles would be indescribable and unknowable because there would be no certainties on which we could rely and with which we could separate out the world we found around us into understandable categories (439e7-440a5)[21]. But not only would we not have things to know: neither would we have the ability to do any knowing. If knowing itself ("*αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος... τῆς γνώσεως*" (the very nature of knowing) (440a9-b1)) changes, then it can never be the same and so ceases to exist as 'knowing'. In a world of complete flux "*οὔτε τὸ γνωσόμενον οὔτε τὸ γνωσθησομενον ἂν εἴη*" (there will be no one to know and nothing to be known) (440b4). The 'deus ex machina' that makes knowledge and a knowable world possible is the idea of things that exist "*ἀεὶ*" (always) (440b5). Each thing partakes in an abstract eternal stability, a Form, which allows us to recognise and know it[22]. But the concept of an eternal and stable knowledge is difficult. It is in knowledge's nature to change, to grow as the knowledge increases. Our everyday knowledge is a process of putting together what we previously knew, applying it to whatever we come across, and then 'creating' more knowledge through argument,

[21] This quote is as relevant to modern particle physics as it is in this dialogue about words.
[22] The reference to "*οὕτως οἴεσθαι καὶ τὰ πράγματα διακεῖσθαι*" ("believing that physical things flow"[my translation]) (440d1-2) is in conjuction with the image of the world being like a person with a runny nose, constantly dribbling. It is punning on the idea that a Heracteitean diagnoses the world as suffering such an affliction. But it also strikes me as similar to Sartre's idea of the world as a 'viscous' mass which is made solid and understandable by our imposition of categories and jobs for the things we see

deduction or perhaps inspiration. This certainly seems to resemble Heracleitus' view of constant change because we always change our knowledge merely by interacting with the world around us. But this is not the sort of knowledge that Plato is here talking about. For Plato, there is a permanent and stable form of knowledge, that of Knowledge of εἴδη. Because they are stable in their nature, any knowledge we have of them also must be stable. Our route to that knowledge of eternal things is a process of discovery and so change. But we do not have a knowledge of them yet. We may read and partake in arguments concerning them, we may hear stories about what they are like, but we can only know them when we know them independently of examples from the tangible world, which I think involves knowing them outside language, which has proved to be so problematic.

Cratylus, who signs up to the Heracleitean view that everything flows (440d9-e2), also agrees with Socrates that there are stable entities (439d2). Either Cratylus is being held up as a man who really is not thinking about what is being said to any degree but is only listening, or the absolute opposite. The only solution I can see that gives Cratylus a defence against the accusation of arrogance is that he has been listening very carefully and has reached a conclusion along the lines of this: if language is such an untrustworthy thing, then how can any conclusion discovered in an argument which necessarily uses language to propel itself be trusted? We have seen how language can be manipulated earlier in the dialogue where Socrates uses language to show that the components of that language can be made to 'mean' opposite things depending on which argument one

around us. For Plato, the Forms mean that we are not faced with this mess that the Heracliteans and Sartre would otherwise have us immersed in.

wishes to use at the time (ἐπιστήμη at 412a3-4 and then at 437a3-5), so the only conclusion that they have reached here is that, according to the current argument, Socrates is right. Perhaps if they approached the same subject in a different way on another day, then different conclusions would be reached. In this battle of words, Cratylus has lost. Inside the argument, he must accept its conclusions; but the words cannot force him to change his beliefs because ideas exist outside language, and so are not susceptible to its tricks or ambiguities[23].

But language remains our only option for communication, and while a healthy suspicion and wariness about it and anything it claims to prove is necessary, so is its use as an expression and communication of thoughts. Beliefs need to be questioned: language is the only way one person can force another to consider what they think they know. Cratylus must listen to Socrates' argument; he must consider the world presented to him in it and compare it with his own. But he does not believe that the argument proves anything about the world, only about the argument. Socrates' uncertainty at the end of the dialogue perhaps reflects a similar attitude when he says of the whole debate between stability and Heracleitus that "*μὴ οὐ ῥᾴδιον ᾖ ἐπισκέψασθαι*" ("it is a question hard to determine") (440c3). He says of Heracleitean flux "*ἴσως μὲν οὖν δή, ὦ Κρατύλε, οὕτως ἔχει, ἴσως δὲ καὶ οὔ*" ("this may be true, Cratylus, but it is also very likely to be untrue") (440d3-4). On this major debate Socrates can say that there is always an uncertainty. But the question remains, and we must do our best as humans to answer it: there is always a debate to be had.

[23] This may also offer an explanation as to why Plato chose Cratylus to appear in this dialogue. He is reputed, after having taught Plato, to have eventually given up on language and only to have communicated

The conversation ends with Cratylus declaring his Heracleitean beliefs, but the two agree to meet again. Socrates appeals to Cratylus' arrogance by saying "σκεψάμενον δέ, ἐὰν εὕρῃς, μεταδιδόναι καὶ ἐμοί" ("examine, and if you find anything, share it with me"[my translation]) (440d6-7). But Cratylus thinks he has already examined the issue, despite his youth (440d5), and knows the answer. This is despite, or because of, all that Socrates has just said. The bravado of Cratylus' last words leave him looking almost hubristic. He is talking to Socrates, a philosopher of some repute, and he leaves him with "ἀλλὰ καὶ σὺ πειρῶ ἔτι ἐννοεῖν ταῦτα ἤδη" ("I hope, however, that you will continue to think about these things yourself") (440e6-7). Socrates, as is clear from the speech he has just given and the reputation of the character that Plato portrays, has thought about these things. Cratylus looks like rather an upstart. But, as we have seen, he may have a point: since language as we have it is not perfect, and an argument is constructed out of and represented by language, the argument may not be as powerful as would first appear. But this argument will always be open to the charge that its conclusion disproves itself, because it has been reached by verbal argument. If this is Cratylus' thinking, he will keep on going around in circles: he can believe no argument is significant about the world around him, not even the one that removes any argument's significance. Throughout the whole dialogue, Cratylus has been verbally agreeing with Socrates' arguments, but at the end he is left with the same beliefs with which he started: no language is a real language unless it is perfect. Only an argument constructed from the perfect language has significance on the world, but Socrates' two Cratylus' argument seems to disprove the possibility of a perfect representative language. Therefore the best that we can do is use

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by moving one of his fingers.

the language we have in argument which are *about* the world. Here, even Socrates seems to be saying that conclusions reached in arguments do not prove the world to be this way or that way. Humans will never be able to discuss the world completely, only partially. Discussion will always be at one remove from what is being discussed. Language stands for something else; language is, in some sense, metaphorical. The conclusions of arguments that use language are not necessarily how the world is, but the results of our linguistic representations of the world can show us what the world might be *like*. No argument, it seems, is final.

Socrates' use of "*διδάξεις*" ("you shall give me a lesson") at 440e3 shows that he believes that Cratylus may still, despite what has gone on before, believe in lectures. He is tempting Cratylus to disprove his own belief in the lack of power in words by returning to teach what it is he does believe. Of course, any such lesson conducted in speech would instantly discredit its giver, because any speech given in an attempt to demonstrate why speech has no power would be a contradiction[24]. This may explain why Cratylus had to be so aloof and ironical when talking to Hermogenes before the dialogue started (383b7-384a4). The nature of his theory prevents its own explanation. Cratylus' reply to this appeal to his arrogance is left ambiguous by Plato: "*ταῦτ' ἔσται*" (translated by Jowett as "very good", literally meaning "these things will be") (440e6). Is he agreeing to come back and give Socrates the benefit of his youthful wisdom in a talk (answering "*εἰς αὖθις τοίνυν με... διδάξεις*" ("then, another day... when you come back, you shall give me a lesson") (440e3-4)), or is he merely agreeing to leave the conversation for now and

[24] It would be, perhaps, a dictum contra dicta

go into the country with Hermogenes as Socrates suggests (answering "*νῦν δέ, ὥσπερ παρεσκεύασαι, πορεύου εἰς ἀγρόν· προπέμψει δέ σε καὶ Ἑρμογένης ὅδε*" ("but at present, go into the country, as you are intending, and Hermogenes shall set you on your way") (440e4-5)). The language by itself does let the reader know. If one wants Cratylus to suffer from a rather stupid arrogance which does not allow him to consider an argument, only listen, then he will return to 'teach' Socrates; if one wants him to have a thoroughly considered doctrine which is as unbreakable by speech as it is inexplicable, then he is merely agreeing that the discussion is necessarily over. Plato, it seems, is demonstrating that language at least has the potential to be completely imprecise.

Indeed, all Socrates can say for sure is "*οὐδὲ πάνυ νοῦν ἔχοντος ἀνθρώπου ἐπιτρέψαντα ὀνόμασιν αὑτὸν καὶ τὴν αὑτοῦ ψυχὴν θεραπεύειν*" ("no man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind in the power of names") (440c3-5). The Heracleitean influence on his language may really be there, but this is no reason to trust language. Socrates has shown that a Heracleitean world would be "*οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς οὐδενός*" ("an unhealthy state of unreality") (440c7-8) in which knowledge is impossible. But Plato has his more optimistic map of the world, where knowledge is what is to be sought after. There is every likelihood that those who were responsible for the early names, if there were such people, just got it wrong. Language has no privileged information on the nature of the world: it is a human construct. Any language which completely reflected the world it described would not be able to exist, because there would be a constant state of confusion as to what was language and what was being described. The language that there is has so much potential to be toyed with, moulded

and generally twisted, either by sophists or the etymologisers whom Socrates satirises, that it must be viewed with caution. It is our tool of communication, and more importantly our tool of philosophy. But it is not the goal. Knowledge outside language is what is searched for in our philosophical use of language. There is the problem that our tool is unreliable, but this dialogue has made us very aware of the difficulties in language and its use – both the speaking and the understanding of it. As long as we are aware that language by itself cannot be trusted, only those concepts behind it which we try to express through it, then we may be able to progress to knowledge. But as long as people trust in language, its roots and intricacies, and believe it to have an almost divine status as a direct passage to knowledge, then their errors need to be pointed out, and what better way to do that than through satire. The very nature of truth is that it is indescribable, but we must use our tool of language to approach it and talk about it, conscious that all we can do is talk *about* it, what it is like. Language on a very basic level necessarily gives us this one-stage-removal from truth, because we cannot utter truth, but a version of it in language, which therefore cannot actually be it. Then, with that language, we can circle the focal point of truth by using different words in various genres about truth, such as a dialogue, an allegory or a myth. If we build up enough true opinions about what truth is like, then we may one day ascend into knowledge of truth itself. We cannot do that through merely listening to words, but must engage ourselves in thoughtful conversation. A refusal to do so, for whatever reasons, will not help us towards a better understanding of the world. But in our conversations, we must be ever wary of our rather unreliable tool.

The Phaedrus

In the Phaedrus, Plato manipulates his characters so that they provide a meditation on the means of the communication of truth or opinion. Plato is writing about writing. His starting point is not the individual words as it is in the Cratylus, but their use in combination to form language as a whole, and especially rhetorical language. The majority of the dialogue is occupied with the giving of examples of different sorts of speech, but from 257b7, the attention turns to a discussion on the giving of speeches. This section begins with a working through of rhetoric, what it is and how it works, and ends with a discussion on *γράμματα* (273d2ff), focusing on language's role in philosophy and showing its problems.

This is necessarily difficult: there is only one tool available to us with which to discuss language and how it works, and that tool itself is language at work. It should be remembered that for Plato, there is the added complication that the words we read written on the page are both his and not his; they are created by him for his own philosophical purposes, and yet they are put into the mouths of characters other than Plato himself. We are reading a play, a conversation staged for us. In order to be able to get anything from the dialogue, as with all Plato, but to differing degrees, we have to enter the game of both believing what we are reading, and not. We do not literally believe all the words and their presentation, we do not imagine that we are reading a forensic report of an actual conversation between Phaedrus and Socrates that took place outside the city of Athens in

the late fifth century B.C.[25] We read in the knowledge that in a very strict sense, we are reading a lie propounded by Plato, yet we understand that within the story there may be something that is relevant to our lives. We accept the convention and apply the sayings of a conversation from someone else's imagination to our version of reality. Already in language there are faintly bizarre things going on: we are told many things, yet we choose to read literally those things concerning our concept of philosophy and to keep those things said about the authenticity of the conversation as purely playful; they just help us 'picture the scene'. Already we have judged the worth of what Plato said; some is to be mostly ignored, some is to be written about at length. Language, the conveyor of Plato's meaning, and the reader's reaction to it, are both strange and obtuse things.

The discussion pivots around 258d4-5: "*ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνο οἶμαι αἰσχρὸν ἤδη, τὸ μὴ καλῶς λέγειν τε καὶ γράφειν ἀλλ' αἰσχρῶς τε και κακῶς*" ("but what is shameful, I think, is speaking and writing not in an acceptable way, but shamefully and badly"). Language, the record of civilisation, is linked by the philosopher with the potential shame and harm that it can bring before it is looked at in the light of its merits. If it is not used properly, it becomes the living space of untruths, and it can only be used properly once the philosopher knows its dangers and deceptions. It is against this background that Plato sets up the opposing forces: there are the philosophers who wish to use language as a means to search for truth and understanding[26], and there are the orators who view language as

[25] There is evidence to suggest that Phaedrus was in fact in exile at the only time when Lysias (227b2-5) and Polemarchus (257b3-4) were in Athens together. See Rowe, Plato: Phaedrus, Warminster, 1986, pg 13-14.

[26] And, perhaps, those like Cratylus, who have given up on language as a useful philosophical tool precisely because the orators, through their linguistic trickery, have demonstrated that the use of language has nothing to do with the independent truth it claims to portray.

the means of persuasion. We start to understand what acceptable writing is a little better when, at 259e4-6, Socrates says that for things to be said "*εὖ γε καὶ καλῶς*", they must be said by someone who knows the truth about what he is speaking about. Phaedrus' reply is revealing, and made to be more so by Socrates afterwards: "*οὑτωσὶ περὶ τούτου ἀκήκοα, ὦ φίλε Σώκρατες, οὐκ εἶναι ἀνάγκην τῷ μέλλοντι ῥήτορι ἔσεσθαι τὰ τῷ ὄντι δίκαια μανθάνειν ἀλλὰ τὰ δόξαντ' ἂν πλήθει οἵπερ δικάσουσιν, οὐδὲ τὰ ὄντως ἀγαθὰ ἢ καλὰ ἀλλ' ὅσα δόξει· ἐκ γὰρ τούτων εἶναι τὸ πείθειν ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας*" ("What I have heard about this, my dear Socrates, is that there is no necessity for the man who intends to be an orator to understand what is really just, but only what would appear so to the majority of those who will give judgement, and not what is really good or fine but whatever will appear so; because persuasion comes from that and not from the truth.") (259e7-260a4). The professional speaker has no interest in any truth other than being persuasive to a majority. The worth of the words, according to this view which Phaedrus inherits from others, is only measured by their persuasive success, not on whether they carry any truth: a persuasive lie is more useful to the orator than a truth which may be difficult to explain. Socrates refers to this as words of wise people, which should therefore not be cast aside (260a5-7). This is both ironic and literal.

The problem has arisen because they are talking at cross-purposes, as so often happens in Plato's dialogues. Socrates means by "*εὖ γε καὶ καλῶς*" something like 'well and acceptably in relation to the good' or 'well and acceptably in relation to the truth', whereas Phaedrus here interprets it to mean something along the lines of 'well and acceptably for what the speaker perceives to be his own good'. Socrates the philosopher

is concerned with the pursuit of truth; Phaedrus the pupil (perhaps lover?) of rhetoric with the job of oratory – persuasion. Socrates' reply takes this into account. One expects him to take offence at what has just been said, yet he says that it must be listened to. I think that it is fair to read an irony in here, because we know that Socrates does not believe that one can speak well without knowledge ("*ἆρ' οὖν οὐχ ὑπάρχειν δεῖ τοῖς εὖ γε καὶ καλῶς ῥηθησομένοις τὴν τοῦ λέγοντος διάνοιαν εἰδυῖαν τὸ ἀληθὲς ὧν ἂν ἐρεῖν πέρι μέλλῃ;*" ("well then, for things that are going to be said well and acceptably, at least, mustn't there be a knowledge in the mind of the speaker of the truth about whatever he intends to speak about?") (259e4-6)). Yet he also literally means what he says: the *σοφοί* are right to think that it is not necessary for a man of Athens at that time who wishes to be seen as an orator to have any interest in the truth. The Socratic or Platonic orator must understand what he is talking about, but a man is called an orator by the majority even if he has no knowledge of his subject. Not only does Socrates play a clever trick with language here, messing around with its tone so that it has two different but connected meanings stemming from the same words, but he also necessarily makes a reflexive point about language itself. It is complicated; it is his tool but it can be abused, and it is seen as a tool for the abuse of truth by the majority – the same majority who need somehow to be persuaded otherwise.

At 261a3-262c3 Socrates explains how it is that the philosopher is the only one who can speak "*εὖ γε καὶ καλῶς*". First of all, an image is settled upon for what it is that rhetoric does: "*ἆρ' οὖν οὐ τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἂν εἴη τέχνη ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων*" ("well then, will not the science of rhetoric as a whole be a kind of leading of the soul by

means of things said") (261a7-8). The way that the λογός is dressed up is what does the leading, rather than any pure truth at its centre[27]. The orator is concerned with nothing more than persuasion and he will "ποιήσει φανῆναι τὸ αὐτὸ τοῖς αὐτοῖς τοτὲ μὲν δίκαιον, ὅταν δὲ βούληται, ἄδικον" ("make the same thing appear to the same people at one time just, but at any other time he wishes, unjust") (261e10-d1). This does not just refer to the law courts, but to "πάντα τὰ λεγόμενα" ("all things said") (261e1): the man with this skill is a magician. This is the image we find in Euthydemus 289d8-290a5, where Socrates says that speech makers have the ability to charm and enchant an audience so that even he himself is sometimes taken in. The idea that the orator can make a thing appear to be different from what it actually is (probably believing to a certain extent that things are as you make them to be) is very similar to the role of the painter in Republic X. The central and true core of whatever is being spoken about is changed because it is presented in language. For Plato, an act, for example, would either be just or unjust; for an orator of the day, its morality would entirely depend on the way it is presented to the court. Any presentation of the act in language would necessarily mean that the court are hearing a different version of the act to the one that actually happened because their version is a copy of an original. The orator exploits this gap between copy and original to make the copy in language appear however he wishes it to appear.

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[27] There is also, perhaps, some word play on ἀγων in ψυχ-αγω-για, especially with the -ων taken from the end of λογων still ringing in the ear. This connects us into the game of rhetoric: the adversarial nature meant that ἀγων developed its meaning from any 'contest' to the verbal ones that took place within the law courts and assembly. The implication seems to be that anyone who is to be led will have to be conquered first. It just now depends on what it is that conquers them. Plato here is playing this game too, because he can only talk about language through using language. In this way, an explanation becomes an example of itself.

The rhetorician tries to lead his audience to whatever he wants them to believe, but cannot unless he understands completely what he is talking about. Socrates claims (261e6-262c3) that the easiest way to deceive someone is to lead them gradually, step by step, so that one slowly moves from similarities of the truth into dissimilarities and deception. But in order to be able to do so, the deceiver must know the truth from which he is leading his victim, or how can he possibly know which way to lead. This means that he who is involved in "hunting down appearances" ("*δόξας δὲ τεθηρευκώς*") (262c2) has no chance of deception, which is the commonly perceived job of the orator. So it seems that in order to make the same thing appear both just and unjust, depending on which is preferable, one must understand justice. This, of course, can only be done by the philosopher, so he appears to be the only one capable of *ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων*.

But surely the reader has to interject at this point. The philosopher understands justice, and so is necessarily bound by it[28]. He would therefore be incapable of doing anything against it, and one would expect that Platonic justice would not include malicious deception. A soul which is truly led by *λόγοι* will be led by someone who completely understands what they are talking about. Those whose acumen lies only in language and its vagaries rather than the substance of truth will not be good deceivers, and those who understand will never maliciously deceive. Just as medicine provides for the good of the body, so should rhetoric, the use of language, do for the soul (270b4-9). But this rhetoric

[28] This is, of course, the Socratic and Platonic principle that everyone wants what is good, but most are mistaken as to what this is: *οὐδεὶς ἑκὼν ἁμαρτάνει*. This idea is explored with rhetoric in mind in the Gorgias 458e3-460c6, where the conclusion is that the true rhetorician must understand justice and therefore be just.

is true rhetoric, and one can only produce or develop that when one understands the subject matter.

So how does one produce good, 'proper', rhetoric? Clearly, one has to be taught. And the teaching, if it is to be "τέχνῃ"[29] (270e3) must explain what it is that rhetoric is aimed at. That, of course, is the nature of soul. Only then can rhetoric become truly useful, because only once one understands soul can one produce the correct sort of rhetoric for each different soul type (270e2-271c4). One must be taught these in the abstract first, then apply those abstract teachings "ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν" ("in real life" or, more literally, "in activities") (271c10-272b4). In other words, one must recognise the different types of examples of the different types of soul and provide each example with its corresponding example of its corresponding type of rhetoric. One must understand the abstract world that lies behind the particular, and apply each to the other. Rhetoric, the use of *γράμματα* in *λόγοι*, can only be done properly by someone who knows what they are talking about: Socrates looks like the perfect rhetorician - as well he should, also looking like the perfect philosopher.

But this idea of rhetoric, as Plato is aware, is rather an oversimplification. There is still the major problem of the tool one has to use to convey the right sort of speech to the right sort of soul. Language is still the key issue. It can be used to deflect from truth, even to create its own falsehoods that can masquerade as truth. No one could lie without

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[29]Rowe translates as "in a scientific way", but I would like to remove the emotionally provocative, and destructive, science vs. philosophy debate from any translation, for reasons which I hope will become clear, and replace it with something like "in an expert way".

communication, and Plato seems to view it at times as a main source of misconceptions about reality as in the Cratylus, where flux and change in language does not mean, as some would claim, that there can be no constants. The majority does not understand its difficulties, or simply prefers to ignore them. Socrates, when talking about the orator Tisias' methods, says "*ὅτι Ὦ Τεισία, πάλαι ἡμεῖς, πρὶν καὶ σὲ παρελθεῖν, τυγχάνομεν λέγοντες ὡς ἄρα τοῦτο τὸ εἰκὸς τοῖς πολλοῖς δι' ὁμοιότητα τοῦ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς τυγχάνει ἐγγιγνόμενον· τὰς δὲ ὁμοιότητας ἄρτι διήλθομεν ὅτι πανταχοῦ ὁ τὴν ἀλήθειαν εἰδὼς κάλλιστα ἐπίσταται εὑρίσκειν.*" ("Tisias, we have for some time been saying, before you came along, that this 'probability' comes about in the minds of ordinary people because of a resemblance to the truth; and we showed only a few moments ago that in every case it is the man who knows the truth who knows best how to discover these resemblances.") (273d2-6). The probability which he is talking about is that which concerns the orator's case: if he thinks his client will be better believed if a probable story is given rather than an explanation of what actually happened, then the rhetorician will give the probable story. Probable is given a definition in this context by Socrates' interpretation of what he believes the rhetorician Tisias would say: "*τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ τῷ πλήθει δοκοῦν*" ("the probable is just what most people think to be the case") (273b1). The rhetorician thinks he should fit what he says, not the way that he says it but what he actually describes, into what the audience is ready to accept[30]. This is, of course, the very opposite of the Socratic and Platonic attitude. Plato has no respect for the

[30] There is an acceptance here that truth is often what is not seen as likely. This offers a defence for Plato's fondness for paradox, because *λογος* will conquer persuasion, and truth is its own persuasion. It also offers another comment on the workings of language: words and grammar cannot, in one sense, cope with truth and so end up in a paradox, but that paradox itself reveals something about language and truth. A paradox is aware of itself as language that is struggling towards a truth which is different from and 'other' than it. It accepts that the only way it can get at 'truth' is to go against our common sense on a linguistic level, but to

majority, only a respect for what is right. He has no time for such a conservative attitude, where nothing new is said to the people because any orator merely interested in a superficial victory knows that they will agree with what they believe they already know. Plato is not interested in pleasing the people, but rather forcing them into philosophy so that they may be truly happy. A rhetorician who gives in to such sycophantic methods has no aim other than to be believed and respected by the people: Plato is searching for the right answers to Socrates' questions, not those answers that make him popular. Any *λόγος* that "frequently says goodbye to the truth" ("*πολλὰ εἰπόντα χαίρειν τῷ ἀληθεῖ*") (272e5) is not a proper *λογος*, but merely and falsely claims to be one.

Anyone who is to be "*τεχνικὸς λόγων*" ("an expert in the skill of speaking") (273e3) must understand the world around him, must be able not only to understand the souls of his audience and be able to speak accordingly, but also must be involved in what seems like collection and division: "*καὶ κατ' εἴδη τε διαιρεῖσθαι τὰ ὄντα καὶ μιᾷ ἰδέᾳ δυνατὸς ᾖ καθ' ἓν ἕκαστον περιλαμβάνειν*" ("and be capable of dividing up the things that are according to their forms and embrace each thing one by one under one kind") (273e1-3). This is further explained at 277b5-c6: "*πρὶν ἄν τις τό τε ἀληθὲς ἑκάστων εἰδῇ πέρι ὧν λέγει ἢ γράφει, κατ' αὐτό τε πᾶν ὁρίζεσθαι δυνατὸς γένηται, ὁρισάμενός τε πάλιν κατ' εἴδη μέχρι τοῦ ἀτμήτου τέμνειν ἐπιστηθῇ, περί τε ψυχῆς φύσεως διιδὼν κατὰ ταὐτά, τὸ προσαρμόττον ἑκάστῃ φύσει εἶδος ἀνευρίσκων, οὕτω τιθῃ καὶ διακοσμῇ τὸν λόγον, ποικίλῃ μὲν ποικίλους ψυχῇ καὶ παναρμονίους διδοὺς λόγους, ἁπλοῦς δὲ ἁπλῇ, οὐ πρότερον δυνατὸν τέχνῃ ἔσεσθαι καθ' ὅσον*

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stand as sensible when the concept it is trying to put across is properly considered. That a paradox is also a piece of rhetoric will be considered later.

πέφυκε μεταχειρισθῆναι τὸ λόγων γένος" ("Until a man knows the truth about each of the things about which he speaks or writes, and becomes capable of defining the whole by itself, and having defined it, knows how to cut it up again according to its forms until it can no longer be cut; and until he has reached an understanding of the nature of the soul along the same lines, discovering the form which fits each nature, and so arranges and orders his speech, offering a complex soul complex speeches containing all the modes, and simple speeches to a simple soul – not before then will he be capable of pursuing the making of speeches as a whole in a scientific way, to the degree that its nature allows." To give a *λογος*, one must understand its contents.

But there remains a problem. When someone can do this, he will be "*τεχνικὸς λόγων πέρι καθ' ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ*" ("an expert in the skill of speaking to the degree possible for mankind") (273e3-4). This is then partly explained: "*οὐχ ἕνεκα τοῦ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν πρὸς ἀνθρώπους δεῖ διαπονεῖσθαι τὸν σώφρονα, ἀλλὰ τοῦ θεοῖς κεχαρισμένα μὲν λέγειν δύνασθαι, κεχαρισμένως δὲ πράττειν τὸ πᾶν εἰς δύναμιν*" ("the sensible man ought to work through [how to become an expert in speaking] not for the purpose of speaking and acting in relation to men, but in order to be able both to say what is gratifying to the gods and to act in everything, so far as he can, in a way which is gratifying to them.") (273e5-8). Humans are described as "*ὁμοδούλοις*" ("fellow-slaves") (273e9) who are not to be gratified, but rather we should aim to satisfy "*δεσπόταις ἀγαθοῖς τε καὶ ἐξ ἀγαθῶν*" ("good and noble masters"[31]) (274a1-2);

[31] Lit: "good masters and from good [ones]" (my translation).

"*μεγάλων γὰρ ἕνεκα περιτέον, οὐχ ὡς σὺ δοκεῖς*[32]" ("for it is for the sake of great things that the journey is to be made, not for those you have in mind") (274a3). The purposes of philosophy, it seems, are not even those which are within the human sphere; they concern things which are higher, which are godlike. But this does not make their pursuit meaningless, because "*ἐπιχειροῦντι τοι τοῖς καλοῖς καλὸν καὶ πάσχειν ὅτι ἄν τῳ συμβῇ παθεῖν*" ("for a man who even attempts what is fine, it will be fine too to endure whatever turns out for him") (274a8-b1). This does not appear to make very much sense. How can Plato hold both that it is good and useful to pursue philosophy and that the object of pursuit is outside the human world? Such a paradox serves its purpose perfectly, encouraging any reader to pursue its meaning.

Earlier in the dialogue, as an introduction to his speech in a mythological style about the soul being like a chariot and its horses, Socrates says about any description of the soul: "*οἷον μέν ἐστι, πάντῃ πάντως θείας εἶναι καὶ μακρᾶς διηγήσεως, ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν, ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ ἐλάττονος*" ("to say what kind of thing it is would require a long exposition, and one calling for utterly superhuman powers; to say what it resembles requires a shorter one, and one within human capacities") (246a4-6). We cannot directly describe soul as humans; it is beyond us. But this does not prevent us talking about it; we just cannot 'talk *it*'. In an attempt to discuss justice, justice itself does not pour out of anyone's mouth, only words about it. The words are different from the thing they are describing. This is why in the myth about writing (274c5-275b2) those who are taught only by *γράμματα* have "*σοφίας ... δόξαν*" ("an appearance of wisdom") rather than

[32] lit: "for it is for the sake of great things that one must make a circuit, not for what you have in mind" (my translation).

true wisdom. The language is presented as the tool for the communication of truth, but it is not truth itself: it is more likely to be the wrapping that lies around truth, the falsehoods men see and believe to be the truth. They may know the words and how to use them, the grammar and the tricks, but they do not understand the concepts in themselves which the words are standing for. It is like looking at a building and only seeing and noting the paintwork whilst ignoring the structure. Once someone is taught how to read, all words become accessible to them, but this has no bearing on their understanding of the world around them if they do not attempt to engage with what it is that the words are standing for and attempting to describe. Each of these things is, we are told at 247c6-7, "*ἀχρώματος τε καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος καὶ ἀναφὴς*" ("without colour or shape and intangible") and will never be celebrated "*κατ' ἀξιαν*" ("as it deserves") by any earthly "*ποιητης*". This is entirely logical, because if something has no dimensions and occupies no space, then it becomes indescribable in language. When we try to discuss justice, we have to deal in examples of justice, whether real or attempts at an ideal. An intimate knowledge of the workings of language and how to work it so that it works for you comes to nothing if there is not an admission that language is in its own world, a world which is an attempt to mimic "*οὐσία ὄντως οὖσα*" ("being which really is") (247c7). That admission also has to take account of language being a human invention - a human, and therefore imperfect, attempt to represent the divine and perfect unchanging reality, which we will never be able to see with our eyes. Consistent, unchanging, complete reality is only approachable through the intellect.

Words are not only imperfect as a means of communication when one is searching for something, but they can go one stage further and even be dangerous. At 275c5-e6, Socrates specifically attacks the written form of language. We are told that anyone who believes either that they have left behind a "*τέχνην ... ἐν γράμμασι*" ("piece of expertise in writing") or that they can gain anything "*σαφὲς και βέβαιον*" ("clear or certain") from what they read, is full of simplicity "*πλέον τι οἰόμενος εἶναι λόγους γεγραμμένους τοῦ τὸν εἰδότα ὑπομνῆσαι περὶ ὧν ἂν ᾖ τὰ γεγραμμένα*" ("in thinking that written words were anything more than a reminder to the man who knows the subjects to which the things written relate"). The problem here is interpretation: "*ταὐτὸν δὲ καὶ οἱ λόγοι· δόξαις μὲν ἂν ὥς τι φρονοῦντας αὐτοὺς λέγειν, ἐὰν δέ τι ἔρῃ τῶν λεγομένων βουλόμενος μαθεῖν, ἕν τι σημαίνει μόνον ταὐτον ἀεί*" ("Similarly with written words: you might think that they spoke as if they had some thought in their heads, but if you ever ask them about any of the things they say out of a desire to learn, they point to just one thing, the same every time") (275d7-9). All the written words can do is sit on the page and be interpreted. The words by themselves cannot lead someone to wisdom, that only comes from understanding the concepts which the words stand for. Someone can use or read the words who has no understanding of what they mean at all. But he may at first appear to have an understanding, especially if he is using the words in an established phrase. To find out whether the user has an understanding or the phrase a sensible and useful meaning, one must examine what it is that the words mean. The learning of a maxim contributes nothing to education. One can only learn through dialectic, through questions and answers given and received with the joint purpose of getting at the truth. That is the greatest thing that Socrates taught: he said

he knew nothing, he laid down no theories, but he emphasised through practice the importance of never accepting the word of a self-proclaimed 'expert'. But one cannot engage in an argument or discussion with a written word: "*αὐτὸς γὰρ οὔτ' ἀμύνασθαι οὔτε βοηθῆσαι δυνατὸς αὐτῷ*" ("for it is incapable of defending or helping itself") (275e5). There is a gap between the word and what it describes. What it means to the author can be different, however subtly, from what the reader takes it to mean, and the author is not present as the words' father to make clear what he means and then defend it. The only defence he can offer is what he writes, and that can never be properly questioned. Because his *λόγοι* are "*ἀδυνάτων μὲν αὐτοῖς λόγῳ βοηθεῖν*" ("incapable of speaking in their own support") they therefore must also be "*ἀδυνάτων δὲ ἱκανῶς τἀληθῆ διδάξαι*" ("incapable of adequately teaching what is true") (276c8-9). Learning goes hand in hand with questioning, and teaching with properly defending: they are as linked as "*μὲν*" and "*δὲ*". Firstly, one cannot find out exactly what the author means, and secondly, even if they did write in such a way as to make the interpretative gap nearly nothing, like, for example, Aristotle, then they would still not be present to defend what they say to see if it is true. All this also assumes that the author knows what he is talking about. However, as we have seen at 273e3-4, it is doubtful whether any human can ever know completely these most important and most abstract things. They are to be aimed at, but perhaps never attained in mind, and almost certainly never in words. There are problems with the spoken word as a philosophical tool too, but the written version is just an "*εἴδωλον*" ("phantom") (276a9). It does not live, but it is forever the same.

A λόγος is only of any use when given by someone who understands what it contains, but even then a written λόγος cannot be taken entirely seriously because it cannot, by itself, teach anything. The reading of philosophy, or indeed of anything, is not the act of philosophy. That is only the thinking, the question and answer dialogue. This does not dismiss the written word by any means, but even if it is written by one who knows what he is writing about, then its reading remains a game and a pastime. No new knowledge will emerge from the reading of a book, only from some discussion of it. And so at 276d8, we get a phrase where Socrates and Plato come together to speak as one to the reader: the budding philosopher, rather than attending drinking parties or the like, will "*ἀντὶ τούτων οἷς λέγω παίζων διάξει*" ("spend his time amusing himself with the things I say, instead of these"). Who is the subject of *λέγω*? Socrates 'says' it, but Plato writes it. In such a self-consciously written work, and necessarily so because of its subject matter, Plato suddenly shines through. The reader can 'hear' Socrates' discussion in the words that he reads, but is also told how to deal with what he is reading about not trusting anything in writing. Whilst Phaedrus is being urged by Socrates to amuse himself with Socrates' philosophy in this play set up by Plato, the reader is being urged by Plato himself to amuse himself with what Plato writes, which is this entire dialogue and all of Plato's works, including the words of all his characters. Phaedrus is right to call writing playful, especially at this point. As a character contemporary to Socrates, he understands what he is saying: as a creation of Plato's, he can point towards the difficulties of truth in writing[33]. It might seem odd that a written book should contain within its conclusion:

[33] His following comment on the man "*τοῦ ἐν λόγοις δυναμένου παίζειν, δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἄλλων ὧν λέγεις πέρι μυθολογοῦντα*" ("who is able to amuse himself with words, telling stories about justice and the other subjects you speak of") (276e2-3) must surely have some influence on how we try to read the Republic in particular, but perhaps also on all of the Platonic corpus. I will come to this later.

"οὐδένα πώποτε λόγον ἐν μέτρῳ οὐδ' ἄνευ μέτρου μεγάλης ἄξιον σπουδῆς γραφῆναι" ("nothing has ever yet been written, whether in verse or in prose, which is worth much serious attention") (277e6-8), but writing by itself cannot contain the answers for which Plato searches. The word δικαιοσύνη is meaningless by itself: it is only the concept which it stands for that has a value, and that concept cannot be completely represented in language because language is incapable of describing such abstracts. By learning a dictionary style definition of justice, one does not understand justice. One may be able to give an answer to the question 'what is justice', but it would not stand up to scrutiny. Justice, as with all concepts, is outside of language. It is possible for Plato to persuade through the written word that rhetoricians are only interested in the so-called truths that are perpetuated through language, in the transference of opinion from one to another through words, and to deny that language can itself contain the concepts, the forms, which he sought to understand, but he must admit that therefore his writings do not convey them either. This does not diminish what he wrote. As long as it is not taken completely seriously, as long as it leads to thinking and discussion, his work is useful. Let us assume that he understood his subject matter to a very great degree, there is too much evidence not to. But he understood it to such a degree, that he knew a word was nothing but a pattern that somehow manages to be a sort of physical representation of a concept: the shape of 'justice' as a scrawl has no morality or justice about it. Those letters placed in that order occupy a strange world: they stand for and mean an indefinable concept which no-one can ever see but someone may understand (if only in theory, as it were). We can never see Justice, and in the gap between the word and the concept, each person treads their own route and reaches a slightly different area of understanding of the

concept. The orator is satisfied as long as he wins the argument or the crowd; he is happy to live in a world of words and interpretation. Only the philosopher can possibly have knowledge rather than opinion, by knowing the whole concept, outside of and without examples; the concept itself as itself; knowledge inexplicable in words.

Language in the search for understanding

The ideal and the physical

But Plato's only means of conveying philosophy was through language. He may dismiss it as not ideal, but he nevertheless must use it: "*τὰ γὰρ ἀσώματα, κάλλιστα ὄντα καὶ μέγιστα, λόγῳ μόνον ἄλλῳ δὲ οὐδενὶ σαφῶς δείκνυται*" ("for the things that are without body, which are finest and greatest, are shown clearly only by verbal means and by nothing else") (Statesman 286a5-7). The Cratylus has shown us that names cannot be the goal of philosophical inquiry, an idea confirmed by at Statesman 261e5-7: "*κἂν διαφυλάξῃς τὸ μὴ σπουδάζειν ἐπὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, πλουσιώτερος εἰς τὸ γῆρας ἀναφανήσῃ φρονήσεως*" ("and if you persevere in not paying serious attention to names, you will be seen to be richer in wisdom as you advance to old age"). The Phaedrus has confirmed that words and concepts are very different things, and that language cannot express truth completely, a principle which leads the Eleatic Stranger of the Statesman, when trying to explain that an action can be called both courageous and excessive, to ponder at 306d9-10 "*ἆρ' οὖν δυνατὸς αὐτὸ ἂν γενοίμην, ὥσπερ καὶ διανοοῦμαι, διὰ λόγων ἐνδείξασθαί σοι;*" ("then would I be able, I wonder, to show it to you in words just as I have it before my mind?"), because such a task it not as easy as the young Socrates imagines. It is not merely a question of finding the right words: the right words may just not be able to exist, so one must find the best possible instead. However, whatever words one uses to express an idea, one must remember that the words

are always secondary to concepts. A passive audience to language does not get at any truth and is not useful to philosophy; an examination of the concept reveals whether it is true or not, because "τὸ γα'ρ ἀληθὲς οὐδέποτε ἐλέγχεται" ("for you cannot refute the truth") (Gorgias 473b10-11). One might be able to refute the words of an argument, but if that argument is bedded in truth, then no amount of rhetorical or sophistic trickery can show the world to be other than how it is. This means that we must search for concepts, because any proper use of words involves having some understanding of the concepts for which they stand. For example, in the Statesman at 280a3-6, we are asked "*φῶμεν δὲ καὶ ὑφαντικὴν, ὅσον ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν ἱματίων ἐργασίᾳ μέγιστον ἦν μόριον, μηδὲν διαφέρειν πλὴν ὀνόματι ταύτης τῆς ἱματιουργικῆς, καθάπερ κἀκεῖ τότε τὴν βασιλικὴν τῆς πολιτικῆς;*" ("and shall we say that weaving too, in so far as it represented the largest part in relation to the manufacture of clothes, does not differ at all, except in name, from this art of clothes-making, just as in that other case we said that the art of kingship did not differ from that of statesmanship?"). We, like young Socrates, must agree. The name is just a thing that stands for a concept and represents it in communication if both the speaker and the listener (or author and reader) understand the concept. In the Sophist 267d4-e2, we see that names are needed as labels for category divisions, but what count are those categories, not the labels we give them. However, this can only be done using that problematic tool of language. However, as we have seen, it is by no means a perfect tool. The clash between the ideal and the physical is set up. Statesman 269d5-6 sums up the problem that we, as humans, face: "*τὸ κατὰ ταὐτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχειν ἀεὶ καὶ ταὐτὸν εἶναι τοῖς πάντων θειοτάτοις προσήκει μόνοις*" ("remaining permanently in the same state and condition and being permanently the same

belongs only to the most divine things of all"). We are tying to understand these most divine things, but the world around us is in a constant state of change. We are incapable of capturing these eternals in language, as is shown in the Statesman when the talk is of laws.

At 294a6-c8, it is agreed that "*νόμος οὐκ ἄν ποτε δύναιτο τό τε ἄριστον καὶ τὸ δικαιότατον ἀκριβῶς πᾶσιν ἅμα περιλαβὼν τὸ βέλτιστον ἐπιτάττειν*" ("law could never accurately embrace what is best and most just for all at the same time, and so prescribe what is best") (284a10-b2). This is because human affairs are never simple; they are always changing and throwing up new scenarios. Any written law, however, is simple because it cannot extend to cover every eventuality. It also has to be permanent and unquestionable: there must be a Rule of Law, or the laws are useless. This means that situations will arise with which the law cannot cope[34]. It is far from ideal, but the Stranger must ask "*διὰ τί δὴ ποτ' οὖν ἀναγκαῖον νομοθετεῖν, ἐπειδήπερ οὐκ ὀρθότατον ὁ νόμος;*" ("why then is it ever necessary to make laws, given that law is not something completely correct?") (294c10-d1). For his answer, he must compare an ideal state with a physical, human one. The method used for this is to form an analogy between a ship and the state. The problems of laws are explained from 294d3-296e4, where their rigidity is shown. They are in one sense necessary because no ruler can look over the shoulder of each member of his state before every action and so there must be a set of rules, written or passed down in custom, which people must obey. But if the leader wishes to change these laws, even if he wants to improve them and make them more just,

[34] Such as, perhaps, Socrates'.

he must force his changes onto the ruled. The laws almost become more important than justice, because according to the mechanisms of state, it is the laws that have to have priority in order for them to be worth anything at all. In the ship analogy of 296e4-297b4, we see that the steersman of the ship does not have a set of written laws which he consults before making a decision, but he controls the boat according to his knowledge as a steersman. His expertise is in charge. At 297e7-300a2, we are shown how a compete adherence to laws in areas such as medicine or navigation prevents any kind of creativity: if laws are written down which these skills must always work within, then anyone finding out anything new about how to judge the weather or how to heal a patient would not be allowed to use their new skill because it would be outside the defined definition of what it is that a doctor or steersman may do. The people who carried out jobs under such conditions would need to do no more than follow the rules: they would need no expert knowledge in their field, indeed any such knowledge that was not accounted for within the rules of that field would not be allowed. Clearly, in these situations, a Rule of Law would stifle any progress and discourage an expertise in a subject. But still, the Stranger points out at 300a3-c3 that it is better to have a Rule of Law within a state than to have the laws changed by people who have no expert knowledge in ruling, since the laws would have been created from experience but changed for personal profit. This would lead to chaos within any state. The option of having written laws is "*δεύτερος*" ("second best") (300c1). These written laws are, in some sense, imitations of true statesmanship (300c4-6). There are degrees of how good these imitations can be, but they can never be perfect: no written law can completely imitate the knowledge of the perfect statesman (300e1-10). No state, therefore, can be perfect: the best that is humanly possible is to

have the Rule of Law with laws that imitate, as far as possible, "*τὴν ἀληθινὴν ἐκείνην τὴν τοῦ ἑνὸς μετὰ τέχνης ἄρχοντος πολιτείαν*" ("that true constitution of one man ruling with expertise") (300e12-301a1). We will never have a full understanding of the permanent 'justice' or 'statesmanship', and so we will never be able to have an ideal state. We must create the best definition of how a perfect state might run and set this out in laws, and treat that definition as permanent. But we must remember that those laws are not a complete definition of the perfect state but imitations of an ideal, and so they must be left open to improvement, whilst ensuring that any changes to them are for the best interests of the state. Indeed, at 303b4-6, the Stranger compares the perfect state to divinity, whereas the other six forms of government (aristocracy, oligarchy, tyranny, monarchy, lawful democracy and lawless democracy) are all human forms of running a state. The perfect state of the single knowledgeable statesman is an ideal that should always be aimed at but can never be achieved. The human statesman must compromise with the problems of living in the physical. The comparison with names is made by Lane[35]: "if names must be understood as tools rather than as evidence, laws too must be understood as tools rather than as the dead and unalterable hand – the mortmain – of the past." The perfect statesman gets his authority from his knowledge of the ideal, but we have to use laws to represent as best we can our attempts at that knowledge: pure ideas cannot exist in language, but we must try to represent them as best we can in words.

This difference between the ideal and the physical is continued when the Stranger talks about the statesman's need for rhetoric, generalship and judging. At 303e7-305c7 we see that these arts are not the art of statesmanship. They are "*τίμια καὶ συγγενῆ*" ("precious

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[35] Lane, Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman, CUP, 1998, pg 155.

and related") to statesmanship, but subordinate to it ("ὑπηρετοῦν" (304e1) about rhetoric, "ὑπηρετικήν" (305b8) about generalship, and "ὑπηρέτιν" (305c7) about judging). They are not a part of the ideal statesman's art. They are similar to that art, and must go along with it in the human, physical version. Like laws, they are necessary for the running of a state.

The idea of the necessity of rhetoric is also expressed in the Gorgias. At 502c5-7, Socrates says "*φέρε δή, εἴ τις περιέλοι τῆς ποιήσεως πάσης τό τε μέλος καὶ ῥυθμὸν καὶ τὸ μέτρον, ἄλλο τι ἢ λόγοι γίγνονται τὸ λειπόμενον;*" ("well now, suppose that we strip all poetry of melody and rhythm and metre, there will remain speech?"). The thing that is left when all the dressing has been taken off, the thing that the decoration is there to convey is *λόγος*. In an ideal world, one would only need the pure *λόγος* because it should be self-evidently true and need nothing extra in order for it to be conveyed or win an argument. But we do not live in an ideal world. Indeed, Socrates himself has to use rhetoric. So when, for example, he claims that he is searching for the truth rather than the victory in the argument, with a clear implication that rhetoricians use rhetorical tricks in order not to loose arguments rather than sort out the question at hand, he says: "*τῶν ἡδέως μὲν ἂν ἐλεγχθέντων εἴ τι μὴ ἀληθὲς λέγω, ἡδέως δ' ἂν ἐλεγξάντων εἴ τίς τι μὴ ἀληθὲς λέγοι, οὐκ ἀηδέστερον μεντἂν ἐλεγχθέντων ἢ ἐλεγξάντων*" ("I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted if I say anything which is not true, and very willing to refute anyone else who may say what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute") (Gorgias 458a3-5). Socrates is undoubtedly being rhetorical with his repetition of *ἡδέως* and *ἐλέγχω*. Even in separating himself from the ways of

rhetoricians, he is necessarily rhetorical himself. If one wants to convey a truth, one has to do so in language. If one wants people to listen to that language, it has to be well constructed. One has to employ rhetoric: "*ἡ ῥητορικὴ ἄρα, ὡς ἔοικεν, πειθοῦς δημιουργός ἐστιν πιστευτικῆς ἀλλ' οὐ διδασκαλικῆς περὶ τὸ δικαιόν τε καὶ ἄδικον*" ("then rhetoric, as would appear, is the artificer of a persuasion which creates belief about the just and the unjust, but gives no instruction about them") (454e9-455a2). People cannot be persuaded of the truth unless the language in which it is presented is well put together, whether that is as clear an exposition of the truth to be conveyed as is possible, or a device like a paradox to force the audience to consider the point for themselves. Rhetoric is not necessarily a bad thing. 480b7-481b5 shows us that rhetoric can be used for good: it can be used during accusations of injustice, if those injustices really did take place, which will lead to punishment and then happiness for the accused (480b7-d7); or it can be used to protect an unjust enemy from punishment, which will lead them into a miserable life (480e5-481b5). Rhetoric, of course, can also be exploited for the bad, and this is how it is generally portrayed in Plato. At 479b3-c6, for example, amongst the things that the unjust men do to try and save themselves from a potentially immediately painful catharsis is to cultivate "how to speak persuasively" ("*ὡς πιθανώτατοι λέγειν*") (c3-4). The others are to surround himself with money and friends. The power of rhetoric is again acknowledged, but it is here seen almost as a natural evil, because rhetoric has no necessary relationship to the truth, indeed it is often employed to deny the truth and propound a lie. The case of the past Athenian rhetoricians such as Pericles, as taken up by Socrates at 515c4-517a6, demonstrates the point about the uses of rhetoric. The great names of Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades and Themistocles were all, after years of controlling

the people of Athens, punished by them; "*εἰ οὗτοι ῥήτορες ἦσαν, οὔτε τῇ ἀληθινῇ ῥητορικῇ ἐχρῶντο - οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἐξέπεσον - οὔτε τῇ κολακικῇ*" ("and therefore, if they were rhetoricians, they used neither the true art of rhetoric (or they would not have fallen out of favour) nor the flattering form of it") (517a4-6). The real rhetoricians could not fool the audience forever; we have to ask what the ideal rhetorician would do. He probably would not even exist, because truth, ideally, is its own persuasion and should need no dressing up. But a pure *λόγος* is impossible to communicate in the physical world; in expressing it in language, one must use the best words in the best combination possible, in order to ensure that those who do not understand 'what-is-best' should be persuaded to do what is best. Such rhetoric is not ideal because the truth should be enough, but someone who conveys truth using the power of rhetoric will be more successful in spreading it than someone who tries not to. In using language, we are forced to use rhetoric to some degree. As long as that rhetoric is the tool of an attempt to communicate the truth to the best of human ability, it cannot be a bad thing.

But humans may never have the capacity to get at the ideal directly. For example, in the Philebus, the talk at 51a2-52b9 is of the possibility of pure pleasure, that is pleasure which is not proceeded by, mixed with, or resulting from pain, coming from pure things, such as a perfect circle or a single musical note. A hierarchy emerges in which the purer something is, the better that thing is and more pleasure can derived from its study, so that purity is best. But at 53a2-b7, Socrates talks about pure whiteness, saying that a small amount of pure white is far better than any amount of impure white. The reader must ask at this point whether pure whiteness is a physical possibility: does it not exist in its purest

form as an idea, an ideal concept? In the creation myth of the Timaeus, McCabe tells us[36] that it can be read so that the world "is the product of a benevolent heavenly craftsman who reconciled the good sense of reason with the pig-headed workings of necessity and produced the world as we see it to be." In other words, our world is structured as, and therefore embedded in, the compromise between the ideal and the physical, the necessary. The white that we can physically see is never pure whiteness, because just in being an example of whiteness, it becomes physical and no longer pure. But the greatest pleasure is the pure pleasure which comes from the pure understanding of the purest things. However, the necessity of the physical world means that nothing is pure: a physical statesman must incorporate the skills of rhetoric, generalship and judging where the ideal concept of statesman as statesman does not include these skills; any knowledge or idea is no longer pure just by the act of its expression in language. But we must strive on in discussing these ideas, as this is the only way that we can improve our lives. And so we get Plato's dialogues: they do not claim to impart any truth directly or to leave the reader feeling that they understand fully the subject being discussed, but they form a part of the process of understanding. They demonstrate "*ἐν θρήνοις τε καὶ ἐν τραγῳδίαις και κωμῳδίαις, μὴ τοῖς δράμασι μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ τοῦ βίου συμπάσῃ τραγῳδίᾳ καὶ κωμῳδίᾳ, λύπας ἡδοναῖς ἅμα κεράννυσθαι, καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις δὴ μυρίοις*" ("that in dirges, tragedies and comedies, not only on the stage, but the whole tragi-comedy of life, distress and pleasure are blended with each other"[37]) (Philebus 50b1-4). Plato's dramas reflect the frustrations and joys of the philosophical life. We can not escape the physical and live in the ideal, but nevertheless, this is what we should aim at. We must try to live

[36] McCabe, "Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato", Apeiron, Vol. XXV, No. 4, pg 60
[37] Translation J.C.B. Gosling, Oxford 1975

as best we can in the pure, even though the physical world is impure. We must try to understand the ideal.

This point is demonstrated in the Republic. Tecusan[38] says about 472cff that "Socrates starts to explain that the whole inquiry we witnessed was a quest for exemplary items on which to 'fix our eyes', but 'our purpose was not to demonstrate the possibility of realizing such ideals'." It is after this that Socrates introduces the idea of the philosopher rulers. After some discussion, Adeimantus interrupts and says that what Socrates is saying about the beneficial effects of philosophy are only "*λόγῳ*" ("in words") (487c5), and that in fact philosophers are "*ἀχρήστους ταῖς πόλεσι γιγνομένους*" ("made useless to states" [my translation]) by their very profession. Socrates rather surprisingly agrees (487d10). But his agreement can only be explained "*δι' εἰκόνος*" (through giving a parable") (487e4-5). The argument will not consist of a bare, point by point run through of what Socrates means; rather it will demonstrate what he means. A truth will be seen in this *εἰκων* in a much clearer light than if Socrates tried to make it emerge from a pure *ad hominem* argument. However, the *εἰκων* itself is, of course, a part of an ad Adeimanton argument, through which Plato hopes more truths will emerge for the real target of Socrates' words, the reader.

487e4-488a7 acts as a justification of what is to follow. The State treats philosophers so badly that "*οὐδὲν ἄλλο τοιοῦτον πεπονθός, ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἐκ πολλῶν αὐτὸ συναγαγεῖν εἰκάζοντα καὶ ἀπολογούμενον ὑπερ αὐτῶν*" ("no single thing on earth is comparable

[38] Tecusan, "Speaking about the Unspeakable: Plato's Use of Imagery", Apeiron, Vol. XXV, No. 4, pg 73.

to it; and therefore, if I am to plead their cause, I must have recourse to fiction, and put together a figure made up of many things"). The situation as it stands, the immediate and present one in which Socrates and Adeimantus are, is not to be understood by itself. Plato is not going to explain systematically and exactly with real examples why philosophers are *ἀχρήστοι* in the current state. That would not serve any purpose; rather we are going to be shown in an example the ideal that we should be aiming for in comparison to the way that we actually are.

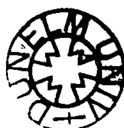
The wider context, of course, is the *mythologising* about an ideal state ruled by philosopher kings. Adeimantus, however, brings the discussion back into the 'real', physical, human world at 487c4-d5 by saying that whilst Socrates may dominate the discussion of the imaginary details and abstracts, the other in the discussion know that what occurs in words is different to what occurs in our lives: "*ἐπεὶ τό γε ἀληθὲς οὐδέν τι μᾶλλον ταύτῃ ἔχειν*" ("yet they are sure the truth is not on your side") (487c3-4). Adeimantus is pointing out that the world they all see around them is opposite to the ideal state that Socrates is creating in words. Socrates deals with this by once again moving the discussion from the factual and into the imaginary.

The state as a ship analogy is useful here because it creates a small scale version of a state that allows the discussion to view the state as a whole and, implicitly, the state as a moving thing, always aiming to get somewhere. The simplification of Athenian democracy into the virtual mob rule of the imaginary ship is difficult to argue with, and the solidification of the concept of the state as a ship forces the focus onto the good of the

whole rather than any personal ambition: there can be no individual gain at the expense of the whole, because that would lead to a destruction of the state-ship and death to the individual who tried to profit. In this scenario, clearly the man who would be best as the captain of the ship is not he who shouts loudest or drums up the most support, through whatever means, but he who understands best all those things that lie behind running a ship. There is a mental, imaginably visible structure for what is fairly abstract in reality: the state as a whole, rather than merely the individuals in it; the thing that links the individuals together, which they control and which in turn supports them. Socrates could never talk about the actual state in which they lived to try to prove his point: they are all too involved. He is not interested in the tediosities of current politics. They are striving towards an understanding of justice in the abstract, with an imaginary, mentally constructed state as an example. Adeimantus does not seem to understand this difference between the ideal to be aimed at and the physical in which we live. He tries to drag the discussion back into human politics, and Socrates, through describing philosophers as *ἀχρήστοι*, shows how the ideal can defeat the physical in argument, and therefore the inadequacies of the real.

Socrates' defence of philosophy is not to try and point out all the things that philosophers have contributed to society; that would be the approach of a politician, or perhaps of Adeimantus. Instead Socrates demonstrates that, while in his Athens philosophers are *ἀχρήστοι*, they should be the most useful and powerful people. Socrates takes Adeimantus' objection and demonstrates on a small scale both the difference between the ideal and the way things are in our world, firmly placing his flag in the ideal, and the

products of his journey into *μυθολόγους*: if the philosopher is he who understands the abstracts behind any example, then he should rule. In everyday reality, they are *ἀχρήστοι*, because a misguided political system allows them no control, but they have the potential to be the most useful people in any state. However, not only does the state have to be moulded so that philosophers can ensure the good of the whole, but also there has to be someone who is a true philosopher so that he can rule. He must completely understand all those concepts necessary for ruling and then he can see what abstracts the things that happen in the physical world are examples of: whether something is just or not, for example. But this man is only an ideal; this sort of knowledge is a target, probably not attainable by any human. By using the ship example, Socrates can use a skill, navigation, which is knowable in place of statesmanship, which is probably not understandable, and is certainly not practical in its purest form – the form Socrates is trying to prove to be most useful in this argument. In our world, the philosopher is "*μετεωροσκόπον τε καὶ ἀδολέσχην και ἄχρηστον*" ("an idle chatterer, a star-gazer, a good-for-nothing") (488e4-489a1); in the ideal he is the best possible ruler. This is the fault of the system, but we must also ask whether someone can exist who has perfect knowledge, someone who is the perfect philosopher for the perfect system, someone who understands without examples. This is our aim, but progress towards this ideal must be carried out through the physical that we see around us.



Rowe[39] says that in *λόγοι*, Socrates can see "things with at least some degree of success", whereas the visible world attracts us to glare at us so that we see nothing at all. The Timaeus says at 49a3-4 "*νῦν δὲ ὁ λόγος ἔοικεν εἰσαναγκάζειν χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρὸν εἶδος ἐπιχειρεῖν λόγοις ἐμφανίσαι*" ("but now the argument seems to require that we should set forth in words another kind, which is difficult of explanation and dimly seen"). The context is far from an argument in the conventional English sense, rather it is Timaeus telling a story about creation "*τοῦ μάλιστα εἰκότος ἀντεχομένοις*" ("holding fast to probability") (44c7-d1). There is this self-governing sense of *λόγος*, so that it demands the next stage. Even when its meaning is closer to 'stage-in-a-tale' than 'argument', we see that one part leads to another; one story naturally demands another and so on until such a time as a rounded understanding is reached. Such an understanding is unlikely to come from just a literal explanation: our physical world is too far from the ideal to achieve any sort of understanding approaching perfection from it. The *λόγος* that is required at the next stage of this argument is both a 'literal' explanation within the context of the creation story, and a simile of that explanation in order to clarify it: 49b6-50a5 gives the 'literal' explanation of the idea of One Matter, then 50a5-b5 gives the clarifying gold analogy so that the reader has an easy and familiar simile to help him deal with what Timaeus is talking about. Both explanations of the One Matter are referred to as "*ὁ αὐτὸς δὴ λόγος*" ("the same argument") at 50b5. There is no difference between them in terms of their use to our understanding of the One Matter; they both form as

[39] Rowe, "Reflections of the Sun: Explanation in the Phaedo", Apeiron, Volume XXV, No 4, pg 89-101.

much a part of the attempt at understanding as each other. The simile is as important as the 'literal' in "*δόξαν τε ὀρθὴν καὶ ἀληθεῖς λογισμούς*" ("correct opinion and true reasoning") (Philebus 11b8), which are the best things, along with intelligence, thought and memory.

However the question of how we study is inseparable from the question of what we study. The study of "*τὰ περὶ τὸν κόσμον*" ("the things of this world") (Philebus 59a3) is concerned with "*τὰ γιγνόμενα καὶ γενησόμενα καὶ γεγονότα*" ("things which are becoming, or which will or have become") (59a7-8) rather than "*τὰ ὄντα ἀεί*" ("eternal being"). This means that such study has no access to "*τὸ ἀληθέστατον*" ("the highest truths") (59b8) because it deals in and with unstable things[40]. However the pure stabilities, such as whiteness, reveal truths if understood and are where knowledge is to be found. But we cannot study these directly. The only way we can try and find out what the label 'justice' is a label of, is by looking at examples of justice. Our language does not allow us to portray a pure abstract purely: we cannot describe the indescribable. Instead, we have to take the second best option. Ideally, we would study the abstracts themselves, but in our physical world we can only access these through those things that are "*μάλιστά... συγγενές*" ("most akin") to them. It is these, presumably, that Plato is trying, in whatever way he chooses, to create: dialogues with characters saying things that are related to abstracts; things that are akin to truth. The explanation that holds fast to probability may be as close as we can hope to get to truth.

In the Sophist 221d8-e3, we are told that the sophist is συγγενής (akin) to the angler because both are hunters. The interlocutors are trying to discover what a sophist is. They have just attempted a definition of 'angler' by continually dividing categories which they believe he belongs to, so that he is a hunter on the water who catches fish on a hook. That was a 'practice run': one suspects that they already knew precisely what was meant by the term 'angler', but they were practising their methodology. That method of category division will serve as a way of approaching much harder subjects, and so they start by asking what a sophist is.

Immediately the comparison is made between the sophist and they angler. The method template will be used, but also the example used in that template. There is a clever economy: the method of division has shown what an angler is so that there is no confusion, and in using the simple example of 'angler', the method has shown itself to be useful. Both the sophist and the angler are agreed to take part in 'what it is to be a hunter'. But this is clearly not meant literally: the sophist is surely only a metaphorical hunter. However, the alignment of the two reveals the importance of 'kinship' to Plato in his method of explanation and understanding. The sophist searches out souls and ensnares them, but he is not what is normally understood as a hunter: if one said "picture a hunter" to somebody, they would not imagine a sophist. But similarly, neither would they imagine a fisherman. The term is taken and stretched. 'Angler' is a clear sub-section of 'hunter', that section that hunts fish. 'Hunter' itself becomes not a noun describing a specific person – say, a man with a spear – but the heading of a whole category: anyone

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[40] Which, as we have seen also in the Cratylus, is an answer, as far as Socrates is concerned, to the debate with Heracleiteans because if nothing if the same, then nothing can be known at all.

in the process of trying to find something to take for themselves, be it an archer, an angler, a gold-digger or a sophist. They are all separate and distinct individuals, and each activity is completely different in one sense, yet they all share in hunting: each one is trying to achieve a similar thing in that each one wants to capture something for themselves. The methods and goals for each are completely different, a rod and line for fish, a shovel and map for gold and linguistic craftiness for the soul, yet the non-specific motives and thinking for each are the same. Remove the physical examples and look at the example-less 'psychology', the pure and general abstract ideas untainted by physical things, and it is the same: it concerns a sort of search, a sort of conflict, and an expected gain. Each hunter expresses this desire in a different way, but each is still engaged in the same abstract activity. In an attempt to understand 'sophist', the rather metaphorical sense of hunter is useful: it allows us to see similarities and common themes. We can get towards an understanding of 'sophist' by looking at what it is similar to; what has the same general themes.

This idea of studying one thing by looking at another is developed in the Statesman. At 277d1-2, we are told "*χαλεπόν, ὦ δαιμόνιε, μὴ παραδείγμασι χρώμενον ἱκανῶς ἐνδείκνυσθαί τι τῶν μειζόνων*" ("it's a hard thing, my fine friend, to demonstrate any of the greater subjects without using models"). But then the Stranger tries to explain this comment. However, in a neat twist, he claims that he can only explain the idea that humans need examples of a subject to understand it, by using an example how examples help towards understanding: "*παραδείγματος, ὦ μακάριε, αὖ μοι καὶ τὸ παράδειγμα*

αὐτὸ δεδέηκεν" ("it has turned out, my dear fellow, that the idea of a 'model' itself in its turn also has need of a model to demonstrate it") (277d8-9). However, Plato does not make the claim about the power of παραδείγμα that Lane wants him to. Lane claims[41] that παραδείγματα are the path from true belief to true knowledge. But the Stranger says at 278c6 that the combination of example with whatever it is that it is an example of form "μίαν ἀληθῆ δόξαν" ("a single true judgement"). Lane's claim is appealing, but it seems that the possibility of true knowledge is not available to us. It may well be only theoretical. True knowledge involves knowing the thing by itself in the abstract. This approach to the subject through its kin, through those things which are like it, necessarily involves the subject's understanding through examples so that an abstract, it seems, can only be understood via examples of it. Our physical world is one of examples, and any attempt to progress into the perfect world of abstracts from our physical world must be done through those examples we have around us. Language does not allow justice to be defined in the abstract, indeed any definition is necessarily not the original but a conversion of it into another, physical form. Plato's attempt at getting towards an understanding of justice in the abstract in the Republic gives an example of a theoretical state that is an example of a just thing. All we have to help us get towards an understanding of an abstract are its examples that we can see or create around us. Statesman 278a8-c1 explains that we can get towards understanding through seeing affinity and diversity; how things fit together; how general principles run through things that are, in a literal sense, different to each other; how, by placing things together

[41] Lane, Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman, CUP, 1998, pg 63-64.

(collection) their likenesses and diversities become clear (division) which makes them examples that can lead to this "μίαν ἀληθῆ δόξαν".

It is the consistency within apparent diversity, seeing how certain things are like each other, which is important when dealing with examples. As Lane says[42]: "example reveals what is common, a matter of self-same identity, and what is different and so achieves a clarification of each entity being compared." Things must be understood in a context of what they are like and what they are different to: approaching a thing through a combination of its affinities and diversities leads towards a rounded understanding. One may never know all the things which are examples of an abstract, but the more one does, then the better one's understanding of that abstract will be.

Weaving is treated and discussed as a λόγος, rather than a mere picture, for two reasons. First, they have to practice on the easy things so that they can give λόγοι of "τι τῶν μειζόνων" ("any of the greater subjects") (277d2) which cannot be pictured (285d9-286b2)[43]. But second, and more important surely, is that there is an affinity between weaving and statecraft which is to be explored and may reveal something about statecraft if it can be found. This comparison can only be carried out in λόγος because a picture of a weaver bears no resemblance to a king, but their tasks are similar. We can extract a λόγος from the image of weaving which we can apply to the imageless statecraft, and further our understanding of statecraft by seeing it from another angle, seeing how it connects and is similar to something more understandable than itself. We further our

[42] Lane, Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman, CUP, 1998, pg 69.
[43] Lane, Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman, CUP, 1998, pg 73-5.

understanding of statecraft by approaching it through weaving: some *λόγοι* we understand in weaving become apparent in statecraft, but they are easier to get to in weaving because our image of it is clearer in that there is a (fairly?) universally accepted one.

McCabe[44] is useful here, on the way that understanding works through connecting similarites: "in the Republic the philosopher understands the symbiosis of the forms, analogous to the natural connection of the phenomenal world (hence the allegory of the Sun, 506ff). In the Theaetetus (184ff) reason contrasts opposites, compares similarites and thus comes up with the common terms such as sameness and difference. In the Phaedrus and later, the best way to do philosophy is to find systems and structures – 'collection and division'."[45] I agree that "the first condition that Plato offers for understanding... is *connectedness*, the interrelation of one Form (or one idea or whatever) to another."[46] Understanding only occurs within a context. . Tecusan[47] agrees and adds to the idea of the necessity of a context for the thing to be understood so that the process of understanding can begin: "paradeigmata are indispensable (277d1-2) because the mind cannot recognise familiar or known items when they are present in unfamiliar or unknown compounds (278c-d)."[48] The mind works through association, connection and relationship: tallness and shortness have to be understood as being linked and only then will they be properly understood as themselves; but before that, one must consider the

[44] McCabe "Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato", Apeiron XXV, No 4, December 1992, pg 47-68.
[45] McCabe (see footnote 43) pg 53.
[46] McCabe (see footnote 43) pg 53; her italics.
[47] Tecusan "Speaking about the Unspeakable: Plato's Use of Imagery", Apeiron XXV, No 4, December 1992, pg 69-88.
[48] Tecusan (see footnote 46) pg 72.

variety of things that partake of each. Beauty is understood through its similarities to good, its opposition to evil and its relationship with ἔρως: but more than this, it is only really, fully understood when its place in the intelligent world is understood; when all its relationships to anything are understood. McCabe calls this "exhaustive"[49] knowledge of all connections. It is an ideal to be aimed at: a pure target that is theoretically reached using the physical that surrounds us and holds us back to propel us towards exampleless understanding.

It is not surprising that the process of understanding works in this way. The *παράδειγμα* is to be looked at so that its similarities with the thing it is a model of can be examined within the framework of the paradigm, in order to explore the indescribable in an indirect, but describable, way. Imitation is important: we must recognise similarities. The inter-connectedness of things, the underlying principles running through apparently completely different things may reveal, or may be used to reveal, some sort of truth. This method is, of course, entirely in keeping with nature: our physical world 'resembles' another world which it 'represents' through a series of 'likenesses', or, perhaps, it 'partakes' physically in things which are entirely abstract. It is natural, then, that our investigations should proceed by connecting various affinities and understanding the things in the world, sensible and mental, in their inter-connected relationships and similarities (collection) and their utter diversities (division). Things must be approached from within a context, then understood as themselves by themselves. We cannot understand what is completely foreign: we start the understanding procedure by contextualising and familiarising something – seeing what it is like that we already know and how – and only then can we move on to any abstract knowledge. But such complete knowledge seems beyond us.

[49] McCabe "Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato", Apeiron XXV, No 4, December 1992, pg 53.

The child, in the example of 277e2-278e3, may know how to read, but it does not then understand the more abstract ideas involved with language. At 306a8-308b9, those things that are grouped together and called 'virtue' are, in some cases, opposite and hostile things. They are virtuous when for the good, and not when for the bad: virtue is what runs through courage and carefulness to make them good. We can look back at history and decide whether actions were courageous or rash, careful or cowardly, and so use these examples to progress towards some kind of understanding of what virtue is. But these are much more slippery terms than those of reading and writing with which paradigms are introduced. In Plato's example of how one learns to read and write, one is taught by someone who knows the alphabet, a clearly defined thing. But for the more slippery terms that Plato is really interested in, presumably one must already have some inkling as to what to use as a paradigm so that one can then rely on trial and error through cross referencing this paradigm in different contexts to find out how useful it is[50]. It is true that "in helping us to 'recognise' [different things partaking of different 'forms' in potentially apparently different ways] they [paradigms] create a bridge between trivial and important matters."[51] But how do we choose what paradigm to use?

The chooser is required to project into the future and imagine one thing as similar and comparable to another which is not yet known and for which the whole process is working towards a definition. One wants to define 'x', so one wants to examine

[50]This is of course Socrates' method of examination: ask for a definition of 'x'; receive a definition 'a'; give an example of 'a' in a context that refutes 'a' as a definition – a different context to the one the giver of 'a' thought about or expected.
[51] Tecusan pg 73.

something like it. One settles on 'y'. But in order to settle on something connected to 'x', one must at least have an inkling that there is a similarity between 'x' and 'y'. In some sense, one must know something about both 'x' and 'y', or one would try to compare things that shared no common principle. For the paradigmatic method to work, one of the interlocutors must have something like a true opinion as to what paradigm to use, or they must reject a paradigm that is revealed as unsatisfactory. There is a degree of something like knowledge of both the object of the inquiry and the paradigm used for that inquiry needed for the method to be profitable. This is not unreasonable: anyone engaged in a philosophical debate about it would already have come across 'statesmanship' and 'statesman' in their human examples and would have an idea of what they do and what they should do. It is impossible to enter and continue a philosophical debate on a subject about which one has no prejudices (used in a Gadamerian sense to mean ideas in advance). It is the confirmation, re-working or re-founding of those prejudices which is the final aim. They are the necessary starting point of any discussion, and their use as tools of the discussion seems perfectly acceptable, perhaps even necessary, as long as the interlocutors are conscious of what they are doing and remain vigilant to ensure paradeigms are a tool not a misdirecting master. We need such methodological self-awareness as we find in the Statesman.

This idea of an almost fore-understanding is given its own metaphor by Plato to help us understand it at Statesman 277d2-3: "*κινδυνεύει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἕκαστος οἷον ὄναρ εἰδὼς ἅπαντα πάντ᾽ αὖ πάλιν ὥσπερ ὕπαρ ἀγνοεῖν*" ("it looks as if each of us knows everything in a kind of dreamlike way, and then again is ignorant of everything as it were

when awake"). We all have a knowledge of statesmanship, but it is a knowledge that is like a dream: we are aware of it, but the more we try to pin it down, the harder it becomes until we realise that we cannot. The dream slips away as we try to explain it when we are awake. The use of paradigms, we are told at 278e4-11, will help make the knowledge of the dreaming world into the knowledge of the waking world: it will solidify the pure thought with physical, recognisable and easy to handle examples of what was in the dreaming knowledge. The dream world is to do with general concepts and principles; the waking world is that of physical examples through which the dream world can be grasped and in which the beginning of a proper and full (perhaps conscious?) understanding can root itself. Shinro[52] makes a connection between the dreaming metaphor and Plato's use of myth: "The great Myth seems to give us that kind of true belief about the Statesman, but not exact knowledge. It is only a knowledge as in a dream. This is, I think, exactly the stage where we are now in search of the being of the statesman." This is not unreasonable since myths are connected to dreams in that they are completely a mental creation and occur in a dream world which is different from the physical one around us. But the myth is also a part of the physical world simply because it is created in language: it is, in this sense, a solidifying example of what the dream-like knowledge is like[53]. The example is just as valid if it has been created especially as it would be if it were merely an actual physical thing described. As long as the abstract runs through something and that something is describable, that something is usable as a paradigm. We just have to see the principle in it: it is the truth that counts, not the vessel that carries it.

[52] "The Role of Paradeigmata in the Statesman", Reading the Statesman, ed. C. J. Rowe, 1995
[53] See below for more on myths.

Ideally, poetry and representation would not be necessary for understanding. But in this physical world, where things can only be understood through, from and in opposition to a structure of likenesses within the complex mass of physical examples, the power of poetry and story-telling to provide loose analogies, guidelines, methods of thinking about and ways of approaching truth, is necessarily part of the philosopher's art. As the ideal statesman needs no written laws but works from true knowledge alone and the human example of statesman must work within the strictest legislation, so the ideal philosopher works only in the mental, his philosophical tool wordless because he understands truth untainted by human interpretation or solidification. Clearly not only does he not need poetry, but it would even be harmful in any education aiming towards this state. But in the real, philosophers know that they must use whatever methods they can to try to contextualise whatever it is they are searching for; for only after understanding within a complete context can anything be completely understood without any context. One should use context to collect and divide, and when there is only one thing left, then there is contextless understanding. The path to understanding involves seeing something as relative to ourselves and to everything else, only once this has been done can that something be understood as relative to nothing; understood itself by itself and as itself. A myth allows whatever concept it is that is under investigation to be seen against a purely mentally created context: the myth world is imaginable but physical only in that it is an example in words. It provides another context within which to understand the thing under examination. The myths allow Plato to whatever examples of truth he wishes, his only limitation is the human imagination. He can create a world more ideal than ours, a world more suited to reveal the purity he hopes to find in truth. If the pure concepts he is

searching for are ideal, then the myths allow him to break away, to a large extent, from the limitations and 'sub-clauses' of the real (Socrates' analogy against Adeimantus in Republic IV, the ideal and physical statesman in Statesman, the problems of language in the Cratylus and Phaedrus). Plato wants to remove anything as tedious and interfearing as human nature, so that the subject under investigation can remain pure and untainted by our world of examples. This constant tension between physical and ideal that runs throughout Plato condemns him as an art hater and a lover of the Muses, a historian and a liar, a fascist and a communist and a terrible proponent of self-contradiction. The beast and *τὸ λογιστικὸν* continue to clash, and will do so for as long as we have to use the physical to try to look towards the ideal.

Myth

Lane claims[54] that "the resort to story-telling when analytical resources are apparently exhausted is a standard Platonic manoeuvre. In such cases (as in the Gorgias, the Republic, the Phaedrus) the stories told are genuine 'myths', employed as supernatural models or justifications to bolster a conviction which the analytical argument has sought to establish." But Plato does not "resort" to *μῦθοι*: they are as active a part of the *λόγος* as the dialectic. They are another, equally legitimate, way of displaying "*τὰ... ἀσώματα, κάλλιστα ὄντα καὶ μέγιστα*" ("the things that are without body, which are finest and greatest") (Statesman 286a5-6) which can only be displayed "*λόγῳ*" ("by verbal means")

[54] Lane, Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman, CUP, 1998, pg 115.

(286a6). In the Gorgias, Socrates introduces his myth with "εἰ δὲ βούλει, σοὶ ἐγώ, ὡς τοῦτο οὕτως ἔχει, ἐθέλω λόγον λέξαι" ("and in proof of what I say, if you have no objection, I should like to tell a story") (522e5-6). He is not giving a μῦθος in the following fantastical tale, but a λόγος, a point which he himself makes explicit in the next few lines: "ἄκουε δή, φασι, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἡγήσῃ μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον· ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν" ("listen, then, as the story-tellers say, to a very pretty tale, which I dare say that you may be disposed to regard as only a fantasy, but which, as I believe, is a true tale; what I am going to say, I offer as the truth") (523a1-3). The mention of καλὸς λόγος must make us think of the Symposium, where this is the aim of the ἔρως of the philosopher; in this case, the philosopher's offspring can be regarded as a μῦθος. Here, the story's status as a λόγος seems to come from it containing some sort of truth. The problem is that truth is inexpressible in an absolute or direct description. The fantasy partakes in truth. It is like truth – and since it is in language, that is as good and close as it can get.

We find exactly the same blurring of boundaries in the Timaeus. At 20d7-8, Critias says of his speech that is to follow: "ἄκουε δή, ὦ Σώκρατες, λόγου μάλα μὲν ἀτόπου, παντάπασί γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς" ("Then listen, Socrates, to a tale which, though strange, is certainly true"). What follows is certainly not any direct or literal explanation, but is a recounting of the tale supposedly told to Solon concerning Atlantis. However much it appears to be nothing but a story, it is still described as a "παλαιὸν... λόγον" ("old world story") (21a7). It sets the tone of story-telling and imaginative philosophy which Socrates believes will be "τὴν τῶν λόγων ἑστίασιν" ("a feast of reason") (27b7-8). However,

Timaeus sets out the problems at 29c4-d3: "ἐὰν οὖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, πολλὰ πολλῶν πέρι, θεῶν καὶ τῆς τοῦ παντὸς γενέσεως, μὴ δυνατοὶ γιγνώμεθα πάντῃ πάντως αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοῖς ὁμολογουμένους λόγους καὶ ἀπηκριβωμένους ἀποδοῦναι, μὴ θαυμάσῃς· ἀλλ' ἐὰν ἄρα μηδενὸς ἧττον παρεχώμεθα εἰκότας, ἀγαπᾶν χρή, μεμνημένους ὡς ὁ λέγων ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς τε οἱ κριταὶ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν, ὥστε περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους πρέπει τούτου μηδὲν ἔτι πέρα ζητεῖν." ("if then, Socrates, amid the many opinions about the gods and the generation of the universe, we are not able to give notions which are altogether and in every respect exact and consistent with one another, do not be surprised. Enough, if we adduce probabilities as likely as any others; for we must remember that I who am the speaker, and you who are the judges, are only mortal men, and we ought to accept the tale which is probable and inquire no further.") This μῦθος is a λόγος which contains some affinities to truth, but as mortal men that is the best we can do.

In the Gorgias, the story that is told deliberately confuses the issue with three mentions of Homer. He appears as 'proof' at the start (523a3) concerning Zeus, Poseidon and Pluto dividing the empire. Homer is mentioned again at 525d6-7 in order that Socrates can use him to give examples of bad kings and tyrants who have gone into everlasting punishment after their deaths. Finally, the myth concludes with a quote from Homer Odyssey XI. 569 about Minos giving laws to the dead. This seems to contradict what Socrates has just said about this being a λόγος, because Homer is so central to the tradition of the μῦθος. His stories were seen as almost religious, but they were entertaining religion; they were stories from which amusement and wisdom could be

drawn. In popular culture, there was something like the idea of a μῦθος having elements of a λόγος in the way that Homer was regarded. His importance in the education of an Athenian is clear simply from the number of quotes which Socrates gives in the Platonic corpus. Homer was used as an ethical guideline, so that Socrates here taps into the popular prejudices concerning the value of Homer. His use as a source of 'authenticity' for the story brings some clarity as to how we are to regard it: on a broad level, if Homer is seen to have moral value and is (however misguidedly) used as a λόγος when he works within μῦθος, then so can Plato. One should treat Plato's μῦθοι as one would should Homer's: do not be literal, but find truth in them and discover that they are not throw-away stories, but are as much a part of the overall λόγος as dialectic argument.

Plato is tapping into the tradition that "poetry always had been a medium for communicating ethical teaching, indeed in the oral culture of early Greece it was the chief means by which ideas of any importance could be transmitted."[55] Indeed, Republic 522a3-b1, we see the importance of poetry in the education of the guardians. As Smith puts it: "myths can help introduce a young man to a truth which will later receive dialectical examination."[56] The Laws 887cff tells us that philosophy is easiest with those who have a true opinion from listening to childhood myths. The myths give a dream-knowledge. They are an essential aid to the process of understanding in providing paradigms created especially for the situation, and paradigms which are diverting and interesting in themselves: "[myth] does not masquerade as all-embracing expertise, or feed the childish part of us at the expense of order in the soul, or disable our moral

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[55] Murray, Plato on Poetry, CUP, 1996, pg 18: for more on this idea, see Murray pg 15-22.
[56] Smith, "Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophical Man", Phoenix 40, 1986, pg 23.

thinking, or luxuriate in spurious paradigms of behaviour. It does not challenge philosophy, but is a part of philosophy, which will assist in guiding the whole person towards a love of truth and goodness."[57] For example, I again agree with Janaway that in the Phaedrus "the mythic speech gave the only account of the soul which was humanly possible, in terms of simile (246a4-6)."[58] Myths "assist in guiding the whole person towards a love of truth and goodness" by drawing the reader into their mysterious world. Smith makes the connection with Aristotle's verdict on myths: "Aristotle in the Metaphysics (A 982b16) says that the lover of myth is a lover of wisdom; a lover of myth is one who is filled with a sense of wonder, and this is the first step for the philosopher."[59] In his myths, Plato can point towards the greatest mysteries of human life by introducing the reader to the mysteries of the ideal, and do so by representing this idealistic myth world as a mysterious place. Any mind that is going to have its curiosity aroused would be hooked by these wonderful stories about a perfect places, where the problems of the human world are not relevant. Such fantastical and addictive paradigms of a better world than ours aid philosophy both as an integral part of the overall *λόγος* and as a hook to catch curiosity and keep it caught.

However, both the Sophist (218e2) and the Statesman (279a7-b1) say that a paradigm should be '*σμικρός*' (small) because then it is not too big to be manageable. But the criticism of the *μῦθος* in the Statesman, that they were mistaken in looking for a great example simply because kingship is great (277b3-4), is only in relation to its narrow role

[57] Janaway, Images of Excellence, Oxford, 1995, pg 160.
[58] Janaway, Images of Excellence, Oxford, 1995, pg 167.
[59] Smith, "Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophical Man", Phoenix 40, 1986, pg 34.

as a paradigm. The excessive embellishments of the *μῦθος* have a purpose other than that of a simple paradigm of the sort weaving turns to be. Perhaps its fantastical nature proves a pleasant distraction from the incessant, bare dialectic, but more importantly its mysteries suck both the unsuspecting and the well-prepared into Platonic thought. Perhaps on a purely epistemological level "great examples are thus framed as inappropriate on methodological grounds"[60], but they are a major weapon in Plato's methodology of entrapment: how he entices readers into philosophy and then does not let them leave. No-one understands everything, everybody wants to. Perhaps in an ideal world, there would be no need for *μῦθοι* because humans would not have to use paradigms as a root to knowledge, but in our world, we do. Since those paradigms are necessary, then they can use all the richness of literature. The Statesman's myth got the interlocutors back on track and generally livened up the discussion. It struck a balance: the mean between what we might now call literature and 'philosophy' (where 'philosophy' means pure analytical logical philosophy). Relative to dialectic, there may be too much 'literature' about it, but it does not really stand on its own as a complete story either. However, in saving the discussion, it plays a crucial role.

Smith[61] comments on this enjoyment that seems to flow through the myths: "dialectic, in the narrow sense... can be tedious" but the tone is kept light, even if the subject matter is distinctly heavy, because "myth... is play with a serious purpose." This idea of play is emphasised at times by Plato: the myth of the Statesman is achieved by "*σχεδὸν παιδιὰν ἐγκερασαμένους*" ("mixing in an element of play") (268d8). Later we are told how the

[60] Lane, Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman, CUP, 1998, pg 122.
[61] Smith, "Plato's Use of Myth in the Education of Philosophical Man", Phoenix 40, 1986, pg 25.

ideal statesman would look to find the best combinations of citizens: "παιδιᾷ πρῶτον βασανιεῖ" ("it will first put them to test in play"). The process of understanding cannot just take place within the confines of a dialogue in a classroom: myth becomes the playground of education, where we learn in a different way about the things discussed in class. They attempt to encapsulate, as best as words and language can, the indescribable abstracts so that we can have a picture of their ideal world. The myths help us approach that world from different angle, one which involves imagination and inspires a child-like curiosity and should never be taken too seriously, but is also very important in the process of understanding.

The myths are not easily categorised within the framework of modern philosophy. They occupy a similar ground to the didactic novel: they are, as McCabe[62] puts it, neither "straightforwardly true" nor "directly false" but "their oddity may help the explanation along, rather than getting in its way." But this is not at all surprising. The things that the dialogues and the myths are aimed at are definitely, in Plato's world, odd: they are invisible, indescribable, perhaps unknowable in a complete sense, but they are the truths on which everything in human life is based. Just because a myth is not literally or completely true does not mean that it is therefore a lie. One need look no further than our world, as Plato saw it, for that: what is around us is not absolutely true, it only partakes in truth. But it is not a lie either because it is definitely there. It is an approximation of truth; it is like truth; it shares truth's characteristics; it is neither truth nor lie. This oddity of semi-truth, as McCabe[63] points out, is very similar to the veracity present in myth: it does

[62] McCabe "Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato", Apeiron XXV, No 4, December 1992, pg 47.
[63] McCabe "Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato", Apeiron XXV, No 4, December 1992, pg 47.

not claim to be truth, in fact usually there are warnings that it is not, and yet there is an inherent claim in it finding its way into the dialogue that it has something to do with truth. Its ambiguity, in a way, helps us understand a little better our relationship both to the world around us and to the other true world of abstracts.

The Timaeus helps to identify the place of myth[64] when Timaeus sets out the different kinds of being at 27d6-28a4: "*τί τὸ ὂν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὂν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεὶ κατὰ ταὐτὰ ὄν, τὸ δ' αὖ δόξῃ μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν.*" ("what is that which always is and has no becoming; and what is that which is always becoming and never is? That which is apprehended by intelligence and reason is always in the same state; but that which is conceived by opinion with the help of sensation and without reason, is always in a process of becoming and perishing and never really is.") Myth never really is, and yet it is about what always is. Take, for example, Adeimantus and the story of the ship in Republic 487b1ff: such a ship never really was, but it demonstrated perfectly the ideal state. Timaeus 68e6-69a5, itself within a kind of myth whose detail is playful but whose principles are true, sets out the two guiding forces at work in the universe: "*διὸ δὴ χρὴ δύ' αἰτίας εἴδη διορίζεσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀναγκαῖον, τὸ δὲ θεῖον, καὶ τὸ μὲν θεῖον ἐν ἅπασιν ζητεῖν κτήσεως ἕνεκα εὐδαίμονος βίου, καθ' ὅσον ἡμῶν ἡ φύσις ἐνδέχεται, τὸ δὲ ἀναγκαῖον ἐκείνων χάριν, λογιζόμενον ὡς ἄνευ τούτων οὐ δυνατὰ αὐτὰ ἐκεῖνα ἐφ' οἷς σπουδάζομεν μόνα κατανοεῖν οὐδ' αὖ λαβεῖν οὐδ' ἄλλως πως μετασχεῖν*" ("wherefore we may

[64] Again, following McCabe "Myth, Allegory and Argument in Plato", Apeiron XXV, No 4, December 1992, pg 62.

distinguish two sorts of causes, the one divine and the other necessary, and may seek for the divine in all things, as far as our nature admits, with a view to the blessed life; but the necessary kind only for the sake of the divine, considering that without them and when isolated from them, these higher things for which we look cannot be apprehended or received or in any way shared by us.") In the world of myth, the rules of 'necessity' need not be involved, the problems of corrupt human nature can be left behind. The reader can watch recognisable images from the human world acting out scenes governed by λόγος and representing the divine in a world approaching, as close as any human can, the ideal. The mental, visionary world of the Republic as a whole is not a system of government to be practised by real people: in a perfect world it would work perfectly because it is a theoretically rational place. It deliberately ignores the irrationality of humans, that most would not see a communal gain as their own gain. In the real world, profit is something that can be touched, but in the truly logocentric world of the Republic, all profit stems from the enactment of justice. The state created is a model of justice made to aid our understanding of justice. That model must use recognisable parts so that we can imagine it as a thing, but it is not meant to be taken seriously: the people in that model are themselves models and have no human nature. The reality of selfishness destroys the image of justice, but one cannot be too literal about the necessarily unjust mortals which Plato is forced to use as parts of his model. It is the overall principle which is important; it is that which runs through and connects the paradigm and the abstract. The μῦθος shows a world where λόγος can reign unchecked by misguided human interference.

If one wants to call Plato's myths 'poetry', then this is how they are saved from Plato's own famous attack on poetry in Republic X. Plato is not reflecting the same thing as those he banishes. At Republic 398b1-2, the poet is allowed who will "imitate the style of the virtuous" ("τὴν τοῦ ἐπιεικοῦς λέξιν μιμοῖτο"); the poets who are banned are compared to the painters who only produce "φαινομένην" ("an appearance") (596e11) of a thing. They do not make poems about the ideal world, the world which we aspire to, but the content of their work is a reflection of our physical and imperfect world, which, of course, is itself a 'reflection' of the true world of abstracts. Plato's myths are not "of a poet or some other life from among those concerned with imitation" ("ποιητικὸς ἢ τῶν περὶ μίμησίν τις ἄλλος ἁρμόσει") (Phaedrus 248e1-2) but are of "a man who will become a lover of wisdom and beauty, or devoted to the Muses or love" ("ἀνδρὸς γενησομένου φιλοσόφου ἢ φιλοκάλου ἢ μουσικοῦ τινος καὶ ἐρωτικοῦ") (Phaedrus 248d2-4). Both are categorisable as involved in μουσική, but one loves truth where the other expands ignorant conceit about appearances through emotional manipulation. Plato's mythologising is to do with a love of good and a spreading of that passion. He positions himself to occupy the morally worthwhile meaning of μουσική, his divine inspiration is truth, and he banishes those who upset a λόγος aimed at happiness through an understanding of truth. Plato's myths are accounts of the truth for the sake of pleasure through the process of understanding, with the ultimate goal being the ultimate understanding.

Conclusion

But even in his myths, Plato is constricted to the realms of our physical and imperfect reality. He cannot describe the abstracts in any way other than in language. He must use examples of physical things in the ideal situations he tries to create. This can create its own interpretative problems when the ideal models are read as potentially physical things that can be brought about. But as we have seen, for example in the Statesman, there is a large gap between the purity of perfect things and the tainted nature of our physical world.

However we can only approach things that are perfect by using imperfect physical things: in order to understand an abstract, we must somehow try to tie it into something that can be described. Language cannot describe pure abstracts: the best it can do is use signs that stand for those abstracts; it cannot define them because then they would no longer be abstract, but would have been made physical in their representation in language. It is part of the nature of perfect things that they are indescribable in our far from perfect language. We cannot talk or write 'truth', we can only use language to say what it is like. But we must not let this fact prevent us from attempting to study truth. If we are to proceed in the process of understanding, we must use language; the only study of abstracts available to us is to look at 'what they are like', a large part of which is looking at paradigms of abstracts. But we cannot reject language, because those paradigms can only be constructed in language: these attempts at describing the ideal only exist in words. We must be fully aware of the problems of both words by themselves and their combination

in language. We must put no faith in words by themselves: they are not a route to truth. We must remember that written language is little more than a game: it cannot answer back to clarify or defend itself and it is as full of deceitful rhetoric as the spoken kind. But no part of human existence is perfect. We must use language as best we can to get towards an understanding of the pure and constant things, an understanding which is significantly aided by the creation in language of paradigms. The dialogues "lead the reader toward the existential ideal of the philosopher: toward life in pure theory."[65] Humans can never achieve life in pure theory because we are tied down by the necessity of being in the physical. But we must not let that prevent us from aiming at the pure; we must work within that physical framework to create, as best we can, an attempt at the ideal. This can only be done in language, when we use it to show what the ideal might be like.

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[65] Gadamer, Plato's Dialectical Ethics; Phenomenological Interpretation Relating to the Philebus, trans. M. Wallace, Yale, 1991, pg 2.

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