Language, Communication, and the Paradox of Analysis: Some Philosophical Remarks on Plato's *Cratylus**

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Auf den ersten Blick hat Platons Dialog *Kratylos* einen klaren und im engeren Sinn linguistischen Gegenstand, nämlich die Debatte zwischen Konventionalismus und Naturalismus in der Bedeutungstheorie. Aber warum sollte dieses Thema für Platon interessant genug sein, um ihm einen ganzen Dialog zu widmen? Was stand für ihn *philosophisch* gesehen im Zusammenhang mit diesen scheinbar ausgefallenen linguistischen Fragen auf dem Spiel? Ich werde argumentieren, dass mindestens eine Hauptmotivation in der Verteidigung der platonischen Epistemologie, insbesondere der Theorie der Wiedererinnerung, zu suchen ist. Näherhin werde ich argumentieren, dass Konventionalismus und Naturalismus alternative Reaktionen auf eine gewisse Version des Paradox der Analyse darstellen. Sollte eine von beiden sich als richtig erweisen, dann wäre Platons eigene Lösung für das Paradox – die Theorie der Wiedererinnerung – nicht hinreichend motiviert. Wenn jedoch weder Konventionalismus noch Naturalismus es erlauben, das Paradox auf plausible Weise zu vermeiden, dann wäre die Theorie der Wiedererinnerung immer noch brauchbar.

On the face of it, Plato's dialogue the *Cratylus* has a clear and narrowly linguistic subject matter. In the dialogue, Hermogenes and Cratylus, ask Socrates to engage a debate between them concerning what principles, if any, govern the "correctness" of names. According to Hermogenes, there is no principle of correctness in names apart, that is, from mere convention (stipulation) and the agreement of language users (384d1–6). In contrast, Cratylus maintains there is some natural, perhaps even mind-independent, correctness to names according to which they apply to their semantic values. On Cratylus' view, the application of words is determined by certain natural depictive relations that hold between the phonemes that constitute the name and the properties of the entity to which the name applies. For brevity, let us dub these positions 'conventionalism' and 'naturalism', respectively.

Given this much, we are immediately confronted with the question of why this linguistic issue was of sufficient interest to Plato to warrant an entire dialogue. What *philosophically* was at stake for him in these seemingly recherché questions about language? Various answers to this question are possible and, indeed, the best answer may ultimately be multi-faceted. However, I am going to argue in this paper that at least one major motivation for the dialogue is as a defense of Platonistic epistemology and, in particular, Plato's Theory of Recollection. Specif-

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ically, I am going to argue that conventionalism and naturalism pose alternative responses to a certain version of the paradox of analysis. If either is correct, Plato's own solution to the paradox – the Theory of Recollection – will not be adequately motivated. If, however, neither conventionalism nor naturalism can plausibly avoid the paradox, the Theory of Recollection will still be required.

In making this proposal, I part company with the majority of scholarly works on the *Cratylus*. The tradition has been to accept Plato's interest in language at face value and to treat the *Cratylus* simply as if it were an early exercise in the philosophy of language.[1] This is surprising. For, as Silverman remarks, 'the discussion of the correctness of names in terms of convention versus nature bears little or no relation to [most of] Plato's other remarks about names in the *Phaedo*, *Sophist*, *Republic* or elsewhere' (1992, 26). But this fact itself suggests that Plato's interest in the philosophy of language may well have been sparked by the implications these particular theses had for more traditional philosophical concerns.

Nor has a fairly intensive focus on the purely linguistic aspects of the dialogue shed a great deal of light on the organization of the *Cratylus* or what theory of language, if any, Plato actually defends. On the view to be presented here, the overall structure of the *Cratylus* is thus determined by the question, 'Is either conventionalism or naturalism adequate as a response to the paradox of analysis?' And Plato's general ambivalence to actually answering the central question of the dialogue (i.e., what does the correctness of names amount to) is explained, not because the dialogue is fundamentally aporetic (MacKenzie 1986), but because only the two theories criticized in the dialogue pose a threat to the Theory of Recollection.

1. The Paradox of Analysis

In the *Meno*, Plato raises an epistemological puzzle concerning the very possibility of philosophical inquiry (80d4–e6). We can put Plato's puzzle as follows: suppose that we do not know the analysis of a certain concept c. If we want to know the analysis of c, what we want is to know the proposition expressed by some sentence of the form 'c is X', where X is to be replaced by a correct analysis of c. Suppose that the correct analysis of c is C. So, we want to know that the proposition expressed by the sentence 'c is C' is true.[2] In order to know this, we must know at least two things: (i) *what* the truth conditions of the sentence 'c is C' are, and (ii) *that* those truth conditions obtain. The problem is that for conceptual analyses conditions (i) and (ii) would seem to collapse into one another, so that merely knowing the conditions under which 'c is C' are true is sufficient for determining whether or not it is in fact true.

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[1] See, for example, Reeve (1998), Fine (1977), Silverman (1992), and Bestor (1980), among others. Notable exceptions are Rumsey (1987) and Spellman (1993), whose position is similar to my own.

[2] Stipulating, of course, that 'c is C' means that c is C.

More explicitly, here is the problem. The truth conditions of 'c is C' are given by the following instance of Tarski's schema T:

(A) 'c is C' is true (in L) iff c is C

Now in order to know what the truth conditions of 'c is C' are we must understand the proposition expressed by (A). And understanding this proposition entails *inter alia* an understanding of its right hand side. That is, it entails that we understand the proposition that c is C. Apparently, however, a person can understand (A) – and, hence, understand the proposition that c is C – without *knowing* whether or not C is, in fact, the correct analysis of c. But given that C is assumed to be a conceptual analysis of c, *it is unclear what more there could be to knowing that c is C than simply understanding the proposition that c is C*. By hypothesis, however, we don't know that c is C. It looks, therefore, like our desire to learn the analysis of c cannot be satisfied unless we already know the analysis of c! But if we already know the analysis of c, we surely cannot learn it. So it appears that there is simply no way to learn the analysis of c.

According to Plato this conclusion is in an important respect correct: in some sense we *do* know the analyses of our concepts even if we cannot always state them explicitly. On such a view, when we come to "learn" that c is C, what we are doing is not acquiring any new knowledge of a proposition; rather, we are simply bringing our prior knowledge of that proposition "to the surface," we come to *recollect* that knowledge.

The moral of Plato's story is familiar enough in modern cognitive science. Individuals with tacit knowledge have capacities that individuals who lack that knowledge altogether do not (and, perhaps, could not) have. One such capacity of everyday significance is our capacity to use words for the purpose of communication. Specifically, an individual with knowledge of the meaning of a word is able to correctly use that word in a way that an individual who lacks knowledge of the word's meaning simply cannot. Thus, our everyday facility with language depends on our knowledge of the concepts expressed by the words in our language. That is, there is a direct connection between our ability to use a word correctly and our having knowledge of the concept expressed by that word.

This connection between our knowledge of concepts and our ability to use words allows us to generate what amounts to a speech-act version of the paradox of analysis. Specifically until he draws the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, knowing a concept amounts for Plato to explicitly knowing the analysis of the concept. For instance, knowing the concept expressed by 'bachelor' involves explicitly knowing that 'bachelor' expresses the concept of being an unmarried adult male. The problem is that we do not generally have explicit knowledge of the analyses of the concepts expressed by the words in our language. This means, in turn, that we do not generally know which concepts are expressed by the words of our language. But if we do not know this, it seems we cannot in general use our words correctly!

Platonistic epistemology provides the same answer to this formulation of the paradox as well. Contrary to our initial assessment, we do in fact know the

analyses of most of our concepts; what we lack is explicit, conscious access to those analyses.

When formulated in this way, however, there are at least two alternative responses.[3] One response is to argue that, contrary to appearances, the conclusion is correct: we don't use our words correctly because there really is no *substantive* normative principle governing our usage of words and to which that usage can either conform or fail to conform.[4] A second alternative is to argue that the correct usage of words is largely *independent* of the intentional states of language users and, in particular, independent of their knowledge. On this view, words will come to be applied correctly (if applied at all) regardless of the individual language user's actual state of knowledge because the application of words is fixed by factors that are independent of such states.

What is striking about these two alternative theses is that, on one plausible construal, they are the very positions advocated by Hermogenes and Cratylus, respectively. This is no accident. For the key to understanding both the structure of and motivation for the *Cratylus* is to view it against the backdrop of something like the speech-act formulation of the paradox of analysis just presented.

As noted above, the theory of recollection makes fairly specific predictions about how tacit knowers will behave. Someone who at least tacitly knows the concepts that their words express will typically constrain their usage of those words in such a way as to apply them only to things that they believe fall under the concept. In contrast, someone who is wholly ignorant of those concepts will be unable to constrain their usage of words in any non-arbitrary way. So, as against the first response to the paradox, establishing that there is a principle of correctness governing language is corroborating evidence for Plato's Theory of Recollection. This corroborating evidence, however, will be undermined if the application of words is largely independent of a person's state of knowledge. So, as against the second response to the paradox, Plato needs to show that the application of words is knowledge dependent.

What I wish to suggest is that this is precisely the dialectic situation that occurs in the *Cratylus*. If so, then this dialogue is by no means a peripheral foray into the theory of language; rather, it is a sustained defense of a centerpiece of Plato's epistemological theory. This claim will be corroborated in part if it provides a fruitful and cohesive interpretation of the dialogue. Moreover, one salutary effect of this way of framing the issues is that it makes the *Cratylus* appear far better integrated with the bulk of the Platonic corpus than it has hitherto seemed.

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[3] This is not to say that there are not other, perhaps even more plausible responses, to the paradox. I am simply interested in drawing attention to these two in particular.

[4] It might be useful to think of Hermogenes' conventionalism along the lines of a Wittgensteinian meaning-is-use semantic theory. On such a theory, the meaning of a word supervenes on its use. Consequently, there is no sense in which a linguistic community (including a community of one) can "get it wrong," for the use of the word by the community determines its meaning, and not conversely. Of course, it will be possible for individuals within the community to make mistakes (except in the limiting case of a private language), but only insofar as their usage is judged to be in error by the larger community.

2. The Correctness of Names

The *Cratylus* is in large part concerned with the application of words, and a crucial part of the application of words is their misapplication or, better, their *misuse*. My appeal here to the more general notion of misuse is designed to cover two sorts of linguistic errors.[5] One sort of error occurs when we apply a name *n* on an occasion to an individual X even though *n* is not a name of X. I will call this sort of mistake a *misapplication* of *n*.

But I wish to suggest that, at least for Plato, there is a second and philosophically more interesting kind of error. To see this, consider by way of comparison the problems that arise in the case of reference failure. According to Plato, the function of a word is to help us "communicate information about the world" (388b11–388c3). That is, words serve as the basic constituents of sentences and those sentences then function to express propositions. Now a necessary condition for a word's performing such a function is the "meaningfulness" of the word. For, assuming that the meaning of a sentence is compositionally built-up from the meanings of its constituent expressions, it will follow that a word that lacks a meaning cannot typically contribute to the construction of sentences that express complete propositions. Thus, words lacking meaning cannot function in the (linguistic) communication of information.[6]

But for Plato, the general sort of problem that arises in the case of reference failure is widespread. To see this, consider a predicate like "grue" which, I will suppose, fails to express a concept that corresponds to any genuine property (Bealer 1982; Lewis 1983). Now, depending on the specific definition one gives of "grue", it is meaningful and even true that the leaves on my maple tree are grue this year. But given that "grue" does not express a genuine property of my maple's leaves, there is plainly a sense in which my telling you that they are grue conveys no (direct) information *about the world*.[7]

We might graphically represent this aspect of Plato's conception of naming as in the *Figure* on p. 62.

In this model, the world is divided – we will suppose exhaustively – into three ontological categories (i.e., either individuals or natural kinds). These are labeled A, B and C. According to arrow number one, the extension of the word *w* consists of some elements of A and some elements of B (call this grouping A+B). In this case, *w* cannot function properly since by hypothesis A+B has, at most, a mere

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[5] There may be others, for instance lying, but I will not be concerned with them in this essay as they do not have direct bearing on the *Cratylus*.

[6] Strictly speaking this is true only in the theoretically most basic case where we ignore or minimize pragmatic effects.

[7] Of course, spelling this out explicitly would be a difficult task. But I take it that the example provides us with a fairly strong, intuitive grasp of the issue under consideration. A less provocative way of making essentially the same point is this. It is plausible to say that words (like "grue") that express concepts that do not correspond to genuine properties apply to entities in virtue of the fact that those concepts are to be analyzed in terms of genuine properties. But in the canonical case, our intention is to use words which apply directly to the relevant objects and not in this indirect manner. In this case, using a word "like" grue will involve a similar sort of malfunction.

conceptual delimitation. According to arrow two, by contrast, *w* can function correctly since its extension corresponds exactly with the actual ontological category B. According to Plato, therefore, the act of correctly introducing a word *w* into the language involves supplying *w* with an *appropriate* meaning.[8]
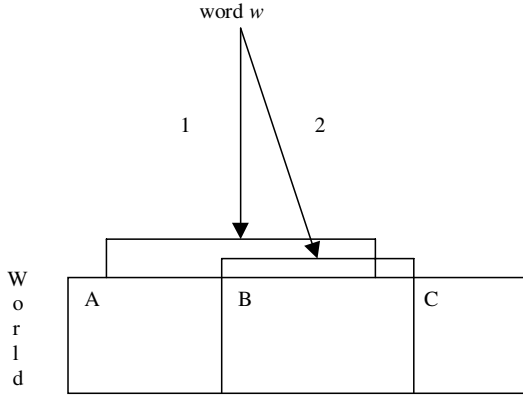
Returning now to the issue of the misuse of words, another kind of linguistic error occurs when we fail to provide a name *n* with an appropriate semantic value and the result of this failure will be the inability of *n* to perform its intended function. I will call this sort of linguistic error a *malfunction*.

With this distinction between malfunction and misapplication in mind, we can give a general statement of Socrates' objections to conventionalism and naturalism. Conventionalism is wrong because it does not allow for the possibility of malfunction. Specifically, convention and agreement fail to be *sufficient* for correctly naming.[9] Naturalism, on the other hand, is wrong because it fails to account for the possibility of misapplication.[10] The "depictive" relations that (according to Cratylus) hold naturally between a phonemic string and an entity are not *necessary* for naming. Moreover, Cratylus *must* deny the possibility of misapplication. For if misapplication were possible, then a convention-based theory of language (that is, a theory which takes convention and agreement as necessary though not sufficient conditions) would provide a viable alternative to the naturalistic theory. In consequence, even if Cratylus' theory of language provided sufficient

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[8] Kretzman calls this requirement 'objective taxanomic correctness' (1971, 128). See also Spellman (1993).

[9] In contrast, many commentators take Plato's argument here to be aimed at Hermogenes' apparent commitment to the claim that names are not individuated by their semantic values (e.g., Ketchum 1979).

[10] A bit of subtlety is required here. According to Cratylus' form of naturalism, linguistic application is entirely fixed by natural, depictive relations holding between the word and its semantic value (429c3). It turns out, however, that misapplication is impossible on Cratylus' view. For, according to Cratylus, when one attempts on an occasion to apply a name to an object x even though x is not the semantic value of the name, the result is *not* a misapplication of the word, but rather a complete failure of the name (as used on that occasion) to apply to anything at all. Indeed, Cratylus apparently believes that such an act might not even be a linguistic act at all (430e2–430a4).

conditions for naming, one would still be forced to determine in any particular case which of the two mechanisms was at work. And this, according to Plato, requires some language independent grasp of meanings. Consequently, the possibility of conventionalism undermines Cratylus' claim that we can achieve real and substantial knowledge of the world merely through a correct understanding of language.

Before considering some details of these arguments, it will be worthwhile to remind the reader of the importance of these conclusions relative to the paradox of analysis. If Socrates' argument against Hermogenes is good, there is a correctness to names not captured by mere convention and agreement. This correctness amounts, in effect, to the fact that true names have semantic values that correspond to real divisions of being, i.e., individuals and natural relations (including properties). It would seem that we are typically successful in using words to convey information *about the world*. But this ability will involve two things: first, it requires that we have words which function correctly (e.g., words which have appropriate semantic values); and, second, it requires that we typically apply those words correctly in the course of ordinary discourse. Taken together, these conditions would seem to allow us to derive the speech-act version of the paradox of analysis given above. Hence, merely appealing to the conventionality of language will not alleviate the need for a Platonic theory of recollection.

Cratylus, on the other hand, accepts both of these requirements as necessary conditions for conveying information about the world. But he denies that they allow us to derive the paradox because he denies that the application of our words depends on our understanding of the meanings of those words. According to Plato, however, this is not sufficient for avoiding the paradox. In order to avoid the paradox, the naturalist would have to show, in addition, that no alternative, convention-based mechanism is in operation. For if such a mechanism were available, one could not treat the concept depicted by the phonemic string as a reliable indicator of the meaning of the term. Rather, in order to be able to use language correctly, one would have to understand the meaning of the term independently of its depictive content.

Plato's strategy is, thus, to argue that the possibility of misapplication shows that there is such a mechanism at work in the language. Moreover, when we consider words having the same application, we find that they frequently have incompatible depictive contents. As a result, the correct use of language does require independent understanding of lexical meanings and the paradox is up and running again.

The upshot is that neither Hermogenes' theory nor Cratylus' theory of language provides us with an adequate solution to the (speech-act version of) the paradox of analysis. Enter the Platonic theory of recollection. Whatever the ultimate outcome may be in the ongoing reformulation and refinement of conventionalism and naturalism, neither theory can be adequately formulated in a way that makes the Theory of Recollection dispensable.

3. The Argument of the Cratylus

In this section I present a more detailed outline of Plato's argument. I want to emphasize that, on my reading, there is a *single* argument to be found in the *Cratylus*, not merely two distinct arguments against two distinct philosophical theories. As just noted, the conclusion of that argument is that neither conventionalism nor naturalism can be adequately formulated in a way that makes the theory of recollection dispensable.

The argument proceeds in two steps, corresponding to Plato's discussion of the two rival theories. In the first step, the aim is to show that, contrary to conventionalism (better: strict conventionalism), there is a correctness to names that goes beyond our mere decision to use certain terms in certain ways. The second step is aimed at showing that, contrary to naturalism, the ability to correctly use language requires a grasp of lexical meaning over and above any postulated depictive content that those words might have.

These arguments constitute a defense of the disputed premises in the paradox of analysis. If successful and if no other premises are disputed, Plato will have successfully defended his theory of recollection as the favored solution to the paradox.

Step One: The Correctness of Names. The first few steps in the Socrates' discussion with Hermogenes are designed to show that conventionalism is indeed incompatible with Cratylus' naturalism. Specifically, Hermogenes observes that different countries, cities and even individuals give different names to the same things (385d7). According to Hermogenes, this shows that there is nothing "in the name" which renders it capable of naming a certain thing whereas some other name is incapable of naming that thing. But the fact that there may be a plurality of names for a single entity is in no way inconsistent with Cratylus' naturalism. For it could be that each such name, though different from the others, is capable of naming the thing in question in virtue of certain of its phonetic properties (whereas other phonetic sequences are not capable of naming it).

In order to show that Hermogenes' position is truly incompatible with Cratylus' position, Socrates correctly brings out the fact that according to Hermogenes any name we have fixed as the prima facie name for a certain entity would do equally well as a name for any other entity we wish (385a7–e2). Specifically, choose any two arbitrary English names, say 'horse' and 'man'. We are agreed that 'horse' denotes horses (and, we may suppose, nothing else) and 'man' denotes men (and nothing else). According to Hermogenes, however, we could establish conventions that switch the semantic values of these two words while leaving the rest of the English linguistic context effectively unchanged. But if the phonetic string H⌢O⌢R⌢S⌢E *naturally* denotes horses (in the context of English), it is difficult to imagine how this semantic juxtaposition would be possible.

There is, however, a final gap to be closed. If it were possible for the essences of things themselves to vary according to our naming practices, then it is at least conceivable that H⌢O⌢R⌢S⌢E could naturally denote horses in one linguistic context and naturally denote men in another. But it is agreed (386a1–386e4) that the essences of things are not relative to us, and, in particular, not relative to

our naming practices. With these two refinements in place, we see that Cratylus'
position is, in fact, inconsistent with naturalism.[11]

The discussion of essences also provides a transition into the first step of the
argument. Having just established that things have independent essences, Plato
points out that actions in general have independent essences. It follows that the
act of naming must itself have an independent essence (387d1). Furthermore, it
is agreed that naming is essentially an act by which we separate certain things
out for the purpose of saying something about them (388b11).[12] For instance,
in an utterance of the form 'x is F', we name (in the broad sense employed by
Plato) both x and F-ness for the purpose of predicating the one of the other.
And, of course, in such an utterance the terms 'x' and 'F' are the overt means by
which these acts of discrimination are affected. In this sense, words are tools for
distinguishing items in the world for the purpose of communicating about them.

At this point, Socrates does not say *how* words are able to perform this function
– perhaps, as Hermogenes says it is by convention, and perhaps, as Cratylus says,
it is by natural depiction. The only conclusion Socrates draws is that the function
of names is incompatible with a thoroughgoing conventionalism, for a word will
only function correctly if it actually succeeds in distinguishing something in the
world. Ontology, however, is not determined by convention (see 386a1–386e4)
and it is something about which we can be quite mistaken. Consequently, there is
a nontrivial (ontological) standard of correctness to names over and above mere
agreement – a standard that is, when not met, implicated in the *malfunctioning* of
names.

Step Two: The Conventionality of Names. But given this ontological standard, we
are confronted with the question of how it is to be met. Specifically, how are we
ever to know if our words are functioning correctly or not? One possibility, of
course, is that we have prior, tacit knowledge of the Forms. Assuming that the
Forms reflect the true divisions of being,[13] the Theory of Recollection supplies
us with an epistemic route for deciding the question.

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[11] This is especially compelling if we follow Shofield (1972) and Reeve (1998) in displacing the discussion
of compositionality in 385b2–d1 to follow 387c5.

[12] While it is doubtful that Plato's claim at 388b11 is epexegetic as Reeve (1998) claims, it is equally
unlikely that it is a mere conjunction. A more plausible interpretation is this. Typically the act of
naming occurs in the context of the complex action of saying something. The purpose of saying
something is to 'give information to one another' and the contribution of the act of naming to the
complex act of saying is 'to distinguish' the thing or things about which we wish to say something.

[13] It is not entirely clear that Plato uniformly accepted this claim throughout his writings. For instance,
in the *Parmenides*, the young Socrates is chastised for denying that various "undignified" objects (e.g.,
hair, dirt, and mud) have Forms (130b1–131a3). If this exchange is understood to cast doubt on the
claim that the Forms reflect the true divisions of being (i.e., whether or not there exist Forms for
unnatural divisions of being), it may explain Plato's reluctance in the *Cratylus* to actually invoke the
Theory of Recollection as a way of resolving the problem (439b4). That such a tension should exist
in Plato's philosophy is hardly surprising. Insofar as Forms are to play the role of semantic values,
we have reason to posit a Form corresponding to every word (since most words appear meaningful);
but insofar as Forms are to divide reality into true divisions of being, we have reason to posit fewer
Forms than words (since there seem to be unnatural ways of conceptually dividing the world).

A second possibility, however, is the one proposed by Cratylus – the semantic values of our words are not determined by convention, but rather by natural relations holding between the words and objects in the world. Since these relations are natural (and, specifically, independent of human cognitive activity), it cannot be that the semantic values of such words have a mere conceptual delimitation.[14] If Cratylus is right, there is no malfunctioning of names – every true name has as its semantic value a true division of being.

Thus, on Cratylus' view the Theory of Recollection is inessential because the ability of true names to divide the world along appropriate lines (and, hence, to perform the function of names) is independent of our knowledge state. Indeed, the attentive student of language can actually come to acquire real knowledge of the world, since that information is directly encoded into the language (435d3).

Plato's argument against Cratylus comes in two steps. First, he argues that (whether or not any natural relations hold between names and things) it is possible to *misapply* names – that is, to apply a name to a thing on an occasion even if it does not, in fact, apply to (i. e., depict) that thing. This part of the argument goes by way of analogy to painting. Plato notes that we can take a painting and, no matter how like or unlike a given person x, make clear we are applying that painting to x. 'May I not go to a man and say to him, "This is your portrait," while showing him what happens to be his own likeness, or perhaps the likeness of a woman? And by "show" I mean bring before the senses of sight' (430e3–7). But if this is possible even in so concrete a case as painting, then surely it is equally possible when the case involves the more abstract depictive relations involved with names (430e9–431a5).[15] It would thus appear that it is possible to misapply names; that is, to apply names to things even though they do not naturally depict those things (supposing for the sake of argument that names really do depict things).

This ability to misapply names depends on convention (434e5–435d2). If the speaker and hearer are both sufficiently clear on the intention of the speaker to apply a name n to x, then they will have established a convention or agreement to apply n to x whether or not n actually depicts x.

In the next step, Plato argues that, if such a convention-based misapplication of names is possible, then convention is a sufficient condition for naming. All that is required to show this is to allow the misapplication to occur at the initial introduction of the name into the language. '[H]e who first gave names gave them according to his conception of the things which they signified. … And if his conception was erroneous, and he gave names according to his conception, in what position shall we who are his followers find ourselves' (436b4–10)? That is, if the individual(s) who first introduced the name into the language had an erroneous conception of the world, they could have applied the names to things not naturally depicted by those names by means of convention or mutual understanding. But

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[14] Compare: there is no natural, topological relation (e.g., north of) holding between Boulder, CO and Santa's Workshop.

[15] *Cf.* Donellan's (1966) distinction between attributive and referential uses of definitive descriptions; see also Kripke (1977).

this means that (minimally) there are two mechanisms by which a name can come to have a given semantic value – natural depiction and convention.

Consequently, in order to know whether or not a name is functioning correctly, one must know whether or not its semantic value is its semantic value in virtue of natural or conventional naming practices. Now a necessary condition for knowing that the semantic value is determined by the depictive content of the word is knowing the analysis of the concept (or individual) named, and so being able to compare the depictive content with the analysis. But this requires a language independent grasp of the semantic values of names.

Thus, even if naturalism provides a correct sufficient condition for naming, it does not allow us to avoid the speech-act version of the paradox of analysis. In order to apply our words correctly, we must know the analysis of the concepts they express. For the names cannot be assumed to simply pick-out whatever is naturally depicted by them. But since we don't typically have explicit knowledge of these analyses, we must have tacit knowledge of them – knowledge obtained by a prior acquaintance with the Forms.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that, if we understand the *Cratylus* as an argument against alternative solutions to (a version of) the paradox of analysis, we achieve a coherent and satisfying interpretation of the dialogue. In the preceding section, I have sketched how such an interpretation would go. In addition, this construal of the dialogue has the effect of squaring its concerns with those of the Platonic corpus as a whole. Specifically, it takes the central concern of the dialogue to be, not the relatively superficial issue of naming, but rather the philosophically central issues of the nature of the Forms and our knowledge of them. Taken together, these considerations provide a powerful prima facie argument in favor of the present interpretation.

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