The Sophist In The Cave: Education Through Names In Plato's Republic

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THE SOPHIST IN THE CAVE
EDUCATION THROUGH NAMES IN PLATO'S REPUBLIC

by

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DISSERTATION

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of Wayne State University,

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Advisor

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Date
DEDICATION

To my five little philosophers.
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Be sure of it, my dear Crito: Incorrect speech is not only discordant in its own right, but it also works mischief in our souls.

- Phaedo 115e

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1 Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own.
INTRODUCTION

“What is the nature of the relationship between words and the objects they refer to?”

This question is surely central to philosophical inquiry, since errors of language inevitably breed errors of investigation. Plato was one of the first people to ask the question. His answer, in the Cratylus, has attracted a great deal of scholarly disapproval, and very little genuine philosophical interest. Worse yet, scholars generally think that Plato’s views about philosophy of language were confined to one (or, at best, two) dialogues, and that his philosophy of language played no particular role in the metaphysical theories that we associate with “high Platonism.”

In this dissertation, I will contest all those common views. I will argue that philosophy of language played a genuine role in Plato’s metaphysical doctrines in the Republic, and that these doctrines are borne out by at least half a dozen other dialogues. I will argue that Plato’s views on linguistic reference are, far from being obscure or outlandish, roughly comparable to certain widely accepted modern views about linguistics, and reasonably plausible. I will argue that Plato’s cave image dramatizes his philosophy of language – and his animosity against the sophists – in a remarkable and previously unappreciated way.

I am not, however, making the claim that philosophy of language was somehow central to the dialogues of Plato’s middle period. I do not think that theories of reference were on Plato’s mind when he wrote the Republic, and I don’t think my thesis requires him to have been focused on such a thing. I would merely say that Plato’s views about language informed his writing about other topics, and that this connection can be traced in the dialogues. And perhaps this is just what we would expect. Had Frege written about politics and propaganda, surely his views about language would have influenced what he said. Why? Because language is the very lifeblood of political
information/misinformation, and – as Orwell recognized – the most powerful revolution proceeds by controlling what things citizens are capable of referring to. The book 1984 is in the tradition of Plato’s Republic, not (I hope) because the latter book does away with all freedom, but because 1984 carries on the Republic’s tradition of media censorship. As I will argue, Plato believed that unjust states were rife with linguistic inaccuracy about objects of the highest importance; citizens in such a state could refer to objects like justice or temperance, but their notion of these words was radically at odds with the genuine nature of such objects.

Plato’s solution to this sorry situation was censorship. According to Plato, the principle guiding his censorship is truth (Rep. 490a). With a few exceptions, stories are to be censored precisely insofar as they fail to conform to the truth (Rep. 377e). In Athens, however, it was a common sophistical teaching that falsehood was impossible. Plato’s philosophy of language in the Cratylus, the Sophist, the Statesman, and the Theaetetus was clearly meant to dispute this teaching as thoroughly and decisively as possible. These dialogues, then, have at the very least the role of carving out a place for the sort of falsity that must then be expunged from the Beautiful City. I see them as doing something more. By promoting the notion that language proceeds from the lawgiver, dialogues like the Cratylus and the Statesman make the claim that language is a political entity, thereby suggesting that there is some connection between primary education and linguistic usage. This suggestion, far from being disproven by the text of the Republic, is confirmed by it. The Republic is not a dialogue about the philosophy of language, but it is highly dependent on dialogues that are.

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2 Scholars may object that Plato is more moved by moral benefit than truth, in determining what stories are suitable to tell. I do not think Plato would allow these two categories to be separated, however. From our perspective, Plato is willing to broadcast lies that are morally advantageous. From his perspective, however, he is merely putting forward factual inaccuracies that point to more fundamental truths (the Forms).

3 Gorgias expresses this view in his work “On What Is Not” (MXG 980a9-12) and Plato ascribes it to Protagoras at Theaetetus 188d–189a.
My argument will proceed in the following way. In Chapter I, I will offer a reading of the *Cratylus*. My goal there will be to understand what Plato meant by the claim that names can be false, and I will argue that names are false just in case the embedded semantic content in the name is false of the object the name refers to. The second chapter will delve into a number of books of the *Republic*, and argue that Plato’s system of musical education there implicitly relies upon the notion that names can be false, and that names are false just in case their semantic content is false of their referent. In the third chapter, I will turn my attention to Book X of the *Republic*, and argue that its castigation of imitative poetry leaves another type of poetry (literally “making,” ποίησις) unscathed: the making of what I will call “intermediates.” The sort of intermediate Plato is most interested in is “intermediate virtue.” I will argue that intermediate virtue is synonymous with demotic virtue, and that the goal of proper musical education is the “making” of demotic virtue through the use of true and accurate language. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will argue that the picture of demotic education I have drawn in the first three chapters can be fruitfully applied to the metaphysics of the cave image. The puppets at the second level of the cave are, I will argue, the (conceptual) names bestowed upon objects of value by the lawgiver. It is this sort of object that one must comprehend before ascending to the real world, and the understanding of these names constitutes a genuine step toward knowledge.

**A Few Comments**

I should note from the start that my comments about philosophy of language here are not presented (for the most part) in the lexicon of the modern discipline, and that this is done quite intentionally. Ancient philosophers did not conceptualize language in the way that we do, and forcing their concepts into our terms will only sometimes be illuminating. As a result, I have tried
to approach Plato’s philosophy using Plato’s terms. At the same time, my hope is that—especially in the case of more obscure terms, like mimesis—I have offered something that can be recognized as engaging with the types of problems we grapple with in contemporary philosophy.

My treatment of the *Cratylus*, as well, requires a word of explanation in advance. I will only deal briefly and tangentially with the question many scholars consider central to any study of the *Cratylus*: “Why does Plato spend so much time making his peculiar and implausible etymologies?” Since I think we lack evidence to decide that question, I intentionally skirt the issue in the text. I do propose one minimal claim about the etymologies— that they are partially intended to ridicule sophists—but this minimal claim is such a commonplace that it hardly needs a defense. I believe that we can pull a number of significant philosophical claims out of the *Cratylus* without solving its central interpretive puzzle, and I focus my attention on those claims.

Finally, let me make a comment about the role of the historical Socrates in my dissertation. Unless otherwise indicated, I use the name “Socrates” to denote the Platonic character, not the Athenian philosopher. There are doubtless contributions that Socrates the Athenian made to Plato’s philosophy of language, but it is almost impossible to know what these contributions were. The passages I discuss from the *Euthydemus* (likely an early dialogue) may be the clearest clue we have about Socrates’s genuine attitude toward language: if they are any indication, he was aware of the dangers of ambiguity and open to the notion that names admit of correctness and incorrectness.

It may be that Socrates’s most significant stamp on Plato’s philosophy of language, however, came at the moment of his trial, when (if Plato can be trusted) Socrates contrasted the “language spoken here [in the law courts]” (τῆς ἐνθάδε λέξεως, *Apol.* 17d) with both ordinary language and the language of philosophy. If we look closely at that claim, we can see a sort of anticipation of the
idea that the poets and the sophists are at a “third remove” (Rep. 599d) from the truth, since they do not even speak in the ordinary fashion, which is regarded as superior to the fashion of the sophists. Moreover, Socrates’s speech embodies the failure of philosophical language to convince the hostile masses in the cave (Rep. 517a; cf. Gorg. 486a-b), and his opponents’ speeches embody the capacity for sophists, rhetoricians, and poets to manipulate moral terms in a way that dupes ordinary people into believing falsely and acting wrongly. This failure, and the resultant death of Socrates, may have played a role in forming Plato’s conviction that the public square must not be controlled by sophists and orators, and thus his determination that philosophers must take a central role in both government and media.

We can see, then, that Plato’s opposition to sophistical forms of communication was no small aspect of his psychology. Sophistry had been the death of Socrates, and Plato feared that it would be the death of Athens. Unlike Socrates, however, it would appear that Plato decided to fight fire with fire. Instead of declaring rhetoric utterly worthless, Plato (in the Phaedrus) forges a place for a reformed τέχνη of rhetoric. And, as I will argue here, he also makes a place for arational but non-sophistical rhetorical persuasion in the Republic and the Laws.

Toward the end of the Apology, Socrates warns the Athenians that the fruit of his death for Athens will be

a reckoning ... far more unpleasant than the manner of my death. Critical questioners (οἱ ἐλέγχοντες) will approach more of you, though I have heretofore held them back. And, since they are young, they will make even more difficulties for you and make you even more perturbed. (39c-d)

One can hardly help thinking that Plato had himself in mind, and his scathing condemnation of Athens, in the cave image, surely was meant as a repudiation of such fools as would put to death a man of incomparable wisdom. We can hardly doubt that Plato would have failed entirely in his
criticism, however, if he had not himself been a master of rhetorical persuasion – a method that Socrates himself intentionally eschewed. This dissertation aims to consider what sort of thing a purified rhetoric might be, and how such rhetoric might be used to educate the populace. Whether such a departure from his own methods would impress or horrify the historical Socrates is anybody's guess.
CHAPTER 1: EDUCATION THROUGH NAMES IN THE CRATYLS

One of the most striking aspects of Plato’s philosophy of language is his notion that words can be true or false. In the Cratylus, Socrates proposes that the assignment of appropriate names (τὰ προσήκοντα) results in “true” names, whereas the assignment of incorrect (μὴ ὑρθῶς) names results in “false” names (431a-b; 430d). To the modern ear, this sounds like a category error. Truth and falsity are properties of propositions, not of words. The notion that words admit of falsity sounds at best eccentric and at worst nonsensical. One might hope, then, that Plato’s theory of the falsity of words might be quarantined in a single isolated dialogue (the Cratylus), and then either explained away or ignored. But the theory does not behave itself. Plato suggests that words are capable of falsity in dialogues as diverse as the Euthydemus (277d-278c), the Phaedrus (244c), and the Philebus (12b-c). Even Plato’s masterpiece, the Republic, includes the objectionable theory. Socrates continually mentions the importance of using true or correct names in the establishment of his ideal πολιτεία. (See e.g. Rep. 359a, 387b, 405d, 443e, 560d-e.) Moreover, in a passage that seems almost Orwellian, Socrates declares that Athenian demagogues make the mistake of calling things by the wrong names, names which accord to the opinions of the “great beast” which personifies the demos. Thus the demagogues call the opinions of the demos “wisdom,” and call those things which please the demos “good” (493a-c).

Despite these passages, scholars have not generally assigned any significant role to Plato’s philosophy of language in the Republic. When the Republic talks about people using the “wrong names” for things, these scholars claim that these people express false beliefs about genuine realities. And scholars are certainly right about that. And yet they are missing one critical point. Given a fuller understanding of Plato’s philosophy of language – both in the Cratylus and elsewhere – the
distinction between an “error in naming” and an “error in belief” disappears. Plato holds not only the odd view that names can be true or false, but also the unusual view that the truth of these names depends upon the beliefs of those who have control of the names (the “standard setters” or νομοθέται). Thus, errors in belief are made manifest in errors in naming; and errors in naming perpetuate false beliefs.

In this chapter, I will argue that “false names” are central to the way that Plato thinks about language throughout his middle period, and therefore that the truth and falsity of names ought to play a more integral role in our understanding of both early education and dialectic. I will focus most of my attention on material from the Cratylus; but the dialogue I want to illuminate is the Republic. One key to understanding the role of false names in the Republic, I argue, must lie in an understanding of Plato’s theory (in the Cratylus) that names are “images” or “imitations” – a theory that has been misunderstood by modern readers of Plato. Once we understand precisely what Plato means by saying that a name is an “imitation,” Plato’s theory that names can be false becomes – far from plainly false – reasonably plausible, at least in the context of the theory of Forms. Moreover, Plato’s views about truth and falsity in naming bear a striking and unappreciated similarity to linguistic theories advanced by contemporary scientific realists like Hilary Putnam and Ted Sider. Given his assumptions about the world, Plato’s proposals about language are not only coherent; they are also sensible.

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2 Throughout this chapter, I will use “image” and “imitation” as synonyms, following Plato’s seemingly indiscriminate uses of the words in dialogues like the Sophist and the Cratylus.
The chapter will proceed in the following way. In the first section, I will investigate two passages about language from the *Sophist* and the *Euthydemus*, and argue that these two passages support the claim that Plato’s philosophy of language was developed as an antidote to sophistical rhetoric. In section II, I will explain how the *Euthydemus* passage, in conjunction with certain comments in the *Cratylus*, suggests that Plato held a view of language largely in keeping with the views of certain modern philosophers of language — and defensible on the same grounds as these contemporary views. In Section III, I will investigate the nature of words in the *Cratylus* in an attempt to vindicate my interpretation in Section II, and I will discuss how Platonic names are content-rich. In sections IV, V and VI, I will argue against several subtly mistaken ways of interpreting the *Cratylus*, and I will argue that names can be false only insofar as they somehow embed false information. Harmful rhetoric exploits this sort of false information, a point which Plato drives home in his strong criticism of “education through names” at the end of the *Cratylus*. In section VII, I will argue that education through names is a target of Plato’s ire only in a limited sense: an education through names is incapable of generating knowledge, but it is capable (when guided by the dialectician) of generating true belief. Finally, in section VIII, I will suggest that we might understand primary education in the *Republic* as a form of education through names, precisely because it is capable of generating true belief.

I. How Language Might Approach Reality

Early in the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger makes what may represent Plato’s most straightforward comment on the relationship between language and truth:

Now you must follow me in a joint inquiry [into things], beginning ... with the *Sophist*, and see if we can make his nature evident through discussion (ἐμφανίζοντι λόγῳ τί ποι' ἔστι). After all, at this point, you and I only coincide in this single respect: that we use the same name for him. But as to the actual thing (ἐργον) to which each of us attaches this name, our conception of it may very well be different.
And so, it’s crucial that we always come to an agreement through our discussion about the thing itself (συνωμολογήσαται...διὰ λόγων...πέρι τὸ πρᾶγμα αὐτό) rather than proceeding without any preliminary discussion, agreeing only on a name. (218b-c)

I believe that this passage is the key to understanding Plato’s philosophy of language. In the passage, the Eleatic Stranger proposes that intellectual inquiry (dialectic) will be ineffectual unless one first engages in an investigation into the language of inquiry. This investigation has two requirements:

(1) When studying the nature of something named “F,” interlocutors must have some sort of verbal agreement (συνωμολογήσαται...διὰ λόγων) about the thing being named. They must have roughly identical referential intentions; that is, they must intend to indicate the same thing (ἔργον).³ (2) This thing to which they refer must be a genuinely existent thing (it must have a τί ποτ’ ἔστι) with extensional boundaries that generally conform to the referential intentions of the speaker.

I will call the first requirement the Conventional Requirement; I will call the second the Naturalistic Requirement. The Conventional Requirement guarantees that language is used consistently by both parties; the Naturalistic Requirement guarantees that there is a norm governing this consistent usage⁵ – that is, it guarantees that the shared “meaning” of the interlocutors has an appropriate connection with an actually existing object. If we do not conform to these requirements concerning names, our dialectical investigations will not lead us to knowledge.

³ The use of the word ἔργον, in the Greek, introduces a traditional Greek contrast between “words” (λόγοι) and “facts” or “deeds” (ἔργα). Some helpful insights about Plato’s engagement with this contrast, and its relationship to the activity of the sophists, can be found in H.G. Gadamer, “Logos and Ergon in Plato’s Lysis,” in Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato, trans. P. Smith (Yale U.P., 1980), 1-20.

⁴ The paradigmatic cases of things with a fixed nature are the Forms, but it may be that other non-Forms have fixed natures as well. The is a ποτ’ ἔστι ascribed to bees in the Meno (72b), for example, though it is surely controversial whether there is a Form of the Bee.

⁵ The sort of norm I appeal to here need not be a value-laden norm. The norm acts as an anchor for the conversation, a sort of target (or “quarry,” Stat. 290d) which is aimed at. When investigating the nature of a “sophist,” it must be the case that there genuinely is a distinctive nature that sophists have, a nature which is subject to investigation. To say there is no such nature is equivalent to saying (in terms familiar from Meno 72c-d) that there is no one thing that different kinds of sophists have in common; i.e., that all sophists are sophists in different senses of the term.
These two requirements have been recognized by various interpreters as aspects of Plato’s philosophy of language, but both requirements – the Naturalistic Requirement, in particular – have not received the attention they deserve. The requirements are not confined to the *Sophist*; in fact, they are given a far more detailed treatment in the *Cratylus*, and they are either stated or implied by the *Euthydemus*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Seventh Letter*, and the *Republic*. Although satisfying these requirements does not guarantee successful intellectual inquiry, failing to satisfy the requirements leads to a sort of deep-seated miscommunication, exactly the sort of miscommunication that is prominently on display by various Athenian sophists.

A dramatic account of how these requirements might be violated occurs in the *Euthydemus*. Midway through the dialogue, Socrates indicts the sophists Dionysodorus and Euthydemus on the charge of confusing the boy Clinias with their misleading language. Clinias has been asked whether it is the knowledgeable person or the ignorant person who “learns” (μανθάνουσιν, 276c), and he finds that the sophists refute both options. Socrates, however, takes exception:

My dear Clinias, do not be astonished if the arguments seem strange to you... These are the first steps in the initiations of the “wise.” For it is necessary, first of all, as Prodicus says, to learn the right use of words (ὁνομάτων ὑφότητος); indeed, this is what the two visitors are showing you. You did not realize that people use the word “learn” with two different purposes (ἐπὶ τῷ τοιὸδε). They call it learning when one begins by knowing nothing about a subject, and then later understands it, yes, but they also use the same name to describe when someone who already possesses knowledge uses the knowledge to analyze the same subject with respect to some action or discussion. The second is called understanding rather than learning, but from time to time (ἐστὶ δ’ ὅτε) it is called learning. But this is something you have not realized, as these fellows demonstrate. They hold the same word as applying to people in opposite conditions, to one who knows and one who does not. ... All this is just a little game about learning, and that’s why I say they are playing with you; I call it a game, because if one learned many such examples or even all of them, one would be no nearer to knowing the condition of the things themselves (τὰ πράγματα), but would be able to play with people because of fine distinctions in words. (*Euthyd*. 277d-278c)
Socrates is not satisfied with the form of “communication” practiced by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. He not only insists that the sophists’ question must be answered by a disambiguation; he also hints that the word “μανθάνειν” has an independent standard of correctness, since he claims that the phenomenon where a person who possesses knowledge uses this knowledge to examine a particular case would ordinarily (that is, normatively) be said to involve “understanding” (συνιέναι), not “learning.” The insistence on disambiguation invokes the Conventional Requirement, which insists that words be used unambiguously in intellectual discussions. The suggestion of an independent standard of correctness for words, on the other hand, involves the Naturalistic Requirement, since it suggests that there is a norm governing individual words. With characteristic irony, Socrates puts a generous interpretation on the intentions of the sophists, assuming that they (like Prodicus) are merely trying to make sure we use words with their proper meanings before engaging in philosophical discourse. Obviously, they have no such thing in mind.

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6 The particular terms here are not important to the normative point Socrates are making: that words should be precise and unambiguous. If things were reversed, so that the word “συνιέναι” usually denoted learning and the word μανθάνειν denoted understanding, it would make no difference. What matters is that there are two things instead of one: learning and understanding. An argument that elides the difference between the two is bound to be misleading. 7 In the Gorgias, Callicles accuses Socrates of a similar charge: exploiting the meaning of a word “by nature” with its meaning “by convention” (φύσει and νόμῳ, respectively; 482c-484a), in order to win arguments. Indeed, Callicles indicates that this sort of equivocation is popularly associated with orators and sophists, since he compares Socrates’s behavior to the behavior of a “demagogue” (482c). Socrates, in response, does not deny that this is a common tactic of demagogues, but he does deny that he himself is engaged in it. He insists that it is more shameful to do than to suffer wrong, both by nature and by convention (489a-b); in other words, he argues that our conventional judgments correspond to the natural truth of the matter. I think this move in the argument is significant, even if we take Socrates’s larger dialectical response to Callicles – that conventional judgments are noble because of the nobility (=power) of the multitudes – as a not-too-subtle example of Socrates drawing out the absurdity of his opponent’s assumptions. Socrates seems to hold himself to the dialectical standard Callicles proposes: that a refutation based on the interlocutor’s agreement with conventional beliefs is only a valid refutation if these conventional beliefs correspond to reality. This standard is either a corollary of the Naturalistic Requirement, or a close relative to it. 8 Again, this could be ironic, since some evidence suggests that the historical Prodicus considered the proper use of words a worthy end in itself, not a means to further ends. Thus Plato refers slightly to Prodicus’s pedantry in several dialogues (Prot. 341a-c, Lach. 197d, Charm. 163d), and in the Theaetetus, Socrates recommends that people who are not mentally pregnant go to Prodicus instead of him (151b).
This *Euthydemus* passage is best explained in context of the *Cratylus*. Socrates here says that “people use the word ‘learn’ with two different purposes” (ἐπὶ τῷ τοιῷδε)\(^9\), and the notion of using a given word with a given purpose – a “referential intention” – plays a central role in the *Cratylus*. In the course of questioning Hermogenes early in the dialogue, Socrates proposes an analogy: just as we discover what the proper shuttle for a particular object is by adapting the general notion of a shuttle to a particular “type of work” (e.g. weaving a tapestry, see Crat. 389b-c), we discover what the proper name is for an object (or concept) by adapting the general notion of naming to the particular purpose of the user of the name (the dialectician). This purpose is to indicate whatever the dialectician needs to indicate. Guided by the dialectician, the lawgiver must know how to put the natural and appropriate name for each thing into sounds and syllables, and to create and assign names with a view to the genuine name of the thing (βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἕκεῖνο δ ἔστιν ὄνομα) ... [Though] different legislators will not assign the same syllables, ... the legislator gives the appropriate form of the name (τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος εἶδος ἀποδιδὼ τὸ προσήκον) in whatever syllables. (389d-390a)

There is nothing simple about this passage, which is filled with language Plato elsewhere uses to discuss immaterial Forms, but the passage does clearly indicate that there are standards for naming. By these standards, there ought to be one, and only one, proper name for every purpose – every “meaning” – that the dialectician may express in the course of a single discussion.\(^10\) When we juxtapose this passage with the *Euthydemus*, we can see that the two sophists run afoul of proper


\(^10\) Socrates immediately qualifies this point, however, by saying that the one proper name of an object can be embodied in various combinations of syllables. So far as I can tell, this means something like the following: the “form” of a name can be instantiated in different phonemes, just as the same person might be composed of various groupings of atoms at various times.
dialectical naming precisely insofar as they allow that, in the course of a rational investigation, two separate *purposes* may be advanced by the use of the same name.

**II. Description and Reference in Modern Philosophy**

In this section, I will consider a number of resonances between Plato’s theory of language and its 20th century counterparts. Some translators have – perhaps somewhat anachronistically – translated “with two different purposes” (ἐπὶ τῷ τοιῶδε) by the phrase “in two different senses.”

Although it is unclear whether these translators had in mind a Fregean understanding of “sense,” applying the modern linguistic category of “sense” to the *Euthydemus* passage is instructive, all the more so in the context of the *Cratylus* passage. Two central aspects of Frege’s notion of a “sense,” as I understand it, are (1) that a name has content, or an “associated description,” and (2) that this associated description determines the referent of the name. If there is no object answering to the description, the name lacks a referent. Now, on Frege’s presentation of it, the description in #1 need not be analyzed for its correctness, since, if it were incorrect, it would fail to refer – and thus, *per impossibile*, fail to be incorrect. Frege’s theory is a bad place to look for any notion of “true” or “false” names, then. On any theory that allows names to be false, the name would have to have content without this content determining the referent of the name.

Various contemporary philosophers have suggested views along these lines. Ted Sider argues that certain joint-carving natural properties and relations are “intrinsically eligible meanings” that can be referred to by terms whose intentional content does not necessarily align with the thing being referred to. 12 Loosely, we might understand this to be the view that a word’s “sense” is not reference-

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11 Jowett, for instance, translates the passage with the word “sense,” and Gifford describes the passage as suggesting that “the same word can be used in two different senses” (3). Plato & E.H. Gifford, *Euthydemus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

fixing, and that the sense may thereby inaccurately describe its referent. A certain subset of natural properties are “reference magnets,” which attract the reference of terms that have identical (or nearly identical) extensions as the property being referred to. Supposing that 17th century English speakers were to use the name “maggot” with the understanding that maggots are a type of larvae that spontaneously generates, one might use the theory of reference magnetism to claim that these speakers successfully refer to maggots despite having a false or inadequate notion of what a maggot is. Instead of saying (as Frege might have to) that these people are correctly conceptualizing something that doesn’t happen to exist, Sider would argue that they are incorrectly conceptualizing something that does exist.

This is precisely the sort of linguistic relationship that exists between our words and the Forms, on Plato’s view. The word “justice” somehow “latches onto” the Form of Justice, even though nearly every human speaker will have a notion of justice that inadequately describes that Form. I will be calling cases where someone uses a word with false embedded content to successfully refer to a Form cases of “descriptively defective reference” (DDR). Without descriptively defective reference, our language would be entirely irrelevant to any investigation of the nature of the Forms, for reasons related to Meno’s Paradox. If you cannot learn anything about a Form without referring to it, and if you cannot refer to it without already having a true description of the Form, then you cannot learn anything about a Form. Any plausible notion of Platonic learning must be predicated on the ability to talk about the Forms in some inferior, defective way. (Rep. 505e, 510d-e; Phaedrus 249b-c, 250a-b).

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13 I owe the suggestion of the term “descriptively defective reference” to Eric Hiddleston.
The notion of descriptively defective reference is not only helpful to Plato, however. I would argue that DDR is a necessary feature of any linguistic theory upon which people are non-coincidentally able to refer to natural kinds which they do not yet understand. The Fregean view that a descriptive sense fixes reference – and thus that senses are necessarily accurate or vacuous (since they apply to nothing) – cannot explain how scientific progress is possible. If Thales thought that magnetism was “the action of an animate soul upon metals,” then descriptivists cannot say that Thales had a false view of magnetism; instead they must say that Thales did not have a view about magnetism, at all. Scientific understanding of concepts does not progress; instead, new concepts are constantly being forged in order to meet the demand of changing beliefs. And the prior concepts were not false, since they were not about anything. If we lack understanding of some natural kind, we will not even be able to refer to the kind, unless we simply stumble upon the right description of it.

Hilary Putnam, like Sider, is an “externalist” about reference; he believes that the relationship between a word and its referent (when such a referent exists) is not exclusively determined by the speaker’s referential intention. Putnam’s understanding of reference, however, is causal. I will give the briefest sketch of this view. There are two stages necessary to establish that a name N refers to an object O in a given language: (1) N is “baptized” to refer to O, usually ostensively, but sometimes using a description, (2) the name N is passed from link to link, with each new learner of the word intending to refer to O. This sketch surely describes something far closer

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15 According to Kripke, who also explicates this view, “The description used is not synonymous with the name it introduces but rather fixes its reference. ... Usually a baptizer is acquainted in some sense with the object he names and is able to name is ostensively.” Saul Kripke, Naming and Necessity (Harvard University Press, 1980), note 42.
to a “naïve” or “pretheoretic” view of language than Frege’s view; and thus it is not surprising that, as I will argue, Plato holds something like it. The naïve view would just hold that words refer to objects because someone once gave the object the name, and the name “stuck.”

Putnam adds to this view (among other things) that the name which “stuck” to the object has certain connotations attached to it: he calls these connotations the name’s “stereotype.” A stereotype is the descriptive component of a word: it is a set of properties conventionally associated with a given term, whether or not these properties are properties of the referent of the term; given a DDR framework, a stereotype will be a description of the referent that may or may not be accurate. As Putnam explains,

The properties mentioned in the stereotype ... are not being analytically predicated of each member of the extension, or, indeed, of any members of the extension. It is not analytic that all tigers have stripes, nor that some tigers have stripes; it is not analytic that all lemons are yellow, nor that some lemons are yellow; it is not even analytic that I tigers are animals or that lemons are fruits. The stereotype is associated I with the word; it is not a necessary and sufficient condition for membership in the corresponding class, nor even for being a normal member of the corresponding class.

It may be that the objects stereotypically assigned a given property (or Form) do not in fact instantiate that property. An action might fall under Meno’s stereotypical notion of “virtue” without actually participating in the Form of Virtue. There is, then, a radical separation between our beliefs about...

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16 Stereotypes, for Putnam, only exist for names of types, not for proper names of individuals. Proper names do not have associated stereotypes; their relationship to their referent is unmediated by any intervening information.

17 When our scientific understanding of something improves, this is a matter of our correcting false stereotypes. Suppose that we live in 1900, and we believe that an “atom” is an indivisible building block of matter. Then, through the experiments of physicists, we discover that the things we were calling “atoms” are divisible. Did we just discover that these things are not “atoms,” or did we discover something new and surprising about atoms? Putnam prefers the latter explanation, since our semantics must account for scientific progress in a way that accepts new descriptions of the old things. Although competent speakers of a language might not share any single “sense” attached to the word “atom,” it would appear much clearer that competent speakers in 1900 would share a common stereotype of atoms – a stereotype which happened to be false. A term’s connection to its referent is not fixed by its sense, but instead explained causally; when an old friend tells me about his wife Sally, I can begin to use the term “Sally” as a referring term, despite the fact that I know almost nothing about Sally.

18 Putnam, “Explanation and Reference,” 204-205.
properties and the characteristics of the properties themselves, but this separation does not make us incapable of actually referring to and investigating the properties (i.e. the Forms).

My purpose in this section has been to explain how a view like Plato’s view on language might be plausible – at least plausible enough, with certain adjustments, to merit the attention of serious philosophers of language. I earlier wrote that “Plato holds not only (a) the odd view that names can be true or false, but also (b) the unusual view that the truth of these names depends upon the beliefs of those who have control of the names.” The first of these views is hardly outlandish, as it turns out, since it is shared by any linguistic approach that allows for descriptively defective reference. The second view is an aspect of causal theories of language, like those advanced by authors like Putnam. These causal theories compare favorably to the Cratylus, since they describe how names can be “baptized” – presumably by a namegiver – and how the notions of the namegiver can be inscribed on the resultant name.

As it turns out, then, Plato is not merely an externalist about reference; he also appears to be a causal theorist about reference. On his view, namegivers “baptize” names with their own (possibly inaccurate) stereotype of the thing, but the name somehow sticks to the thing whether or not the stereotype is accurate (Crat. 431d-e). Insofar as Plato gives us any notion of why this name sticks, it must be a causal one: the namegiver has some acquaintance with the thing named – most likely, he has an acquaintance with particular objects that participate in the Form being referred to. Anyone who has seen beautiful things, then, is capable of giving a name for beauty; but only the

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19 Contrast Robinson, who says that “the most fundamental falsehood” of Plato’s theory of names is that “it assumes that the business of a name is to describe its nominate, whereas it is merely to refer to that nominate” (133). Robinson’s criticism, if valid, would apply equally to the theories of Sider and Putnam. R. Robinson, Essays in Greek Philosophy (Oxford, 1969).
person who has “seen” the Form of Beauty will be able to give an accurate name – that is, an accurate stereotypical description.

When Socrates, in the *Euthydemus*, says, “People use the word ‘learn’ with two different purposes,” then, he is saying that there are two different stereotypical descriptions that people assign to the phoneme “learn,” and that the word is ambiguous between these two descriptions. Either of these descriptions could be false of the referent, or could fail to refer to any referent. Plato gives us a distinction – though we might like it to be sharper distinction – between name-as-phoneme and name-as-sense. Thus, in the *Cratylus*, we are told that the name “Hermogenes” can be used to refer to Hermogenes, despite the fact that the content of the name “Hermogenes” is false to Hermogenes (429b-431d): Hermogenes is “not a son of Hermes” (Herme-genes), since Hermes is the ultimate artisan, whereas Hermogenes is “not a skillful artisan of words” (408b). By distinguishing phonemes from “purposes,” Plato places a particular emphasis on the beliefs and associations which speakers of the language attach to the referent they intend to indicate.

Individual names\(^{20}\) have content, then, which is implied by the way they are used. A name is false when the beliefs embedded in that name are false; that is, when the referent of the name does not have the relevant property. Formalized, we might call this the

**Correspondence Theory of Reference:** The name “X” is true if and only if the descriptive content associated with X is true of the Form of X.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{20}\) That is, the “purposes” of the names. From this point in the chapter onward, I will simply use the term “name” to refer to the purpose of the name, as opposed to the mere phoneme which carries that purpose.

\(^{21}\) Cf. Partee: “The worth of [individual names] depends on their conformity to the eternal Forms” (120). The connection between names and Forms should be qualified, however, by the mention of possible stable non-Formal realities in note #4. The distinction between Formal and non-Formal realities in Plato’s thought – if there is one – does not play any major role in this dissertation. As a matter of convenience, I will simply use the term “Forms” throughout the dissertation, without continually making reference to stable non-Forms. Morriss Henry Partee, “Plato’s Theory of Language,” *Foundations of Language* 8 no. 1 (1972): 113-132.
According to this theory, names have standards of correctness despite the fact that the connection between a name and its referent is predominantly conventional (Crat. 435b).\textsuperscript{22} The theory does not, however, insist that every name admit of truth and falsity, since one can imagine names that do not refer to any Form (or any fixed reality). Thus, in the Cratylus, Socrates expresses concern that words like κάλος, ἀγαθός, or ἐπιστήμη might be false, but he does not appear concerned about errors in the case of objects which are “never in the same state” (439e), e.g., ordinary material objects.\textsuperscript{23}

The fact that we attach certain content to the names of unchanging objects, like virtues or mathematical entities, paves the way for miscommunication, since this content is potentially false. At the same time, we must communicate – indeed, if we are to do philosophy, we must sometimes communicate about realities at an extremely precise level (cf. Theat. 184c). One central focus of the Cratylus, then, is to clarify the nature of sophistical errors in language use, the kind of errors manifested in the Euthydemus passage, and to explain exactly what role language can have in the education of a citizen. I now turn to the question of how Plato approaches this task.

III. Plato’s View of Names in the Cratylus

In the Cratylus, Socrates draws an explicit distinction between two types of education: (a) education through names and (b) education through things. One can either learn about things

\textsuperscript{22} Thus Gail Fine says that in the Cratylus, Plato is “assessing the adequacy of conceptual schemes. He is asking what natural kinds there are and how divisions of words should match them. ... A name is correct, then, not just so far as it picks out a natural kind, but only if it also reveals the nature of that kind, or correctly describes it” (297). I think that Fine is wrong, however, to say that Plato “rejects any causal theory of names. [He] will not allow ‘n’ to be a name of x just in case there is an appropriate causal connection between ‘n’ and x. ... For ‘n’ to name x, it must reveal the ρασ or outline of the essence of x; that is to say, it must correctly describe x’s essence. ... The correctness of names consists, then, in their descriptive adequacy” (298). In this passage, Fine blurs the distinction between a name referring, and a name referring correctly. Plato’s insistence that names can be false, on the contrary, relies on the notion that a name can refer without referring correctly, i.e. without correctly describing the nature of its referent. Gail Fine, “Plato on Naming,” Philosophical Quarterly 27 (1977): 290–301.

\textsuperscript{23} Cf. “It would be especially likely to discover correct names pertaining to things that always naturally exist” (ἀεί οντα κατι περικότα, Crat. 397b).
“through [their] names” (δι᾽ ὄνομάτων) or “through the things themselves” (τὰ πράγματα ... δι᾽ αὑτῶν, 439a). These two possibilities are mentioned toward the end of the dialogue, in the context of Cratylus’s insistence that the best – indeed, the only – way to educate a person in reality (τὰ ὄντα) is through the use of accurate names. As Socrates expresses the view, “whenever someone knows what kind of name something has ... he also knows the thing, since the thing is like its name” (Crat. 435d-e). Socrates comes to reject this view, as we shall see.

Cratylus’s view about the efficacy of education through names is motivated by the notion that a name (ὄνομα) is an “imitation” (μίμημα, 423b) or an “image” (or “likeness,” εἰκόνας, 439a) of its referent, a view that the dialogue appears to take quite seriously. Cratylus himself believes that there are natural standards for names, but his conventionalist counterpart, Hermogenes, also agrees with the theory that names are imitations. The theory that a name is an imitation, indeed, is consistently a central focus of Plato’s comments about language. In the Timaeus, speech is seen as an “imitation of the unwavering ways of God” (μιμούμενοι τὰς τοῦ θεοῦ πάντως ἀπλανεῖς, 47c) and words are said to be “akin to the matter which they describe” (29b). In the Critias, all language is seen as a matter of imagery and representation (Crit. 107b). And in the Republic, falsehood in words is an “imitation” (μίμημά) of the soul’s unfortunate state (382b-c).

What does Plato mean by saying that a name is the εἰκών, or a μίμημα, of its referent? A long digression in the middle of the Cratylus seems to take the imagistic account to refer almost exclusively to the way that the sounds and structure of names can be said to imitate the real nature of the things they describe. As in the Sophist, a name represents in speech (ἐν λόγῳ) what the object

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25 The entirety of this passage compares favorably to Rep. 400b-402a, which discusses music and speech as oriented toward the imitation of good and bad moral character.
is in reality (ἕν ἔργῳ). Socrates and Hermogenes expound upon hundreds of etymologies, which have been the subject of much critical consternation, centered around the question of why Plato would write such a prolonged investigation on premises that he later seems to reject.

This rejection comes late in the Cratylus (435a), when Socrates, perhaps drawing on the discussion of being reminded by similars or dissimilars in the Phaedo (74a), declares that we are capable of communicating (or "giving indications," δήλωμα γίγνεται) by making an utterance (φθέγγομαι) that is unlike the object it indicates. He draws from this point the conclusion that, although "words should as far as possible resemble things ... this dragging in of similarity (ὁμοιότης) is a stingy\textsuperscript{26} thing, which has to be supplemented with an odious reliance on convention" (435c). But even with this conventionalist turn, Socrates does not reject the imitative model of names.\textsuperscript{27} In practice, we resort to convention (συνθήκη) in order to communicate, but the use of likenesses would, if practiced, lead to "the most perfect state of language" (435c).

When he discusses the subject of the ability of names to educate, Cratylus contends that this ability stems from their similarity to the objects they denote (435e), and Socrates does not disagree. Quite the contrary: he seems to assume that it is an \textit{a priori} truth that like can be used to teach about like (435e; cf. Rep. 490b, 611e; Tim. 90d). Instead, Socrates's attack on education through names starts when he observes that, even on an imitative theory of names, "learning names" need not be understood as the same thing as "learning things." Whoever first gave things their names did so


\textsuperscript{27} Socrates rejects the dragging in of "ὁμοιότης" (similarity), which seems to imply that names are not the same sort of things (ὁμός + οἶος) as things, but not that names are not images of things.
under the impression that the things named had certain qualities (οἷα ἡγεῖτο εἶναι τὰ πράγματα), and so he assigned these same qualities (τοιαῦτα) to the names (436b). But this person may have been mistaken about the object’s qualities, a mistake that would infect the qualities of the name, as well. Thus, the person who learns by names alone is subject to being deceived. The implication is that a language that accurately created likenesses of the objects named – that embodied a “most perfect state of language” – could be used to teach accurately (whether or not it provided ἐπιστήμη), but that Greek is not such a language.

This shortcoming on the part of the Greek language explains Socrates’s complaint that words like βέβαιος or ἐπιστήμη embed false and ambiguous information, at 437a-c. For the sake of argument, Socrates concedes to Cratylus that all things are in flux, but he points out that the names themselves suggest something different. When the namegiver instituted the name βέβαιος, he clearly must have thought that things were sometimes stable, since the word contains the notion of fixedness (βάσεως, 437a), and similarly with ἐπιστήμη, which suggests station (ἵστησιν). The problem is not that the namegiver failed to understand what the syllables be-bai-on (or ep-hi-ste-me) represented onomatopoeically, but rather that the namegiver had false beliefs about the relevant objects: the namegiver falsely believed that “stable” earthly objects (or human knowledge) were not subject to Heraclitean flux. Socrates, of course, need not endorse this judgment, which is merely a consequence of Cratylus’s view. But the point about naming stands regardless.

It is hard to know what to make of such a position. Clearly, part of Plato’s problem with sophists like Euthydemus is that they use words deceptively, which seems to suggest that their use of language is “imperfect.” The imperfection of their language, however, does not always appear to be

28 The point about “ambiguity” in 437a is made because earlier in the text (412a) the interlocutors had judged ἐπιστήμη to suggest motion, not rest. Apparently, it suggests both, and thus it is, as a name, doubly flawed.
etymological; it is at least sometimes semantic. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do not proceed in their sophistical routine by using deceptive primary names or errant etymologies; no, their problem is either that (a) they exploit the fact that the word “learn” can be used with two different meanings, or that (b) they exploit contradictory beliefs that Greeks ordinarily have about the concept of learning. Either of these problems was, plausibly, very difficult to express, given the philosophical terminology Plato had available to him: the one because it involves what we call “senses” of words; the other because it involves the notion of a “concept.” Note, however, the resonance between these two errors and the Conventional and Naturalistic Requirements. The first explanation violates the Conventional Requirement, since it involves using a single word (i.e. phoneme) ambiguously. The second explanation violates the Naturalistic Requirement, because one cannot consistently hold that an object like learning, which genuinely has a nature (τί ποτ’ ἐστι), also has contradictory properties.

On either explanation, the sophist manipulates words (ὄνοματα), and this manipulation of words acts as a form of obfuscation in the educational process. But mistaken primary names or etymologies do not make any appearance in either of these explanations, and it may be hard to see how the Cratylus’s attack on education through names could possibly apply to ordinary non-philological education that went on in Athens. Since I intend to argue that education through names was the strategy of ordinary sophists – people like Protagoras and Prodicus – I will have to now turn my attention to the question of whether education through names was necessarily a matter of etymology. I do not believe that it is, and that is what I intend to demonstrate in section IV.

29 The example of this process in the Euthydemus is not unusual among Plato’s dialogues for its use of deceptive or ambiguous language, but rather for the self-consciousness of this deception, and for Socrates’s exposure of the ambiguities involved – hence the fact that Socrates innocently assumes that the sophists are trying to make a methodological point. Sophists in other dialogues are no less likely to exploit deceptive assumptions about words. The shifting positions of Thrasymachus (in Book I of the Republic) concerning the nature of justice are a good example of such procedures. See Rachel Barney, Names and Nature in Plato’s Cratylus. (Routledge, 2001), 11.
IV. Scholarly Interpretations of the *Cratylus*

The *Cratylus* is filled with fanciful and unrealistic etymologies. The word areté, for instance, is traced to the words ἀεὶ ῥέον, since these mean “always flow,” and according to Socrates, “the flow of the good soul is always free” (415d). The central puzzle behind the *Cratylus* is this: if Plato means to say something serious about language in the *Cratylus*, why does he focus so much on the exploration of contrived etymologies? I have no innovative response to that puzzle here, but I will object to several unsatisfactory ways of solving the puzzle. The responses I have in mind are various: they may involve the claim that the bookends of the dialogue are merely a platform for a curious game of etymologies, or the claim that the dialogue is wholly pessimistic about language, or the claim that the dialogue is a *reductio* on the notion that names are imitations of their referents. The common thread in these readings seems to be this: that the *Cratylus* does not mean to establish any genuine connection between naming and knowledge, not even a connection rooted in the notion of imitation. All of the readings, then, either (a) deny that Plato ever meant to imply that the certain words can be correct or incorrect, insofar as they are guided by the dialectician (despite 390d), or (b) argue that the later portions of the dialogue revise this view, problematizing the notion of names being false.

The first sort of view is held by scholars who argue that the *Cratylus* contains few, if any, views that Plato actually took seriously. Fowler, for example, peremptorily dismisses the *Cratylus*:

30 Shane Ewegen, for example, has recently written a book denying that any of the straightforward conclusions drawn by Socrates in the *Cratylus* are meant seriously. On Ewegen’s view, the *Cratylus* is a sort of comedy of errors, in which the views of Hermogenes and Cratylus are held up as instructive and amusing examples of how not to interpret names. Ewegen denies that Socrates genuinely believes there is any such thing as “education through things.” Instead, he argues that a central focus of the *Cratylus* is to in fact disprove the hypothesis that names are images of their referent. This alleged disproof would establish that names cannot be images of their referents under conventionalist or naturalist assumptions about language; thus, under the plausible assumption that conventionalism and naturalism are the only two options, names cannot be images of their referents tout court. S. M. Ewegen, *Plato's Cratylus: The Comedy of Language*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
“The Cratylus cannot be said to be of great importance in the development of the Platonic system, as it treats of a special subject somewhat apart from general philosophic theory.”

Ewegen presents an argument for a similar conclusion. According to him, the idea that the dialectician supervises the creation of words (390c) has the seriously undesirable consequence that it implies some sort of knowledge that exists independently from language. For Ewegen, however, “education through things” is a ridiculous notion that Plato could not possibly hold. If knowledge is propositional, then you cannot have knowledge without words. Since the namegiver did not have preexisting words, the namegiver did not have preexisting knowledge (extralinguistic access to reality).

Ewegen’s argument fails because Plato does not have a straightforwardly propositional understanding of knowledge. Plato does not assume that knowledge must be capable of being put into words, and he certainly does not assume that knowledge can be put into words without some loss in fidelity. To the contrary, it is Plato who famously claimed that written words can do no more

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32 Moreover, the comments about the limitations of language later in the dialogue, if taken seriously, would mean that not even the dialectician could put knowledge into words or to express it. As Ewegen complains, “One would condemn oneself to silence, unable to bring the look of a thing into speech: for the moment that one attempted to speak of the thing one would submit it to the very hazards of human λόγος that one was seeking to evade” (173).

33 Gulley, for example, argues that Plato’s conception of δόξα is propositional, but his conception of episteme is not. In a similar vein, Gonzalez defends a traditional interpretation of the objects of knowledge in the Republic against the views of Gail Fine, arguing that episteme in the Republic functions on a sort of acquaintance model, whereby the objects of knowledge are the Forms themselves, not propositions about the Forms. In this dissertation, I will not specifically address Fine’s arguments against the acquaintance model of Platonic knowledge, but I will be largely operating in the tradition that embraces the traditional interpretation against hers. Many of the things I say could be translated into the language of a veridical reading of epistemology in the Republic; some of the things I say could not. For a good overview of the controversy between Fine and her critics, see Allan Silverman’s entry on “Plato’s Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology” in the Stanford Encyclopedia. Norman Gulley, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (Greenwood Press, 1962). Gail Fine, “Knowledge and Belief in Republic V,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 60 no. 2 (1978): 121-139. Francisco J. Gonzalez, “Nonpropositional Knowledge in Plato,” *Apeiron* 31 no.3 (1998): 235-284. Allan Silverman, “Plato’s Middle Period Metaphysics and Epistemology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/plato-metaphysics/.

34 Indeed, one plausible reading of the Theaetetus is that the dialogue is meant to prove that knowledge cannot be put into words, by showing that every attempt to make knowledge propositional ultimately fails. Cf. Alexander Nehamas, “Episteme and Logos in Plato’s Later Thought,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 66 no. 1 (1984): 11-36.
than “remind one who knows” (*Phaedr*. 275d)\(^{35}\) – the same Plato who wrote in the *Symposium* that διαλέγεσθαι (dialectic) points the way to “one single form of knowledge” (τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην), a “wondrous vision,” which will be “neither some sentence (τις λόγος) nor some piece of knowledge (τις ἐπιστήμη, *Sym*. 210d-211a).\(^{36}\) Clearly this wondrous vision cannot be put into words. Thus the author of the Seventh Letter (Plato or one of his early followers) says that names are not “stable” (βέβαιον, 343b), and that their instability makes any “reality that is expressed in words or illustrated in objects liable to easy refutation by the evidence of the senses” (343c). The comparison between words and illustrations is, if anything, profoundly suggestive of the identification of words with images/imitations, as is the insistence that failures of words are analogous to failures in illustration.\(^{37}\)

A second group of authors acknowledge that the *Cratylus* aims at a serious result, but nevertheless argue that the dialogue is ultimately pessimistic about the hope of finding correct names. So, for example, Susan Levin contends that, although Plato had “serious intentions” in composing the *Cratylus*, “these intentions do not result in the elaboration ... of substantive positive proposals. Instead, following a protracted investigation, Plato rejects approaches to the notions of naturalness and appropriateness that are based on the constituency of onomata.”\(^ {38}\) These readings,

\(^{35}\) Shortly after this passage in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates does indeed refer to a type of “living language” (λόγον ... ζώντα, 276a) that “accompanies” knowledge, but this living language is never said to be expressible into ordinary words, whether spoken or written. Rather, the living language is “inscribed on the student’s soul” (276a); it is identified with the ability (δυνατὸς) to defend one’s position, and to know when to speak and when to remain silent. The implication here seems to be that a person who knows how to speak the living language necessarily possesses the τέχνη of dialectic.

\(^{36}\) At 211a, Socrates discusses individual pieces of knowledge (τις ἐπιστήμη) as things clearly separable and inferior to knowledge as such. Thus, the “single form of knowledge” referred to here cannot be identified with τις ἐπιστήμη. Cf. Letter VII 342a-343e, where Plato implicitly makes the same distinction.

\(^{37}\) See *Crat*. 432a-c, where Socrates argues that no illustration (or statue) of Cratylus could be entirely accurate, since the illustration would then have to have all the characteristics of Cratylus – in which case there would be two Cratyluses, and no illustrations.

in general, take the etymological portion of the dialogue very seriously, and think that the defeatism about etymological accuracy at 435a-c indicates a thoroughgoing Platonic pessimism about the correctness of names.  

V. Interpreters on Names and Education in the *Cratylus*

Rachel Barney is an outstanding example of this latter group. An analysis of her reading of the *Cratylus* will help to clarify the issues at stake in my own arguments, and - I hope - demonstrate how one might both hold the view that education through names is generally deceptive without also holding that names are merely conventional entities.

Barney says a number of useful things about the notion of “education through names,” a process which she delightfully dubs “onomastikê.” Barney considers the scope of onomastikê to correspond to the scope of rhetoric: Since “the application of primary names, complex names and even *logoi* are all part of the craft of verbal ‘painting’, ... the onomastic craft is thus also identical with rhetoric properly understood” (99). She interprets Socrates’ naturalistic criticism of Hermogenes as a hopeful stage of the *Cratylus*, during which Socrates entertains an idea he will later reject: that names might reliably “[disclose] the natures of the things they name through a particular semantic content” (97). The semantic content is possessed by a name “by virtue of its mimetic content,” and

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39 Thus, Timothy Baxter describes the *Cratylus* as a criticism of sophistical ideas of naming, in which Socrates supports no positive theses: “Greek thinkers and poets had consistently put too much trust in names, implicitly regarding them as surrogates for the things they names. Such trust could only make sense when dealing with an ideal language, which Greek was certainly not.” Baxter’s analysis makes a good deal of sense, but fails, I think, to explain why Socrates never repudiates certain aspects within the sophistical repertoire: for instance, the claim that names are imitations, or the claim that names admit of “correctness.” One can agree with Baxter that Plato engages in parody without believing that the people he parodies (e.g. Prodicus) were wholly confused. Timothy Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato’s Critique of Naming* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 184.

40 Barney, *Names and Nature*. David Sedley, like Barney, argues that the etymologies are of central importance to the *Cratylus*, but Sedley thinks that Plato is much more optimistic about the capacity that etymologies have to successfully describe the objects to which they refer. D Sedley, *Plato’s Cratylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
the semantic disclosure is accurate if “there is a natural relation of resemblance between the letters and the nature of the object named” (98).

What Barney is pointing out here is a version of what I have called the Naturalistic Requirement, the requirement that certain types of names (especially the names of Forms) link up with the things they describe in a normatively adequate way. On Barney’s view, however, Plato considers the mimetic content of a word to be present exclusively in its etymological structure. Although there are multiple etymological structures that can all capture the essence of a single given object (different words can correctly name a “tree”; 389d-390a, 394a-b), the nature of the object named constrains the etymological structure of any name. Any kind of scissors will work to cut paper, but an apple won’t work at all.41 The correctness of a name is wholly connected to its etymology. If we apply this account to the final sections of the Cratylus, we will find that the inability of onomastikê to educate is rooted in its etymological deficiencies. On Barney’s view, then, naturalism in language – even though Socrates praises it as a desideratum (435c) – ultimately plays no meaningful role, certainly not a role in education. Although earlier, in her analysis of the hopeful section of the text, Barney had suggested that onomastikê could be a “subsidiary of philosophical dialectic” and that the giver of names, guided by the dialectician, might create “a language strictly governed by a philosophical understanding of the natures of things” (101-102), later in the dialogue Barney takes Socrates to reject all such optimistic fervor. “Since names as such turn out to be images, no ... strong distinction between correct and incorrect [names], between the real thing and the

41 Thus, Barney connects the etymological section very closely with the Tool Analogy at 388a-390c. For an interesting survey of reasons why the Tool Analogy is meant quite earnestly in the Cratylus, see Imogen Smith, “Taking the Tool Analogy Seriously: Forms and Naming in the Cratylus,” The Cambridge Classical Journal 60 (2014), 75-99.
imitation, can properly be drawn” (139). In the *Cratylus*, “a perfectly correct language is impossible, and a partially correct language, therefore, of no particular use” (141).

This formidable interpretation of the *Cratylus* relies on the premise that the sole criterion of correctness of names is etymological accuracy. There is evidence, however, that Socrates’s position on this premise changes in the latter portion of the dialogue. Consider, for example, the nature of the namegiver’s error at 436b-c.

Soc. Why, clearly he who first gave names gave them according to his conception of the things which they signified—did he not?
Crat. True.
Soc. And if his conception was erroneous (μὴ ὄρθως ἔγειτο⁴²), and he gave names according to his conception, what do you think will happen to us, when we follow him? Shall we not be deceived by him?

The error manifests itself as an error in primary names and etymology, but the actual error is an error in belief: the namegiver has false beliefs about the object named. The namegiver must “know” the things he names (438a), and a namegiver who fails in this respect is a bad “craftsman of names” (431e). The problem is not that the bad namegiver does not know how to give names correctly, nor is it that etymologies are useless; rather, it is that the namegiver does not properly conceptualize the object he is naming. As Putnam would have it, the namegiver does not have an accurate stereotype, and so he crafts a name that enshrines his misunderstanding of the object named. He gives the wrong name to an object because he does not recognize what type of object it really is.

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⁴² Spellman has a sensible argument for this point. Observing that words are portrayed as images throughout the dialogue, she nevertheless argues that Socrates rejects the notion that this notion of a word-as-image can be cashed out in terms of etymology. Therefore, “if the dialogue is not to be dismissed as just silliness, one must find another way for language to be an image.” Spellman, “Naming and Knowing,” 200.
⁴³ I translate the verb ἔγειτο with the noun “conception.” I do this, not out of any desire to overload the Greek with the notion of a “concept,” but merely to indicate the *set of beliefs* that one has about an object. I will use the word “conception” in that way throughout the dissertation.
It is plausible, then, as Jeffrey Gold has argued, that the word ὀνόματα is used ambiguously in the Cratylus. On the one hand, an ὀνομα could be a mere sound: a sensory object subject to the ordinary limitations of sensory objects, though (unlike most other objects) used symbolically. On the other hand, however, an ὀνομα is a semantic unit that plays a certain role in communication; Gold suggests that this meaning of ὀνομα roughly corresponds to the modern notion of a “word type.” By this latter understanding of names, the English word “hat” would be literally the same ὀνομα as the French word “chapeau.”

The important thing to notice about the move Gold is making, in introducing types, is that types are content-rich. Whereas a mere sound can only refer to a thing, a type plausibly carves out a semantic space, such that tokens are tokens of that particular type only if they occupy that space. Not every curved thing is a ball, but any competent speaker of the language would immediately know that a non-curved object could not be a ball. Thus, in the Cratylus, the namegiver individuates names on the basis of their “force” (δύναμις, 394a-b), where the force of a word is clearly something content-rich, but at the same time something distinct from the referent of the word. Gold's

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44 I shall leave it to the reader to determine whether Plato egregiously and ironically violates the Conventional Requirement, in using the word “name” ambiguously. For more on Gold’s view, see Jeffery B. Gold, “The Ambiguity of ‘Name’ in Plato’s Cratylus,” Philosophical Studies 34 no. 3 (1978): 223-251.
45 Cf. Wittgenstein: “One could say that the real name of an object was what all symbols that signified it had in common. Thus, one by one, all kinds of composition would prove to be unessential to a name.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus: German and English Edition, trans. C.K. Ogden (Routledge, 1981), 3.3411.
46 As will become clear from my analysis, I certainly do not believe that scholars should understand the Forms themselves to be types or concepts. Plato’s theory of Forms posits that the joints of reality are not subject to human conventions (Stat. 262b, Crat. 438d). Since types are plausibly formed along at least partially conventional lines, types cannot plausibly be identified with Forms.
47 The introduction of the term “δύναμις” is a response to the question of how names could have correctness (ὀρθότης, 391b), a question which Socrates previously answered (at least in part) by an appeal to the notion of a “form of the name” (τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἔδιος) at 390a (compare ἀυτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα at 389d) and to the “true natural names of each thing” (τὸ ἑκάστῳ φύσις περίκος ὄνομα) referred to at 389d. For the purposes of this chapter, I will not enter into the controversy about what Socrates means by these phrases. Whatever these phrases mean, however, it is clear that they are not meant to indicate mere sounds, and it is clear that they are evaluative in nature. According to 389-390, the namegiver must be able to somehow embody these “forms” or “natures” in ordinary words. This task of embodiment is clearly the same task Socrates discusses with Cratylus at the end of the dialogue, though the end of the dialogue emphasizes that the task is prone to error.
approach is further exemplified by J.L. Ackrill, in a paper called “Language and Reality in Plato’s Cratylus.” As Ackrill puts it:

We might call the name identified by the idea that it expresses the ideal name (as opposed to the ordinary name). An ordinary name is made of particular sounds or letters; but the ideal name is a semantically defined unit not made of sounds or letters. It is in effect the meaning of all the ordinary names in a group of synonyms: and one might well call it the name-as-concept, in that what synonyms all express is the same concept.

Ackrill emphasizes the roles that names with false conceptual content play in Socrates’s refutation of Cratylus, but both Ackrill and Gold use Socrates’s refutation of Hermogenes to ground their notion of a “name-as-concept.” When the later section of the Cratylus discusses names as being semantically deceptive in the hands of sophists, then, the earlier section of the Cratylus has already set in place a framework from which to evaluate a word’s correctness on the basis of semantics, not merely on the basis of etymology. Indeed, we see this framework playing at least one very concrete role in Socrates’s discussion with Cratylus: the name “man” is said to be incorrect in cases where it assigns a “likeness of a woman” to a “man,” despite the fact that we are not told that any etymological error is being made; the error is a purely semantic one (430b-d). “Man” is a concept-rich name and, as such, it is not the proper tool with which to indicate a woman.

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49 Compare Crat. 390a.

50 Ackrill, “Language and Reality,” 44.

51 It is not clear, of course, that Plato realizes the extent to which he is equivocating on the word “ὄνομα.” Thus Evans comments that Plato “does not recognize any fundamental distinction between the linguistic act of applying a name to a thing and the mental act of applying a concept to a thing” (323). Matthew Evans, “Plato on the Norms of Speech and Thought,” Phronesis 56 no.4 (2011): 323.

52 Barney points out that Hermogenes’s claim, early in the Cratylus, that the names “horse” and “man” are interchangeable “is hardly plausible if [these] ‘names’ are taken to include the senses or meanings which, we normally think, should guide their use.” She calls these senses “semantic content.” Now the fact that “man” and “woman” are not interchangeable, according to Socrates’s later statement, indicates that he believes genuine names in a language have semantic content. Barney thinks this semantic content is undermined by the weakened role etymology plays later in the dialogue, but nothing in the dialogue indicates any such thing. The belief that a name has semantic content is completely independent from the belief that this semantic content is exclusively onomatopoeic and compositional.
Although the syllables assigned to various conceptual ὀνόματα may be merely conventional, the content of the name can be correct or incorrect based on very precise standards: the Forms. This is why Kretzmann, in his highly influential paper on the Cratylus, takes Plato to be presenting an “objective taxonomic correctness” of names – what I am calling the Naturalistic Requirement. Although Barney is quite right to emphasize that names are sensory imitations of the things they refer to, she is mistaken to suggest that Socrates primarily measures their correctness compositionally, on the basis of their etymological structure.

A fuller treatment of Barney’s book is not possible here, but it is worth mentioning one commitment my interpretation has, in contrast to Barney’s interpretation. Early in the Cratylus, Socrates suggests to Hermogenes, in the course of the “tool argument,” that conceptual names are in principle distinguishable on the basis of their force (δύναμις). Barney argues that the later portion of the Cratylus rejects this standard for linguistic individuation of names, and replaces it wholesale with the notion of names as images which mimic their referents compositionally. According to my interpretation, however, Plato maintains the same basic (conceptual) model of names as images throughout the dialogue, despite an abortive attempt to add a further level of naturalism through the use of onomatopoeic imitation.

VI. Semantics in the Cratylus

The introduction of conceptual ὀνόματα introduces a new framework through which we might understand the action of the namegiver at 436b-d. Prior to naming, the namegiver has certain beliefs about a particular object, beliefs that could be true or false. These beliefs guide the namegiver

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think Socrates maintains the first view (consistent with his responses to Hermogenes), but eventually rejects the second view. Barney, Names and Nature, 7.

in crafting a (conceptual) ὄνομα for the object\textsuperscript{54}; false beliefs about an object lead to the creation of a deceptive ὄνομα. This ὄνομα is deceptive both etymologically and conceptually. The result is that sophists need not use misleading etymologies to deceive; they can also use equivocation, or they can exploit culturally false beliefs about words.

Once we combine the notion that a name could be a “type” or a “concept” with a pretheoretic, causal view of linguistic reference, we end up with a view almost indistinguishable from Putnam’s view, which I described above. Each name (i.e., name type) is packed with information, containing a certain stereotype about its referent. The relationship between the name and its referent is historically fixed by an initial baptism. The referent of the name does not change depending on what sorts of things the stereotype actually describes: “Pythagoras” will still refer to Pythagoras, even if the name “Pythagoras” embeds information that is false of Pythagoras and true of Zeno. The information contained in the stereotype will be true if it accurately describes the referent, and false otherwise.

The picture that emerges from my analysis of the Cratylus is this: though it is desirable that words display the nature of their referents through etymology, they may also capture this nature by “packing in” semantic stereotypes which correspond to it. Names become content-rich. The namegiver should be faulted not only when he uses syllables that do not resemble their referent, but also when his names contain false semantic content.\textsuperscript{55} To use an example: the word δικαιοσύνη (justice), as it is used in the Greek language, carries with it certain information: that the thing it

\textsuperscript{54} Thus Spellman says that “what is put into the matter which will become words are correct beliefs about Forms.” Spellman, “Naming and Knowing,” 203.

\textsuperscript{55} Thus, the Eleatic Stranger in the Sophist identifies the sophist as an imitator, and says that the sophist is able to “create with his pencil representations bearing the same name as real things, [and thus] deceive the innocent minds of children” (234b).
indicates is a virtue, for instance. Without knowing what justice essentially is, one might nevertheless know that - provided one accepts the Greek stereotype of justice - one is committed to the belief anything that is not a virtue is not justice. Indeed, this is precisely what Callicles accuses Socrates of doing in the course of an elenchus: harnessing stereotypical meanings of terms to his advantage in producing a contradiction, whether or not he genuinely endorses those stereotypical meanings. (The stereotypical meaning is “by convention,” νόμῳ; the genuine meaning is “by nature,” φύσει, Gorg. 482c483d).

What I have written here is, admittedly, only a sketch, but it provides us with the outlines of a Platonic analysis of how language can be false or misleading at the level of words. Barney believes that the link between a name and its referent is a matter of etymology: a matter of the syllables of a word (sensory images) imitating the object named. But the notion that names have attached stereotypes opens the way to a much broader understanding of the Naturalistic Requirement. On this latter understanding, there ought to be an intimate semantic correspondence between a concept (an abstract image, cf. “ideal name” at 389d) and the thing conceptualized; and indeed, this is a connection that actually exists between content-rich concepts like “man” and individual men. Moreover, a person could make false judgments about this connection, as when a student mistakenly claims that hydrogen is inflammable. Once we recognize this, we are better positioned to understand how Plato’s critique of language in the Cratylus opens the door to understanding the role of the sophists in what we might call “miseducation.” And it is to education and its lack to which I now turn.

VII. Education Through Names and Education Through Things
At this point in the chapter, we should be well situated to take a fresh look at the concepts of “education through names” and “education through things,” as they are contrasted in the last few pages of the *Cratylus*. Education through names relies on the accuracy of imitative names – that is, the accuracy of linguistic stereotypes – to transmit to the student accurate beliefs of the objects which are imitated by the names (*Crat.* 435d-e). Education through things, by contrast, is a mode of investigation that involves looking at the “existing kinships” between objects, as well as directly examining the “objects themselves” (*αὐτὰ δι᾿ αὐτῶν*, 438e). Any successful engagement with education through names presupposes a prior successful engagement with education through things, since names will be accurate when bestowed by someone knowledgeable, and otherwise inaccurate. The individual who knows things in themselves should clearly be identified with the person who “employs” (*χρήσεται*) names, described earlier in the dialogue at 390d, the “dialectician” (*διαλεκτικόν*).

Education through names relies upon content-rich images, and this is its problem, since images can be inaccurate. The same very point is made about the educational aspirations of the lovers of sights and sounds in Book V of the *Republic*: they consider beauty (*τὸ καλὸν*) to be that which it resembles (*αὐτὸ ἡγήται εἶναι ὃ ἐοικέν*, 476c), and thus their opinions are fallible (*μὴ ἀναμαρτήτω*, 477e). The culturally influenced stereotype that I have of “electron,” for example, would not be a perfect guide to scientific investigation: I should study the thing itself, and not assume that my idea of the thing is (prior to investigation) fully accurate. In Book X, the poet is compared

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56 I am certainly not saying that Plato is, in Book V, making a point about language and naming. What I am saying is that the fact that images (including names) represent things imperfectly is a motif in Plato’s thought that connects a number of different types of people, including whoever Plato intends to indicate by the “lovers of sights and sounds.” Their notion that beauty could be known wholly through its instances is similar to Cratylus’s notion that objects can be known through their names.
to a painter, and is said to use words and phrases to craft colorful images of arts like shoemaking or warfare so that “others of a similar mind, who see through words (ἐκ τῶν λόγων θεωροῦσι), will praise him exceedingly” (601a). The following warning at Crat. 440c, then, may very well apply not only to the itinerant etymologist like Cratylus, but also to the lover of sights and sounds, the painter, the poet, and (no doubt) the sophist: “No intelligent person (νοῦν ἔχοντος ἀνθρώπου) will put himself or the nourishment of his soul under the guardianship (ἐπιτρέψαντα) of names.”

Education through things, in contrast, approaches the objects of knowledge themselves, in some sense unmediated by words. Socrates picks out two qualities of education through things: (1) Things are known through themselves (αὐτὰ δι’ αὐτῶν, 438e), and (2) Things are known through any similarities they have with each other (δι’ ἀλλήλων γε, εἰ πη συγγενῆ ἐστίν, 438e). For the purposes of this chapter, it will not be necessary to understand with any precision what Socrates means by these phrases, except to say that these two activities are clearly the types of things that require the capacity to measure and engage in mathematical reasoning – two capacities that are never mentioned in the context of the study of names. Both in Socrates’s insistence that the objects of knowledge transcend imagery and in his insistence that they be encountered “in themselves,” his discussion of education through names strikingly recalls the culmination of Plato’s description of the Divided Line, in the Republic, where Socrates says that the highest section of the Line refers to “that which reason itself grasps by the power of dialectic ... entirely spurning the use of the senses,

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Notice that it is the person with νοῦς that refuses to nourish himself with names. This is not an indication that education through names is useless (if properly administered with guidance from the dialectician), but rather that education through names is not the type of thing the philosophical nature will pursue.
but only using Forms in themselves, through themselves, unto themselves, and resulting in Forms” (ἐἴδεσιν αὐτοῖς δι’ αὐτῶν εἰς αὐτά, καὶ τελευτᾶ εἰς εἰδη, 511b-c).  

I suspect that the nature of education through things might come into a sharper contrast, however, if we merely consider what it is not. It is not an inquiry into words, neither in the sense of being an etymological investigation nor in the sense of being an analysis of our stereotypes (or perhaps “folk concepts”) of various words. When a person inquires into the nature of things, she does not take the semantic qualities of words as her starting point. In this way, her actions are fundamentally at odds with the common practice of linguistic/conceptual analysis, as it has been practiced by various philosophers throughout the ages, including many sophists and perhaps even the historical Socrates.  

Peter Ludlow offers a remarkably clear thinking statement of this practice, in his discussion of contextual theories of epistemology: he says that “any investigation into the nature of knowledge which did not conform to some significant degree with the semantics of the term ‘knows’ would simply be missing the point.” This claim, which strikes Ludlow as “obvious,” is expressly denied in the Cratylus. The ordinary semantics of “knowledge” could, according to Plato, be dramatically disconnected with the nature of the genuine referent of the word. The person who pursues

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58 The passage at Phaedrus 249b, which refers to “speaking according to Forms” (κατ’ εἴδος λεγόμενον), is especially evocative here, though its meaning is the subject of much dispute, a dispute which I need not enter into, for the purposes of this chapter. Hackforth translates 249b-c in the following way: “Only the soul that has beheld truth may enter into this our human form – seeing that man must needs understand the language of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity recognized by reasoning.” On such a translation, it would appear that Plato explicitly acknowledges the sort of hypothetical perfect language suggested by the conclusion of the Cratylus: a language in which there would be a 1-to-1 function between the Forms and the names in the language. Plato, and R. Hackforth, Plato: Phaedrus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

59 My understanding of education through names, here, is largely in keeping with that of Christine Thomas. When attempts at education through names are not focused on etymologies, Thomas describes them as “inquiries focused eventually on natures or essences but which take linguistic items as their starting points.” That sort of characterization makes them sound strikingly like linguistic or conceptual analyses. Thomas, “Inquiry Without Names,” 346.

education through names, in the context of epistemology, runs the risk of being duped by the vagaries of human belief, and thus never developing acquiring a genuine understanding of knowledge at all.\textsuperscript{61} And this sort of error would seem to plague any investigation into some ultimate truth that started from our conception of (or our intuitions about) the proper uses of words.

\textbf{VIII. Toward an Understanding of Language in Plato’s *Republic*}

It would appear, then, that Plato denies that education through names plays a central or defining role in a proper education. But then, why write a dialogue about it? Does my interpretation involve just as much of a pessimistic reading of the *Cratylus* as other interpretations, despite my insistence that Plato maintains the dialogue to advance a number of positive theses? I don’t think so: for I believe that I can explain why these positive theses are important in the context of Plato’s middle period as a whole, in particular why they have important ramifications for the *Republic*.

The *Cratylus* is at pains to demonstrate that our names could be false. But when guided by the “user” (the “person who knows,” the “dialectician”), these names are true. It is possible for one person (say, Aristotle) to investigate things, and subsequently bestow accurate names upon them, whereupon another person (say, Alexander) might come along and become informed about the world merely by learning the nature of Aristotle’s names, without ever personally engaging with objects in their own right. Aristotle’s way of learning is proclaimed by Socrates to be “finer and

\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Thomas: The problem with relying on names in inquiry is not that one is necessarily misled. Presumably those engaged in inquiry with names can both acquire new concepts and revise old ones in such a way as to make epistemic progress. But there is risk involved. If one takes names as a guide one might be deceived into embracing a thoroughly false picture of the ultimate nature of reality, a picture that may be difficult to relinquish or to overcome.” Thomas, “Inquiry Without Names,” 349.
more distinct” (καλλίων καὶ σαφεστέρα, 439a) than Alexander’s way, but Alexander has nevertheless learned something.\(^{62}\)

In the Cratylus’s repudiation of sophistry, then, there remains logical space for a positive use of education through names. The problem with sophistry is not simply a method of education: it is that sophists have false beliefs, both about the nature of particular objects and the nature of the world. Sophists and rhetoricians, by and large, do not admit that there is such a thing as education through things (Soph. 246a-b, 254a). As such, their opinions are blind. They might stumble upon a true belief, but they do not admit the existence of the standard that makes this true belief true.\(^{63}\) A namegiver who was guided by a dialectician would not have this problem. He would have true beliefs about the objects of knowledge, and he would believe that his names could only be reliable if they accorded with these true beliefs.

We have seen how this sort of model for true names is suggested in dialogues throughout Plato’s middle period: not only the Cratylus, but also the Euthydemus and the Sophist. (The Phaedrus and the Gorgias, with their discussions of noble and ignoble rhetoric, could be added to this list). It is also very much present in the Republic. The Republic roundly chastises those who pursue knowledge through sophistical devices, but it also presents a vision for how accurate nomenclature could play a role in the creation of an ideal state. Those who “see through words” (ἐκ τῶν λόγων θεωροῦσι, 601a) are criticized, and yet it is precisely the human tendency to see through words upon which the primary educational system of the Republic is built. The sort of totalitarian control

\(^{62}\) To deny that Alexander has learned is to deny the soundness of Socrates’s argument against Cratylus. For Socrates argues that education by names fails because the names themselves are unreliable, which implies that at least some level of education could be achieved through reliable names.

\(^{63}\) Contrast this with the ordinary citizens of Kallipolis, whose true beliefs are not blind, since their beliefs have been molded by the education of the guardians. See Rep. 590d-591a.
of language advocated for in Books II, III, and X is aimed at the establishment (τιθεσθαι, 484d) of true beliefs in the soul, and yet it clearly does not involve the student in anything resembling an education through things. This latter type of education is reserved for those who practice dialectic.

The Republic, then, should be read in the context of the theory of language developed in the Cratylus. Since false names and false beliefs are inseparable, the constraints that Plato puts on naming in the Cratylus ought to play a significant role in informing the constraints that Plato puts on primary education and rhetoric in the Republic. In the next chapter, I will embark upon a rather unusual journey, setting out to discover traces of Plato’s philosophy of language in the Republic, and – in particular – attempting to demonstrate that Platonic censorship was aimed at precisely the sorts of sophistical misrepresentations that the Cratylus identifies.
Although the Republic is not known as a dialogue about language, the workings of language are never far from its political and moral vision. A large portion of the dialogue is concerned with censoring bad and harmful poetry, which is spoken of as a sort of toxin that inevitably poisons the healthy human soul. Both the demos and the demagogue are chastised for their use of language, and - perhaps most intriguingly - one of the sharpest criticisms Plato levels at irrational people is that they “see through words” (ἐκ τῶν λόγων θεωροῦσι, 601a) - that their opinions are shaped by words and arguments, not by facts or realities. Nevertheless, aside from certain perennial questions pertaining to questions of poetry and censorship, scholars of the Republic rarely focus their attention on Plato’s comments about language. This ought to change.

I believe that the Republic has a great deal to say about language; indeed, I hold the strong view that the Republic cannot be adequately understood without making reference to that curious dialogue about language, the Cratylus. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I restrict my attention to one narrow (but far-reaching) claim: that an important goal of primary education in the Republic is to train all citizens in the objectively correct usage of names. The incorrect usage of names inevitably results in false beliefs, and false beliefs are both destructive of virtue and inimical to dialectic. The role of accurate and unambiguous nomenclature may be more explicitly described in other dialogues, but it is certainly implicit in discussions of the positive uses of rhetoric in the Republic.

The structure of my argument is reasonably straightforward: I will begin by laying out forcefully, and in some detail, my case for the position that the Republic is concerned with the correct usage of names, and that it is correctness of naming and belief that explains the effectiveness of
primary education. Second, I will explore the relationship between naming in the Republic and naming in other dialogues, most centrally the Cratylus. Third, I will respond to an important objection, the objection that we should not identify the normative language surrounding names in the Cratylus with the normative language surrounding persuasive rhetoric in the Republic. Finally, I will explain how correct naming plays a central role not only in the virtue of the citizens of Kallipolis, but also in the purely scholarly pursuits of the philosopher kings, as they prepare for dialectic.

**Under the Spell of the Demos**

Scholars have sometimes suggested that the sophists, as Plato saw them, were those who manipulated the demos in order to accomplish their own individual goals: power, pleasure, and the like.¹ This suggestion attempts to combine two clear accusations against the sophists into one neat package: (1) the accusation that sophists practiced manipulation, and (2) the accusation that the sophists were motivated by things like power, reputation, and pleasure.

The truth is much more complicated. Sophists do practice manipulation, and they do pursue inferior aims, but it is not quite accurate to say that they manipulate the demos. In fact, as James Wilberding has demonstrated, it would be far more accurate to say that the demos manipulates them.² Thus, in the Gorgias, Socrates accuses Callicles of being “under the spell” of the demos: “If any statement of yours is contradicted by the Athenian demos, you change your position and say what it wishes” (481e). Sophists are panderers to the masses; indeed, Socrates identifies the politically-minded sophist with the demagogue (δημολογικόν, Soph. 268b).³ Plato’s dialogues depict the

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¹ For example, see Helen North, “Inutilis sibi, perniciosus patriae: A Platonic Argument Against Sophistic Rhetoric,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 06 no. 2 (1981).
³ In what way, then, do sophists practice an “art of deception” (ἀπατητικήν, Soph. 264d)? The demos, presumably, does not need to be deceived, no more than a drunkard needs to be convinced to take a drink. No, the objects of this deception cannot be the demos at large; instead, they must be either citizens in their private capacity or children who
masses as embroiled in error, a type of error that the sophist imbibes, exploits, and encourages. The ordinary Athenian politician is the pawn of the people precisely because he benefits from responding to their whims.

In the *Republic*, the picture of the politically-minded sophist is strikingly similar. The democratic masses are compared to a “great beast” which bullies its handlers into catering to its every whim. Socrates turns the common prejudice against sophists on its head, counterintuitively portraying the sophists as victims of the populace:

> Do you really think, like the masses do, that the youth are corrupted by sophists in their private practice of sophistry, to any degree worth mentioning? Or don’t you agree that it is the people who say these things [i.e. the masses] who have a greater claim on the title “sophist,” since they give the most complete education, molding young and old, man and woman, into whatever sort of shape they please? [When do they do that?] Whenever the masses gather all together, seated at assemblies or law-courts or theatres or battlefields ... vehemently condemning some words and actions and vehemently praising others, striving to outdo one another in shouts or applause, and even the rocks and the walls of their gathering place resound with the double tumult of censure and praise. Don’t you think that the young man’s heart, in such a situation, is moved within him? (492a-c)

Sophists in professional practice are so far from being the impetus of corruption that Socrates emphasizes how they themselves are corrupted. The public exploits the sophist’s desire for pleasure and gain, and gets the sophist to use language according to its own whim:

> Each one of these paid professionals, whom ordinary people treat as rivals, calling them “sophists,” inculcate no other doctrine (δογμάτα) except the doctrines which the masses pronounce when they gather en masse, which they call “wisdom” (σοφία). It is just like if a man were acquainting himself with the passions and desires of a great strong beast whom he was taking care of, learning how to approach it and touch it, learning when and why it becomes manageable or unmanageable, learning the reasons for each of the sounds of it is accustomed to make, and what sorts of sounds will soothe or aggravate it. ... Now, though [the trainer of the beast] doesn’t genuinely know a thing about which of these beliefs (δογμάτων) and desires is beautiful or ugly, good or bad, just or unjust, he applies all these names (ὀνομάζει) in

have not yet come to “think with” the demos. The sophist “imposes [beliefs] upon the young who are still far from things as they really are” (*Soph*. 234c). On Plato’s view, then, sophists justify the views of the demos to those who have not yet accepted them.
accordance with the opinions of the great beast, calling the things that delight it good, and the things that irritate it bad. (493a-c)

The passage is explicitly about sophists in private practice, but it is easily applicable to all those who curry public favor – demagogues, politicians, poets, and the like. Let us call this type of person a “panderer.” The problem with panderers, according to this passage, is that they apply names incorrectly. The panderer applies names according to the beliefs of the demos – beliefs which may well be false, since they are based on the desire for pleasure, not the desire for truth. The name “good,” according to the great beast, is understood to mean “whatever is pleasing to me”; whereas the name “good,” in reality, refers to a fixed reality with objective standards of correctness. Since “being good” does not genuinely mean “being pleasing to the demos,” something is amiss.

In this chapter, I draw upon my Chapter I analysis of Plato’s philosophy of language, and I argue that this analysis can be applied to his comments about language in the Republic. The way this plays out in the Republic can be seen in the above quotation: the demos attaches a certain content to the word “good,” a type of content which may or may not be etymologically based. This content is similar to Frege’s notion of “sense,” or Putnam’s notion of a “stereotype,” in that it involves the ordinary understandings that speakers of a language have about the referent of a word. The content the demos attaches to “good,” however, is false of the Form of Goodness; as such, teaching the content to the professional panderer is a form of miseducation.

Cherished Beliefs in the Republic

At this point, I will draw out and analyze a number of passages about education and miseducation (cf. 514a) in the Republic, in the hopes of discovering the role that naming might play.

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4 It would remain a form of miseducation even if, by some dumb luck, the demos chanced upon an extensionally adequate set of beliefs about the good (See Rep. 506c). The problem is that the demos has an unreliable method; it is not pursuing truth, only pleasure.
in the dialogue. In its discussion of musical education, the Republic identifies two sorts of poetry: poetry that harms its listener, and poetry that encourages its listener in virtue. The former sort of poetry inclines a person toward base desires and diverts a person from the path of Truth. Bad poetry both fails to establish true beliefs in the soul, and fails to insulate the true beliefs the soul already possesses from the seduction of pleasure and the forcible influence of pain (see 413a-d). Such failures are failures in musical education, the kind of education that prepares the soul for dialectic (402a).

Socrates describes the beliefs that the soul acquires through musical education as “dogmas” (Rep. 413c; 414b) - the same sorts of things (δογμάτων, 493b) possessed by the masses and pandered to by inferior lawmakers at 493b. The most striking account of the origin of these sorts of beliefs comes late in Book VII, in the context of the story of the rich and suppostitious son. This son is brought up subscribing to the beliefs of his parents, which are compared to the ordinary beliefs Athenian children acquire as they grow:

> We have, at any rate, certain beliefs (δόγματα) from childhood about the just and the fine (δικαίων καὶ καλῶν), under whose influence we have been raised as if they were our parents, and we obey and revere them. (538c)

When he discovers that these are not his real parents, however, his allegiance to the δόγματα wanes. Flatterers (i.e. sophists) swoop in and he adopts their way of life and, no doubt, their beliefs about matters of value.

The story complicates matters somewhat, since it envisions the sophists as active, not (as in the great beast image) passive. But there can be no doubt that the δόγματα mentioned at 538c are not the same beliefs as those of the demos; for they do not sway sophists, but instead are swayed by

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5 For the ancient Greek, the word “dogma” did not indicate that a belief was irrational.
them. And indeed, Socrates is defensive on behalf of these beliefs.\textsuperscript{6} Even if false, these beliefs do not seem to be primarily influenced by the prospects of pleasure and pain; indeed, if we read 538c closely with 413a-d, these δόγματα are precisely the sorts of things that would ideally resist the lures of pleasure and pain. The “great beast” of the demos does not delight in such beliefs. The person who is taught dialectic too soon is dissuaded from these beliefs about justice and goodness and made to believe that a certain thing “is no more fine than base” (538d-e). He no longer obeys or reveres the δόγματα, and thus becomes, in essence, an immoralist. Moreover, he becomes a perfect target for the demos.

If we cast these two passages at 492-493 and 538-539 narrowly in terms of language, they present the reader with two points about conventional beliefs about words. First, they express that certain young men’s hearts respond with heartfelt emotion to the way the masses use language, causing them to fall in line with popular errant language in an effort to maintain influential positions in the city. The influence of the lower soul parts – the desire for base pleasures, for honor, for popularity – distorts the content of the young man’s language at the same time as it distorts the constitution of his soul. Second, the two passages insist that other young men (possibly, though not necessarily, distinct from the first group) are taught by dialectic – or perhaps, the sophistical doppleganger of dialectic – how to destroy the foundations of the conventional beliefs of the masses. These conventional beliefs are incorrect, and likely becoming more incorrect with each succeeding

\textsuperscript{6} As Adam has pointed out in his commentary, Socrates’s endorsement of conventional morality here is almost certainly not a wholesale endorsement. The guardians who have seen the Forms are said to “take care to insert into human beings both in public and in private the habits which he sees [in the world of Forms]” (\textit{ὅ ἐκεῖ ὁ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς ἀνθρώπων ἴθι καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ τιθέναι}, 500d), which certainly suggests that these habits are not identical to the habits valued by ordinary Athenians. The passage at 538-539, however, is unambiguous that conventional Athenian values are far superior to conventional immoralism. Plato, and James Adam, “The Republic of Plato, edited with Critical Notes, Commentary and Appendixes” (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1965).
generation of democracy,7 but they are not radically incorrect enough to merit their complete
destruction.8 They are relics of an earlier time, a time when cultural conventions (and names) were
more amenable to truth and virtue. Moreover, in contrast to the beliefs of many practitioners of
sophistry (e.g. Protagoras), conventional beliefs clearly presuppose that there are objective facts
answering questions like, “What is justice?” Nevertheless, these beliefs are not firmly entrenched
enough in the souls of young men to withstand the deleterious effects of premature dialectical
inquiry.

The combination of these two factors yields an interesting result. Conventional Athenian
beliefs are mediocre guides to virtue, but they are extraordinarily better than the results of an eristic
that makes argumentation the slave of the lower impulses. The conventionalist – a person like
Cephalus or Charmides – is incorrect, but is nevertheless more correct than his sophistical critic.9
The error of the practitioner of eristic necessarily follows from her method, since the person willing
to destroy any belief will, as a consequence, be left without true beliefs. The error of the
conventionalist is, by contrast, contingent, since the conventionalist would not use words falsely if
the convention setters did not first possess false beliefs about the referents of these words.

Education Through Names

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7 The ruling powers of a democracy, according to Plato, are focused on sating their appetites, by effectively using
money and legal intervention to obtain what they want. They “care nothing for virtue” (556e), they “trample virtuous
habits underfoot” (558b), and they avoid education (560b). Their engagement in philosophy is just done for
appearances (ὡς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ διατρίβων, 561d).
8 As Hall observes, Plato “suspected the arbitrary character of most men’s judgments when they think for themselves,
and suggests that they are better off accepting conventional standards.” Dale Hall, “Interpreting Plato’s Cave as an
9 Throughout the dialogues, Socrates consistently displays this sort of carefully circumscribed but sincere appreciation
of conventional values and beliefs. Consider the Euthyphro, where Euthyphro’s rebellion against conventional values is
roundly ridiculed.
Plato's view of naming in the Cratylus is contingent in precisely this sort of way, as we have seen in Chapter One. The names given by legislators in the Cratylus happen to be false, but – if the namegiver had known the truth about the world – they could have been true. This is the case because the objects of knowledge “have their own characteristic and independent essences, which are not in relation to us or up to us (οὐ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὐδὲ ὑπ’ ἡμῶν), pulled up and down on the basis of how they appear to us, but independent” (386d-e). A name is a “tool for teaching and distinguishing essences” (388b-c), which is given by the νομοθέτης – the “rule setter” or the “lawgiver.” The name can be given well or given badly, and it will be given badly just in case the νομοθέτης has a mistaken conception of the qualities of the object named (436b). The only truly reliable form of education is that which does not rely on the beliefs of the namegiver: education through things, not education through names.

In the Republic, then, we should be able to see what has gone wrong in the education of the panderers in Book VI. The problem is not that the panderers lack advanced education in the mathematical or dialectical arts. The problem is that the panderers encounter naming practices that are, to whatever degree, false and unreliable. It is not the names themselves (as phonemes) that mislead the sophists; rather, it is the fact that those who laid down the meanings of these names have imbued them with a set of false beliefs or stereotypes. The panderers are not the creators of false names, but rather the victims of such names: they are people who are being educated by names laid down by an ignorant lawgiver. The panderers “put [themselves] and the nourishment of [their souls] in the guardianship” (Crat. 440c) of inferior lawgivers. They commit the sin of Cratylus, by assuming not only that names “are given for instruction” (428e), but also that “he who knows the names also knows the things [they refer to]” (ὅσ ἂν τὰ ὄνοματα ἑπίστηται, ἑπίστασθαι καὶ τὰ
πράγματα, 435d). Then, once they are “educated,” they pass themselves off as experts in the nature of reality, not just in the nature of names.

What is the source of their false opinions? The answer may be a bit complex. According to Rep. 538-539, children are brought up imbibing the beliefs of their elders; but, according to Rep. 492-493, the beliefs of the demos, in a democracy, cause the names we use to become corrupted. In the Cratylus, names are given by the lawgiver (νομοθέτης). There is no indication that new lawgivers cannot give new names, names that conflict with the beliefs of their ancient counterparts. I should like to hypothesize, then, that the lawgivers of a democracy – the demos – are just as capable as any other of laying down names, and that the systematic misnaming of virtue terms at Rep. 493 is an instance of democratic namegiving. This hypothesis may seem ambitious, but I believe that it unifies the concerns of these two dialogues in a striking and plausible way.

I would argue, then, that the mistaken usage of “good” or “just” on the part of the panderers, derives from the opinions (δογμάτων) of the great beast. The demos is the νομοθέτης in a democracy, and as such, it is the source of various rules, norms, and customs – including the norms of linguistic usage. These norms are circumscribed by a set of conventional beliefs that the demos attaches to the names we use: making “wisdom” connote “the things that the people pronounce when they gather” and “evil” connote “the things which irritate the demos.” We might understand these beliefs in various ways: as the results one would arrive at through a linguistic analysis of the word, as the Wittgensteinian rules of a “language game,” as Putnam’s notion of a “stereotype.” All

10 I haven’t the space here to counter various interpretations of the Cratylus that would call into question my assumption that Socrates’s views at Crat. 440 are sincere views that Plato himself subscribed to. For readings of the Cratylus which are consistent with my own, see Kretzmann, “Plato on the Correctness of Names”; Ackrill, “Language and Reality”; and Gold, “Ambiguity of ‘Name’.”
these understandings have in common two things: (1) that they involve packing a word with various embedded beliefs, and (2) that these beliefs are contingent in the way I described above.

When we put this in the context of Platonic ontology, the resulting conclusion is this: “beautiful,” “ugly,” “good” and “bad” genuinely refer to stable realities. Nevertheless, within the Greek language, these names are content-rich, packed full of conventional Greek beliefs about the given concepts. In a proper πολιτεία, these beliefs would be accurate, dictated by the lawgiver in accordance with the knowledge of the dialectician. But, since Athens is a democracy, the views of the masses become enshrined in linguistic customs; instead of imbibing true belief and demotic virtue from their youth, the children of democracy “have lawlessness implanted in them” (τὴν ἀναρχίαν ἐμφυομένην, 562e). The beliefs attached to the names they use are both unstable and inaccurate. This instability and falsehood infects the education of those who learn these names, in much the way that Socrates bemoans popular education through names at the end of the Cratylus.

In this section, then, we have seen how false beliefs attached to names are manipulated by sophists and panderers, both in the Cratylus and in the Republic. In the next section, I will discuss the power that these false beliefs have upon individual souls, and I will suggest that there might be a positive counterpart to this sort of corruption: a way that virtue could be nurtured through the correct usage of names.

**True and False Words in the Soul**

Jakub Jirsa\(^\text{11}\) has convincingly argued that the anarchic (“leaderless”) nature of a democracy has its analogue in democratic language. Virtues are given the names of vices, and these vicious names create a pretext through which the drones of a democracy can drive the virtues out of the city.

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The sophists are capable of manipulating names with such alacrity only because the polis has become distanced from its ancient lawgivers; we might say that the democratization of Athens has left a semantic void, a void which becomes filled by sophistry and demagoguery – a dynamic through which the leaders please the people, and the people flatter the leaders (see 494c).

This process is effected almost exclusively through the use of words. First, the son of the oligarch “samples the honey of the drones and falls in with fiery and cunning beasts who have the resources to assemble a limitless panoply of richly textured pleasures” (559d), inspiring a “brood of passions” which “take over the acropolis of the young man’s soul, since they gather that it is bereft of education and noble habits and λόγων ἀληθῶν (560b).” Then “false and unreliable words and opinions dash in and take hold of [him]” (ψευδεῖς δή καὶ ἀλαζόνες οίμαι λόγοι τε καὶ δόξαι ἀντ᾽ ἐκείνων ἀναδραμόντες κατέσχον, 560c), becoming leaders for the young man’s soul. (Notice again the intimate connection between words and beliefs). Finally, he returns to the drones – here called “lotus-eaters” – and “lives openly with them” (ibid.). The toxic discourses of the drones “shut the gates of his kingdom and ... will not even admit the wise words of ambassadors of a bygone age” (560c-d). Now that true words and beliefs have been rejected, the son follows the drones in the systematic misnamings described in 560d-561a. (I will explore these misnamings in more detail, a little later.)

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12 The Athenians considered Solon to be their lawgiver, and a great many of their laws did derive from his written code, even into the 4th century BC. Nevertheless, in Plato’s depiction of democratic Athens, every person “has the authority to do as he pleases” (557b) and may defy or evade any law that claims authority over him (557c-558a). Democracy “tramples underfoot” all solemn ideals and pronouncements (558a-b), and recasts the profound reverence ordinary people feel for the law as “foolishness” (560d). Clearly, Plato would deny that Solon is responsible for the genuine customs (νομοί) that are exemplified by his contemporary Athenians.

13 I intentionally leave the phrase “λόγων ἀληθῶν” untranslated. It could be translated “true discourses,” “true arguments,” or “true language”; since these three translations are all compatible, I am inclined to believe that all three of these meanings of λόγος are relevant here. The third translation, “true language,” most straightforwardly supports my thesis.
This passage of the *Republic* has clear and unambiguous resonances in the *Cratylus*, where Socrates warns that names in the hands of inferior legislators are deceptive, and that “no sensible person will put himself or the nourishment of his soul under the guardianship of names” (440c). Both passages are a manifestation of Plato’s characteristic antipathy toward politicians: the giver of names (ὄνομάτων θέτης) and the giver of laws (νομοθέτης) – the establisher of conventions (νομοι) – are said to be one and the same.14 We would hardly expect Socrates to recommend that Cratylus and Hermogenes trust in the linguistic fabrications of orators, nor would we expect someone as suspicious of politics as Plato to be optimistic about the trustworthiness of future lawgivers. And yet elsewhere in this very dialogue, the *Republic*, Plato is unambiguously optimistic about the educational potential of political rule. Would Plato’s warning not to trust the lawgiver apply equally to the citizens of the perfect city, the Kallipolis?

Certainly not. The philosopher in Kallipolis “looks intently on whatever things are fixed and eternal” and imitates them, thus becoming himself “divine and graceful,” and “if it should be required (ἀνάγκη) of him in his engagement with society to insert into human beings both in public and in private the habits which he sees there... he will [not] prove a poor craftsman of temperance and justice and every kind of demotic virtue” (*Rep.* 500c-d). This passage parallels the passage at the conclusion of the cave image, where we are told that the philosopher who has seen the Good must then be compelled (προσαναγκάζοντες) back into the cave, where they will discern the nature of

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14 My own sense of this identification of the lawgiver with the name-giver is that Plato is here anticipating something like the postmodern understanding of language as a tool that the powerful use to manipulate the masses, or that various powerful in-groups use to create disempowered out-groups. In Plato’s dialogues, however, there is always a question of who is manipulating whom, however, since – as we have seen – the politicians themselves are often portrayed as mere puppets in the hands of the opinionated people (the demos).
the shadows projected onto the cave wall “infinitely better than the people there” (520c, see 519c-520d). Or consider 484c-d:

Do you think, then, that there is real difference between blind people and those who are genuinely deprived of the knowledge of each thing that exists, since they lack any manifest pattern in their souls and so they cannot even like a painter consult the genuine article, considering the spectacle of it as the most precise example and standard for imitation, and accordingly establishing the norms (τὰ νόμιμα ... τίθεσθαι) of beauty and justice and goodness where they are currently lacking, while taking responsibility for the maintenance of already existing norms (τὰ κείμενα)?

The message is abundantly clear: those who do have a pattern of the Forms in their souls are capable of constructing demotic norms, norms that are naturalistically adequate for the generation of accurate naming conventions and true beliefs among the populace.

There is some complexity in these passages, however, which is certainly worth consideration. In the Republic, the term νομοθέτης is almost exclusively used to describe the founders of the city (Socrates, Glaucon, and Adeimantus), not its guardians. Indeed, the very term “guardian” gets at this notion, since the guardians are not selected for their ability to establish laws or customs, but rather their ability to be a “guard of himself and the musical education he has received” (φύλαξ αὐτοῦ ὄν ἀγαθός καὶ μουσικής ἢς ἐμάνθανεν, 413e). It would be a mistake, then, to say that the stamping or insertion (τίθεσθαι) of the virtues referred to in 484c-d and 500c-d indicates the original imposition of customs; rather, it refers to the particular grafting of already existent normative customs onto a soul that does not yet possess these customs.

Now, if we were to import from the Cratylus the intimate connection between the giving of customs and the giving of names, we would find that a Platonic critique of names necessarily informs

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15 Both passages anticipate Stat. 309c-d, which certainly supports the view that the νομοθέτης is involved in the insertion of accurate terms and true beliefs into the citizen’s soul.
16 458c, 497d, 530c.
the naming conventions of the founders of the city (the “lawgivers”), and that the guardians are charged with the job of applying these names accurately in the process of paideia.\textsuperscript{17} To apply the names accurately means (a) to have the right beliefs about the Forms corresponding to these names, and (b) to use these beliefs to determine which objects “fall under” the name (e.g. which people are courageous).\textsuperscript{18} Primary education in Kallipolis, then, is not simply aimed at making the soul amenable to the rule of reason. It is also centrally concerned with training the novice in the proper use of names, which is to say the proper beliefs about the Forms. This education has at least two purposes: (1) to improve the moral fiber of each citizen, since correct beliefs about the virtues are essential to – and, in the case of courage, perhaps even constitutive of – right action, and (2) to prepare the student for the practice of dialectic, which will both reaffirm and refine the true beliefs about the Forms that a proper education through names consists in. The student who engages in dialectic at the proper time, with the proper natural dispositions and the proper entrenched true beliefs, is capable of becoming a philosopher king. But without the generally accurate names, the task of higher education is impossible.

**Correct and Incorrect Naming in the Republic**

There is a great deal of evidence for this view in the *Republic*.\textsuperscript{19} According to Book VII, the conventional *dogmata* of individuals raised in a given culture are not primarily – as we might expect – views they have heard from their peers or their parents or the culture at large, but rather they are

\textsuperscript{17} There is no need, of course, for the founders to create a completely new language. It will be sufficient to keep current words, but simply to change our beliefs about those words: that is, to change the content that is culturally inscribed on these words.

\textsuperscript{18} For practical purposes, then, true belief is just as useful as knowledge, even in Kallipolis. (Cf. *Meno* 97b-c). However, true belief is not as stable as knowledge, since it is blind and untethered to a λόγος (*Rep*. 401e-402a). Moreover, one cannot have reliable true beliefs unless these beliefs have been implanted by a person who possesses knowledge.

\textsuperscript{19} Pace Jirsa, who writes that “within the Republic there are not many passages dealing with the correct approach to naming.” Jirsa, “Sophists, Names and Democracy,” 134, note 20.
the views they have heard from the νομοθέτης (538d). On the surface, of course, this is completely implausible, since most children would have never spoken to a legislator, much less an august νομοθέτης like Solon. But the Cratylean view that the entire fabric of a language proceeds from the lawgiver may clear things up, here: the meanings that are inscribed onto Athenian names manifest the moral beliefs of the demos, moral beliefs of the culture as a whole, and these are precisely the beliefs that proceed from the names imposed by the lawgiver (in Athens, the demos). It is of vital importance that these names be correct, or the child will be ill-equipped to proceed on the ladder from ignorance to knowledge.  

Time after time, Plato emphasizes this point, as his characters discuss the use of language and names (ὄνόματα) among the citizens of his cherished republic. First of all, in discussing the censorship of the poets, Socrates somewhat curiously focuses his critique on terminology: “All the names (ὄνόματα) of [certain] terrors and fears must be banished” (387b). The passage makes a connection between truth and normative values: the terrors and fears imagined are in fact false

20 A comparison with Aristotle’s notion of ἀρετή is instructive here. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle insists that (demotic) virtue proceeds almost entirely from proper training, which is the province of the lawgiver: “Legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one. Again, it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced. ... For if this were not so, there would have been no need of a teacher, but all men would have been born good or bad at their craft. This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust. ... It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference” (2.1). Aristotle, and W.D. Ross, The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle, Translated and Introduced by Sir David Ross (Oxford University Press, 1961).

21 Note that it is the use of names is regulated here. The assumption is that the names themselves instituted by the founders are properly informed by dialectic, but that the populace must now be made to use these names correctly. As Reeve says, with respect to the Cratylus, “Through his association with the dialectician, the name-maker has completed the first of his tasks: he has made naturally correct names for all the forms. It remains for him to carry out the other part of his task and assign those names correctly to things. He must ensure that the name of a form is assigned only to things which have a nature that imitates it. This he does by setting rules or conventions governing the use of names” Plato, and C.D.C. Reeve, Cratylus, Translated, with Introduction and Notes, by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), liii.
(386c), because in a perfect society they do not exist. That which fails to edify the future guardian is considered to be false: thus, the harrowing stories of the poets are “neither true nor beneficial to future warriors” (386c). There is a similar passage later in Book III, where Socrates mentions how the indulgent diets and lifestyles of certain Athenians wreaked such havoc on the body as to force the sons of Asclepius to coin names (ονόματα τιθεσθαι) for the resultant diseases (405d), names which Glaucon calls “unnatural” (ἀτοπα) – since presumably they would not be needed in Kallipolis.

Of course, Plato’s central preoccupation, in terms of naming things, pertains to moral terminology. The demagogue, as we have seen, is criticized for applying names like “beautiful” and “just” according to the δόξα of the multitudes (493b-c). Moreover, whereas the uneducated men emerging from Glaucon’s primitive state of nature mistakenly “name the things enjoined by the law ‘lawful’ and ‘just’” (ονομάσα τό ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου ἐπίταγμα νόμιμόν τε καὶ δίκαιον, 359a), those subject to primary education in Kallipolis “name an action ‘just’ and ‘fine’ when it preserves and contributes to [their harmonized] condition [of the soul]” (ονομάζοντα δικαίαν μὲν καὶ καλὴν πρᾶξιν ἢ ἂν ταύτῃ τὴν ἕξιν σάφη τε καὶ συναπεργάζῃται, 443e). Correct standards of naming are present in the virtuous state; indeed, incorrect standards for naming moral attributes seem to be a touchstone of corrupt constitutions.

Although I shall not argue the case fully here, my sense is that this particular passage anticipates modern poststructuralist thought in an interesting way, since it tends toward the view of the “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,” which contends that language influences thought. Chris Swoyer recently characterized this line of thought as “linguistic relativism,” the view that “different languages carve the world up in different ways, and that as a result their speakers think about it differently” (http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/relativism/supplement2.html). One could not simply classify Plato as a linguistic relativist, however, because although he agrees (in the Cratylus, Republic and Statesman, at any rate) with the descriptive claim that different languages carve up the world in different ways, he would insist that there are objective standards against which to judge the worth or accuracy of these different divisions of reality. Chris Swoyer, Maria Baghramian, Adam Carter, “Relativism,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/relativism/.
This process of renaming exists not only in the state, but in the soul. The story of the son of oligarchy in Book VIII, which I have already alluded to, describes a man seized by a sort of psychological sophistry, making his soul democratic, and therein giving ugly names to the virtues and sweet names (or “pet names,” ὑποκριζόμενοι, 560e) to the vices. Plato personifies the young man’s epithetonic desires, and alleges that these desires call attributes of the soul by the wrong names, calling a sense of shame “folly,” temperance “effeminacy,” but calling impudence “refinement,” license “liberty,” wastefulness “magnificence,” and shamelessness “manliness” (560d-e; cf. Laws 821d-822c). Thucydides makes a strikingly similar complaint, while discussing the manipulation of language during a time of war:

Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question, inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defence. The advocate of extreme measures was always trustworthy; his opponent a man to be suspected. To succeed in a plot was to have a shrewd head, to divine a plot a still shrewder; but to try to provide against having to do either was to break up your party and to be afraid of your adversaries.\(^{23}\)

The problem here is, again, not with the particular syllables that are used, but with the semantic content housed behind these syllables. Calling license “liberty” entails a number of false beliefs about a genuine standard for action: the virtue of liberty. If a young man believes that drinking exorbitant amounts of wine is a manifestation of liberty, then his soul (not to mention his body) becomes subject to serious harms. The beliefs embedded in words almost inevitably manifest themselves in actions.

What is the relationship between the *Cratylus* and the *Republic*, then? In the *Cratylus*, Plato constructs a notion of linguistic correctness, and specifies that education through names can only be of any use to a person who can be assured of the names’ corresponding to that notion of correctness. In the *Republic*, Plato constructs a system of lawgiving whereby the conceptual content of names is dialectically constrained (cf. Crat. 390c) so as to be morally and conceptually accurate. By doing this, Plato discovers a way in which education through names can consist in learning what is objectively true, since the conceptual names of Kallipolis embody true beliefs about the nature of genuine objects (the Forms).24

**Philosophy and Rhetoric**

Up until this point in the essay, I have defended a view about Platonic naming that centrally hinges on the idea that primary education in the *Republic* – at least insofar as such education deals with words – should be identified with the kind of onomastic education Plato writes about in the *Cratylus*.25 The viewpoint I have advanced is, I believe, compelling, but it can only be as strong as this premise about the close relationship between the two types of education. What reason, then, is there to believe that Plato’s concerns in the *Cratylus* were similar to his concerns in the *Republic*, much less to believe that musical education in the *Republic* is an application of his educational musings in the *Cratylus*? That is the question to which I will now turn.

To begin to answer this question, we must first remember why it is possible to compare the two types of education, in the first place. Both onomastic and musical education are concerned with

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24 These beliefs are externally reliable, though their internal justification is lacking. They lack an internal λόγος. Thus, they are “true belief,” but not knowledge.

25 Non-verbal aspects of primary education can hardly be called “onomastic,” though an argument could be made that even instructions on the modes of music and the physical movements of the body aim at true belief. They likely aim at such belief indirectly, however: by removing the obstacles to true belief that would exist in a disorganized and disharmonious soul.
persuasion. Both of them have the aim that the student might use language according to certain norms. In good onomastic/musical education, words are used accurately; in bad onomastic/musical education, words are used inaccurately. In both cases, good educators are identified with noble lawgivers or philosophers, and bad educators are identified with demagogues or sophists.

Since both pedagogies revolve around persuasion, I intend to do three things to defend my interpretation in the remainder of the essay: (1) provide a basic survey of Plato’s understanding of persuasion, (2) argue that all verbal, but non-dialectical, persuasion should be identified as education through names, and (3) argue that, since primary education is non-dialectical verbal persuasion, it is a variety of education through names. A surprising consequence will fall out from this analysis: it will become clear that, to Plato, the hallmark of non-dialectical inquiry is that it disregards the nature of things, in preference for discussions about the words themselves.26 This sort of persuasion through mere language has its purposes, though it bypasses any strict notion of rationality. It would appear, then, that irrational (or perhaps arational) persuasion is a driving force behind the constitution of Plato’s Republic; and this is an interesting result indeed.

Platonic Persuasion

Persuasion, as an activity, consistently appears as a central theme of various Platonic dialogues. In the Philebus, Protarchus quotes Gorgias as saying that “the art of persuasion is far superior to the other arts, for it makes all things willingly subject to it, without making recourse to force” (58a-b). There are a multitude of types of persuasion (e.g., persuasion in mathematics, Gorg. 453d-454a), but Plato tends to focus on the kind of persuasion that is “concerned with right and wrong” (Gorg. 454b, cf. Soph. 223a). Value-laden words like “right” and “wrong” are the subject of

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26 Surely the interlocutors do not always know that their subject matter is mere words, however.
much public disagreement, and the use of these words is “bound to fluctuate” (*Phaedrus* 263a) in common parlance. The instability of ordinary beliefs about these words make them subject to manipulation in the hands of the rhetorician. Those who practice persuasion “contend with words (ἀντιλέγουσιν) ... about justice and injustice,” and they are capable of making “the same things appear to the same people at one moment just, and then, when they choose, unjust” (*Phaedrus* 261c-d). Perhaps the most illuminating comment Plato makes on this sort of persuasive activity comes in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates describes rhetoric as “a distracting of the soul through language” (ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων, lit. “soul-bringing,” 261a).

There are two kinds of people who seek to persuade, according to the *Phaedrus*. First, there is the individual who, though he “does not understand good and evil,” nevertheless “uses persuasion to subdue a society just as clueless as he is, ... and makes evil out to be good” (260c). This person has “gone hunting for beliefs”; instead of saying that he practices an “art of words” (λόγων ... τέχνην), it is more appropriate to say that “his art is laughable, and turns out to be completely artless” (262c). Doubtless, this individual could be justly compared to the tragic poet or the mob orator in the *Gorgias*, who desires only to “please his countrymen,” who “despises the common good in pursuit of his own interests ... and doesn’t care in the slightest whether his actions make others better or worse” (502e-503a), and who “caters to our desires without recognizing any goodness or nobility concerning them” (518c).

Second, the *Phaedrus* describes the individual who (a) understands the nature of his audience, and (b) has the capacity to “divide things into kinds and embrace each individual thing under a single form” (273d-e) – in other words, the dialectician. This individual is the “true rhetorician” (269d), who is capable of persuading someone with truth, or deceiving someone with falsehood,
precisely because he has “knowledge” (259e). These orators consistently speak “with an eye to what is best, their aim being to discover any way their words might make citizens as good as possible” (Gorg. 502e, cf. 503d-e). “The person who would become a proper rhetorician must be just himself and be fully conversant in just things” (ἐπιστήμονα τῶν δικαίων, ibid. 508c). The rhetorician treats the soul as the doctor treats the body, with the goal that their patient become “well ordered” (κεκοσμημένον, 504a) according to “a certain form” (ἐἶδός τι, 503e). The goal of proper rhetoric is clearly arête.

Now, since it is clear that one of the goals of dialectic is also virtue, the question arises: is philosophy synonymous with proper rhetoric? In the Phaedrus, the dialectician and the “true rhetorician” might seem to be the same person. The passage from 501d-504e, in the Gorgias, could be read along the same lines. Thus Griswold identifies the philosopher with the true rhetorician, and claims that this identification is based on the fact that – whereas false rhetoricians instill belief – true rhetoricians instill knowledge. Griswold is wrong to identify the philosopher and the true rhetorician, however, because even good rhetoric (in keeping with the later section of the Cratylus) is incapable of producing knowledge. It may be the case that a certain philosopher is also a true rhetorician, or vice versa, but the two categories are conceptually separate – just as the same woman might be both a wife and a mother, despite those two identities being conceptually distinct.

The philosopher is distinguished from the true rhetorician in dialogues like the Cratylus, the Statesman, and the Republic. In these dialogues, Plato presents a picture by which the practitioner of dialectic instructs the lawgiver in either the use of names (Cratylus) or right opinion (Statesman, Republic), as a tool for proper governance. The dialectician and the rhetorician are conceptually

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separate (Crat. 390d; cf. Rep. 601e-602a), even if they may coexist in the same person. In the Statesman, rhetoric is portrayed as being “auxiliary” (ὑπηρετοῦν) to statesmanship; statesmanship is the “art that is in charge of rhetoric” (τὴν τῆς πειστικῆς ἀρχούση, 304d-e). Proper rhetoric does not provide formal instruction. Instead, it involves telling the masses the appropriate “myths” (304d), myths which inculcate “firmly entrenched true beliefs about beauty, justice, and goodness” (309c).²⁸

In the early books of Plato’s Laws, the Athenian repeatedly emphasizes the role of persuasion in the art of ruling the state. He says that the lawmaker has two available instruments of rule: persuasion and compulsion (cf. Gorg. 517b). The problem with contemporary legislators is that they “proceed by compulsion unalloyed” (722c). They do not make people agree with the law; they only make people follow the law. Elsewhere, Plato appeals to the close connection between desire and action, and the idea that a person might be made captive by her own desires (Crat. 403, Phaedo 82e-83a; cf. Rep. 517a) – and moreover, that such a captivity might be used to positive effect, if what the citizen desires is virtue (Rep. 590e-591a). The appeal to persuasion, in the Laws, is an application of this notion of the constraining power of desire. The Athenian recommends that the lawgiver work in “conjunction” (κοινούμενος, 720d) with the citizens, “using persuasion to somehow win them to his side” (ἐπέταξεν ... πὴ συμπείση) – a task which is done through the introduction of a prelude (προοίμιον) to each law. These preludes are highly suggestive of the latter portion of the Phaedrus,

²⁸ Plato’s generalized attitude toward persuasion and rhetoric is obscured by the fact that he sometimes (e.g. Gorg. 454e) seems to consider genuine teaching a form of persuasion. Even in such instances, however, he distinguishes persuasion that aims at knowledge from persuasion that aims at belief. For my purposes here, I shall consider persuasion proper to be the second sort of persuasion; when I refer to the first sort of persuasion, I will call it “dialectic.” The relevant point is that the statesman does not force the ordinary citizen to engage in dialectic, although he does persuade the ordinary citizen.
as is the Athenian’s suggestion that the lawgiver study the natures of individual citizens, so as to more effectively implant convictions into their minds (Laws 720d; cf. Phaedrus 271b-e).

Non-dialectical persuasion is always focused at this goal of implanting convictions. We are told in the Timaeus that knowledge arises in the soul through instruction (διδαχῆς), true belief through persuasion (πειθοῦς, Tim. 51d-e); this is the central distinction between knowledge and true belief. Knowledge occurs μετ’ ἀληθοῦς λόγου, with true “language” or “reasoning,” whereas true belief is senseless (ἄλογον).²⁹ Although some scholars³⁰ have argued that persuasion tending toward true belief may include rational elements, it is abundantly clear that these rational elements stop short of a λόγος; or rather, even if the educator possesses the λόγος, this λόγος is not one of the things communicated through non-dialectical persuasion. So long as an instance of non-dialectical persuasion ends in true belief, it is successful.

Onomastic Persuasion

I will now argue that the sort of “education through names” described in the Cratylus can be identified with the practice of persuasion described above – in other words, that the category of “education through names” subsumes both proper and improper rhetoric.

Commentators have often assumed that “education through names” is merely a matter of etymology. Such a proposal, however, seems to neglect a number of places where the Cratylus suggests that the art of naming and the arts of rhetoric/sophistry are intertwined – centrally 425a, where Socrates explicitly compares the onomastic art with rhetoric: “We shall make speech by the

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²⁹ Looked at from this angle, the Theaetetus is concerned with distinguishing true beliefs that arise from instruction (knowledge) from true beliefs that arise from persuasion (mere opinion). The word “λόγος” captures this difference. The distinction between instruction and persuasion is very prominent in the Theaetetus. At 201a-c, for example, true belief and knowledge are distinguished on the basis of their origins, completely in keeping with Tim. 51.

art of naming, or rhetoric” (τῇ ὁνομαστικῇ ἢ ῥητορικῇ). Naming, in the Cratylus, is continually connected with figures that Plato associates with sophistry: Prodicus (383b), Protagoras (386a), Euthydemus (386d), Homer (391d; cf. Prot. 316d), and Euthyphro (396d-e). The suggestion seems to be that sophists take advantage of the meanings of words in order to establish their arguments: thus Socrates waxes poetic about what the arch-sophist Protagoras has learned about the “correctness of names” (391b-c); elsewhere, in the Euthydemus, Socrates complains that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are exploiting various customary meanings of words in order to confuse the young Clinias (277d-278c). The accusation here is clearly not that sophists take advantage of certain etymologies; no, it is that sophists take advantage of the associations that words have, whether or not these associations are enshrined etymologically. This makes sense of the fact that Socrates is still concerned with a student’s being deceived by the meaning of names even after he has established that names are largely conventional.\footnote{Barney would appear to be a proponent of the thesis that onomastikê is essentially etymological, but even she acknowledges that “[since] the application of primary names, complex names and even logoi are all part of the craft of verbal ‘painting’, ... the onomastic craft is ... identical with rhetoric properly understood.” Unless Barney wants to limit “rhetoric properly understood” to etymologies, however – which is wildly revisionist – her position fits best in the context of an understanding of onomastikê which embraces more than just etymological theorizing. Barney, Names and Nature, 99.}

If such considerations do not make fully clear that education through names is not exclusively etymological, other considerations from the text will. Consider, for example, the nature of the namegiver’s error at Crat. 436b-c.

Soc. Why clearly he who first gave names gave them according to his conception of the things which they signified – did he not?
Crat. True.
Soc. 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? Shall we not be deceived by him?
The error in this case manifests itself as an error in primary names and etymology, but the actual error is an error in belief: the namegiver has false beliefs about the object named. The problem, in modern terminology, is not that the namegiver does not know how to give names correctly, but rather that he does not properly conceptualize the object he is naming. The namegiver gives the wrong name to an object because he does not recognize what type of object it really is.

The conclusion of the Cratylus makes a broad claim about education through names: education through names is unreliable, since the names used are inadequate. These names are inadequate precisely because they embody false beliefs. Once we juxtapose this conclusion with the survey of persuasion above, a fascinating result emerges. Education through names is flawed for precisely the same reason that persuasive rhetoric is flawed: because it involves the learner in an engagement with false (or at least unreliable) beliefs. The best explanation of this correspondence is, obviously, that “education through names” is just another name for rhetoric – exactly the sort of claim we see at 425a.

This interpretation explains and illuminates other Platonic texts, as well. The Sophist and the Statesman both contain numerous references to a distinction between two types of education that occur in the city: the sort of education practiced by sophists and demagogues, and the sort of education practiced by philosophers and statesmen (Soph. 268a-d). The former sort of education involves the use of images and phantasms, and exploits the possibility that words can be false. Both these qualifications are the hallmarks of the discussion about onomastikê from the Cratylus, since Cratylean names are “images” (439a) or “imitations” (423b) which can be either true or false. The

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32 That is, he does not have the correct “set of beliefs” about the object. See Chapter 1, note 42.
33 For a helpful analysis of the relationship between naming and conceptualizing, in the Cratylus, see Gold, “The Ambiguity of ‘Name’.”
latter sort of education can be characterized by dialectic, but need not be: since the educational actions of a statesman aim at true belief, not knowledge, they must be a type of non-dialectical persuasion.

The Statesman juxtaposes two types of rhetoric: the rhetoric of demagogues (303a-c) and the rhetoric of statesmen (or those directed by statesmen, 303e-304e). The rhetoric of statesmen is impressively similar to the uses of language described in the hopeful portions of the Cratylus, when names are described as tools of education (Crat. 428e). This latter form of rhetoric is uniquely qualified to educate because of it “implants” a “true and certain opinion” (ἀληθῆ δόξαν μετὰ βεβαιώσεως, Stat. 309d) in the minds of the talented young people of the polis. It generates “right opinion” about topics like goodness, justice, and benefit (309c). The difficulty inherent in the wrong opinions is discussed earlier in the Statesman, though not in relation to value terms.

Several examples are given; for instance, the belief that animals all have something in common (263c) and the belief that statesmanship involves “art of nourishing herds” (ἀγελαστροφικήν) instead of “art of looking after herds” (ἀγελασκομικήν, 275d-275e). With such false “elements” (στοιχεῖα, 34 At 429b, Socrates suggests to Cratylus that some legislators do their job of naming better than other legislators. Cratylus disagrees, thereby introducing a digression where Socrates criticizes the sophistical commonplace that all names are rightly imposed, and thus that all conventions are equally valid. This digression has interesting resonances with the exploration of how falsehood is possible, in the latter portion of the Sophist. More importantly, however, I would note that the digression obscures the point Socrates surely believes: that some legislators are better at naming (i.e. assigning conventions or laws) than others. And this is the point from the Cratylus that is picked up in the Statesman. 35 I follow one reasonably standard interpretation of the Statesman, according to which the dialogue investigates something relatively unimportant (what is a “statesman”) in an effort to demonstrate adequate methods for investigating more difficult topics.
278d), the dialectical formation of a “single true belief” (μίαν ἀληθὴ δόξαν, 278c) about the object of inquiry is said to be impossible.\(^{36}\)

The **Sophist**, likewise, contains too many resonances with the **Cratylus** to ignore. In the **Sophist**, a name ought to “express the nature” (Soph. 221d) of the thing to which it refers. The problem that sophists have, as the interlocutors describe it, is that they somehow manage to participate in falsehood, despite the fact that (by their standards) falsehood is impossible. Since the sophist is not guided by the dialectician, his claims about the world are haphazard, like a blind man groping in darkness. The sophist “creates with his pencil representations bearing the same name as real things” (Soph 234b). As in the **Cratylus**, the sophist is likely enough to get the name right, but the meaning wrong. Indeed, the sophist could hardly manage to deceive unless he had a knack of getting the name right. False beliefs are said to be “imitations” (μιμήματα) of real things, and false beliefs account for the practice of deception (Soph 264d). False attempts at virtue are based on false beliefs about the nature of virtue (cf. Soph 267b-c).

It is abundantly clear, then, that Crat. 425a, which identifies rhetoric with onomastic education, should be taken extremely seriously. Every type of verbal persuasion that does not involve dialectic is onomastic – it is persuasion through **merely** language. Having established this, it is a small step to say that musical education in the **Republic** is onomastic. Musical education is clearly not a form of dialectic, though it also clearly involves persuasion. I make no claim, of course, that musical education involves only persuasion; it involves various other things, like an engagement in harmonies, rhythms, and forms of speech. But the persuasive power of musical education is

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\(^{36}\) An illuminating discussion of 277a-278c – where the Stranger discusses the relationship between letters, words, and true belief – can be found in Kenneth M. Sayre, *Metaphysics and Method in Plato’s Statesman* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).
intimately related to its moral power to form citizens into demotically virtuous individuals, and this persuasive power is a form of onomastikê. As at Crat. 428e, names are indeed given to instruct; and if these names derive from the discernment of the dialectician, they are quite well suited to instruct a person in virtue.

**Bridging the Gulf Between Knowledge and Opinion**

How do the true beliefs and true names inculcated by onomastic education relate to the more mature knowledge and wisdom of the philosopher-kings of the *Republic*? This is the question I should now like to turn to. My contention is that the sort of stable true beliefs produced by education through names are needed in order for a student to successfully engage in dialectic. I will proceed, first, by setting out why true beliefs about the Forms must play a key role in the *Republic*; second, by appealing to evidence in the *Republic* to support my thesis; finally, by appealing to similar evidence in other dialogues.

In a recent paper on *Republic* V, Katja Vogt argues against what she calls the “traditional” view of Socrates’s conversation with the lover of sights and sounds.\(^{37}\) This view holds that, since knowledge and opinion are separate faculties set over (ἐπί, *Rep.* 477b) different kinds of objects, it is impossible to possess an opinion about a Form. Vogt’s concerns are quite broad, but I should like to emphasize a single point that she makes. According to Vogt, the traditional view makes the very notion of Platonic education through the dialectical process impossible, since such education is consistently portrayed as involving the movement from a belief about X to knowledge about X. The classic case of this process is the depiction of the slave boy in the *Meno* (82-85), whose “true opinions” have been awakened by questioning, and who – through further questioning – will attain

knowledge (85c-d). Vogt argues that this same sort of process takes place in the Republic, when
Socrates reluctantly offers his opinion about the offspring of the Good, in the Sun, the Line, and
the Cave metaphors. Even though Socrates insists to Glaucon that “true beliefs without knowledge
... are at best blind” (506c), he nevertheless goes on to share his own opinion (μοι φαίνεται, 506e)
about the Good in analogical form. Vogt’s conclusion is that, although belief is properly directed
at the believable (δοξαστόν, 478b), “this does not mean that [belief] cannot – deficiently – be
directed at what [it] is not adequate for.”

Notice that Vogt puts this point in the passive voice: belief may be directed. This, I would
argue, is precisely the educational programme of the Republic. If a person’s beliefs are blind – if they
“direct themselves” – then, although they may be practically useful and even true (Meno 97b-c), they
are “ugly” (αἰσχραί, 506c). But true beliefs directed either by a wise teacher (as in the Meno) or by
a virtuous constitution (as in the Republic) are essential steps in obtaining knowledge.

The distinction between mere true beliefs and what we might call “directed” true beliefs is
explicit in the text, too. In Book IV, courage is understood as the “preservation of the customary
belief (δόξης) produced by education ... about what sort of things should be feared” (429c). Then,
a moment later, Socrates opines that true beliefs about what should be feared, on their own, do not
constitute courage: “accurate opinion about the same matters, if it has not come about through
education ... you would apparently call something other than ‘courage’ ” (430b). Educational
direction must be the means by which a true belief may be, in Vogt’s sense, “directed” at the Forms.

I would like to suggest, then, that Vogt is actually wrong to fault the traditional
interpretation, despite the fact that she is right to suggest that beliefs may be (in some sense) directed

38 Ibid., 64.
at the Forms. The information-rich names created by the lawgiver and supervised by the dialectician are images of the Forms, and it is these that contain the raw materials of true belief. As such, Vogt is right to say that the opinions of the students of Kallipolis are directed at the Forms in an inferior way, but only if she qualifies this by saying that these beliefs are directed at the inferior verbal imitations of the Forms.

The lawgivers of Plato’s perfect state provide educational direction through musical education: that is, an accurate education through names presided over by the dialectician. Although the content contained within these educational names is not exact, and is certainly subject to revision (see 504b), the names are nevertheless the indispensable stepping stones to virtue and knowledge.

Returning to Socrates’s discussion of courage, he there says that

We were contriving [in the case of musical education and physical training] precisely this: the noblest and most excellent way for [the future guardians] to be convinced by the laws and receive them like a dye, so that their belief about what should feared and all the rest might be steadfast (lit. dye-fast), held in check by their nature and their virtuous upbringing, lest their dyes be washed out by the most cutting detergents: pleasure, … pain, fear, and desire. (430a-b, italics mine)

The phrase “and all the rest” indicates here that it is precisely the stability of their true beliefs about virtues in general that classify the guardians as worthy to advance in their education. As Cross and Woozley put it, at this point in the Republic, “the mark of the ruler was true belief”39 – and, as I discussed in the earlier section, true belief cannot be obtained without accurate nomenclature.

Book IV, then, provides a strong basis for the claim that true opinions and true names are necessary for advancement, and thus necessary for knowledge. There is narrative evidence for this

39 R.C. Cross and A.D. Woozley, Plato’s Republic: A Philosophical Commentary (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964), 200. There are many other suggestions that a central goal of musical education is to instill true beliefs about virtue. Take, for example, Socrates’s insistence that children not hear “any chance stories told by random people,” lest they “receive opinions in their souls that are mostly contrary to those which we want them to possess in adulthood” (377b). Moreover, we are told that these stories will “mold [the] children’s souls … much more than [the nurses and mothers] mold their bodies by handling them” (377c).
claim, as well. The characters of Glaucon and Adeimantus enter into the conversation of Books II-X with the firm and unshakeable belief that justice is beneficial to its possessor, despite the fact that they are able to produce a very strong argument that it is not. Socrates praises them, saying that there must be something godlike in them if they “are not persuaded that injustice is better than justice though [they] can argue so capably on its behalf” (368a). Now, although it almost certainly going too far to say that Glaucon and Adeimantus hold all the true beliefs taught in Kallipolis (despite their notable education and military experience\textsuperscript{46}), it is nevertheless reasonably clear that Socrates’s praise for the irrational/arational true beliefs of Plato’s brothers foreshadows the critical role that such dogmatic beliefs play in his constitution.

The notion that true opinion is necessary for knowledge appears elsewhere in Plato’s dialogues, as well. The Eleatic Stranger in the Statesman balks at the possibility of a person acquiring knowledge without first believing correctly (278d-e). In her extended study on the Symposium, Frisbee Sheffield convincingly argues that the philosophical activity Eros instigates in the rational soul results in two things: accounts (logoi) and true beliefs.\textsuperscript{41} True belief is midway between ignorance and wisdom (Symp. 202a), and the philosopher’s journey from ignorance to wisdom involves a sort of ratcheting back and forth between aporia (resourcelessness, “no way”) and euporia (resourcefulness, “good way”), whose offspring Eros is portrayed as (203c-e).\textsuperscript{42} When the soul realizes its own aporia, it schemes after some piece of wisdom and creates a λόγος, but this λόγος turns out to be unstable, since it is said to “ebb away” (203e). Through such progressions from aporia to euporia, engaged in

\textsuperscript{40} See Sandra Peterson, Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 151-159.
\textsuperscript{42} Sheffield, ibid., 65.
repeatedly over a long period of time, the philosopher moves from ignorance to true belief, and then from true belief to knowledge.

An almost identical progression is envisioned in the Seventh Letter, the work of either Plato or an ancient author steeped in Platonic tradition. The Letter presents a rather complicated picture of education, and I will not attempt to work out the details of this picture here. The author of the Letter divides the progress of education into five classes: the name, the definition, the likeness, the piece of knowledge, and the thing itself. (In Greek, ὀνομα, λόγος, εἴδωλον, ἐπιστήμη, and ὁ δὴ ἔστιν, 342b.) A course of instruction that continually leads a person up and down through these lower four classes “just barely manages to breed knowledge (ἐπιστήμην ἐνέτεκεν) of a naturally good object in a naturally good individual” (343e).

Now if genuine knowledge is only obtained at the fifth step, clearly the label ἐπιστήμη for the fourth step is somewhat misleading. The author of the Letter helps us out, however, by clarifying that the fourth step is a step that involves “both thought and true opinion” (καὶ νοὺς ἀληθῆς τε δόξα, 342c), and that even this step depends upon the evidence of the senses (343c). It is no stretch, then, to propose that all four classes exist at the level of Doxa. The author emphasizes how unstable and unreliable the four lower classes are (343b), and this instability recalls multiple passages in the

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45 The meaning of λόγος here is, per usual, somewhat unclear. In context, it is clear that the λόγοι of this passage have more epistemic dignity than mere words (ὀνοματα), but less dignity than likenesses (εἴδωλα). Plato gives an example of a λόγος: the λόγος of a circle is “the thing whose edges are removed by the same distance from the center in every direction” (342b). I do not think we will go amiss by saying that such a λόγος is a “description” or a “definition.”
Republic about the difficulties with Doxa, including 479a-c, where “things” are said to “equivocate” (ἐπαμφοτερίζειν), and the three fingers passage at 523a-526b, which describes the senses as “deficient” (ἐνδεῶς, 523e).  

Once again, then, true belief is a prerequisite for knowledge. In the Letter, moreover, increasingly correct ὄνοματα are explicitly necessary for the progression from ignorance to belief to knowledge. The Seventh Letter explicitly places the blame for the instability of Doxa on the inadequacy of language.

These four [classes] make an effort to disclose the particular instance of a thing (τὸ ποιὸν τι) quite as much as the genuine nature of the thing itself (τὸ ὧν ἕκαστον), because of the inadequacy of language (διὰ τὸ τῶν λόγων ἀσθενές). ... Now we affirm that none of our names are at all stable (βέβαιον); nothing prevents the things we now call “round” from being called “straight,” and vice versa, nor would the names have any less stability (οὐδὲν ἕττον βεβαιῶ) if they were changed from their current meanings. (342e-343b)

The conventionality of language echoes the latter part of the Cratylus. And yet, clearly the goal being sought is some level of objective correctness, a correctness which is only possible in the stability that links concepts with real objects, not in the stability that links phonemes to concepts. It is the objective correctness of names that allows one to advance forward through the four stages; this objective correctness, therefore, is a necessary precondition for knowledge.

Conclusion

My analysis above has illuminated at least this much: The Cratylus is not an isolated dialogue, and certain theories Plato advances there play important roles in other dialogues. The idea that

46 The mention of the senses here is relevant, because the Seventh Letter passage squarely places the blame for the instability of the four lower classes on the fact that they rely on the senses.
47 It is worth noting, at least in passing, how striking the resemblance between this passage and the passage I discussed above, from the Symposium, is. Both passages describe a ladder toward knowledge that involves both downward and upward movement, a realization of insight and a realization of ignorance. Both passages make explicit mention of logoi and true belief as stepping stones to knowledge.
names are imbued with meaning by the lawmaker is a characteristic assertion Plato makes throughout his middle period, and it is particularly important in the Republic. The negative attitude Plato has toward education through names in the Cratylus is a result of his antipathy toward sophists, not an indication that no sort of education through names could be efficacious. For, as we have seen, the proper method of educating the guardians, in the Republic, begins with an education through names.

My explorations in this chapter and the previous one go some way to explaining the role of philosophy of language in Plato’s system of primary education, but they do not situate language in the broader metaphysical vision of the Republic. In the following two chapters, I proceed under the hypothesis that language can be situated in that context, that we can understand language in the context of various other mainstays in Platonic ontology, like appearances and Forms. If I can succeed in demonstrating that, it will make an even stronger case for what I have been saying here: that the regulations on permissible speech in Kallipolis are manifestations of the standards of naming expressed in the Cratylus.
CHAPTER 3: MIDDLE VIRTUE
ACCURATE “POETRY” IN REPUBLIC X

In this chapter, I should like to propose a number of novel suggestions about the nature of
taste in the final book of the Republic. In all the voluminous debates about Rep. X’s apparent
reversal on the issue of poetry, Plato’s real concern – which is virtue, not poetry – has been somewhat
lost. My argument here is that the sort of understanding of Platonic language I have proposed in
Chapters I and II illuminate the discussions about virtue in Book X. In Book X, Plato envisions a
notion of virtue which is neither the virtue manifested in imitative poetry nor the virtue possessed
by a philosopher. This “middle” virtue, I argue, is a familiar object in disguise: it is a word. Both
this chapter and the next will attempt to do something few people have attempted to do: they will
attempt to situate words as metaphysical entities in the metaphysical vision of Plato’s Republic. In
my work on these chapters, I hope to shed light on what sort of existence words have, in Plato’s view.

The chapter will proceed by moving from a discussion about couches to a discussion about
virtue, and then from a discussion about virtue to a discussion about words. The first section will
focus on the role of the craftsman in Book X’s depiction of the three kinds of couch, and will draw
a number of connections between this discussion and the Cratylus. The next section will consider
how we can use two emphases of Book X – couches and poetry – to infer the truth about something
Plato did not emphasize: what I will call “intermediate virtue,” the type of virtue that corresponds
to the craftsman’s couch. I will argue that intermediate virtue should be identified with demotic
virtue, and that Plato envisions it as a kind of sensory object that can, in some sense, genuinely
educate a person about right action. I will then argue that the virtue words are objects that fit that
precise description, and I will identify four common characteristics between these words and
intermediates. Finally, I will draw these four commonalities into an argument that virtue words and intermediate virtues are, for Plato, the same thing.

That is the plan for the chapter. I will begin, however, by discussing upholstery.

Section 1: On Couches

At the beginning of Book X, Socrates describes three couches and three people associated with couches. The first type of couch has its being “in nature” (ἐν τῇ φύσει οὐσα, 597b) and is created by God. God made “only one of these” and it has “real existence” (597c). The second couch is created by the craftsman (δημιουργός), who looks toward the Form of a couch in order to fashion it (πρὸς τὴν ἰδέαν βλέπων οὕτω ποιεῖ, 596b). This “intermediate” couch has two aspects: a “reality” (τὸ ὄν, 598b) to the way it is, and an “appearance” (τὸ φαίνόμενον, 598b) which changes depending on the perspective of the viewer (598a). The imitative painter does not produce his couch by looking toward the Form, nor by looking to the “reality” of the intermediate couch, but rather by looking to the appearance of the intermediate (πρὸς τὸ φαίνόμενον, 598b). The painted couch is not genuinely the “sort of thing” (τοιούτου, 597d) God and the craftsman produce, since it does not serve the purpose of a couch (e.g. you cannot sit on it). It is merely an imitation of one particular appearance of the intermediate.2

The three people associated with couches are these: the user, the craftsman, and the painter. (See 601d-602c). The action of the painter, we have seen, is to imitate appearances. The action of the “user” – and, indeed, what Plato means by this term – is somewhat obscure; I shall not say much

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1 Similar language is used in the Cratylus, in reference to the artificer of names: the legislator puts names into syllables by “looking toward the genuine name of the thing itself” (βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἐστιν ὄνομα, 389d); and the true namegiver is “the one who sets his gaze on the natural name of each thing” (ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀποβλέποντα εἰς τὸ τῇ φύσεως ὄνομα ὃν ἐκάστῳ, 390c), and puts this name into appropriate syllables.

about it here, except that the user appears to be in direct contact with the Form of the Couch. My concern is with the craftsman. The craftsman takes information acquired from the user, and uses this information as a template for his “making” (ποίησις). Socrates’s mention of the user at 601c, then, must be a slight revision of what is said at 596b. The craftsman, strictly speaking, does not “look toward” the Form of the Couch, but rather receives information about the couch from someone who has looked toward the Form. It is this information that provides the craftsman with the true beliefs that allow him to produce a “good instance” of a couch (where a “good instance” is a material couch that somehow conforms to or instantiates the Form of Couch).

Although it has seldom been mentioned in the scholarship of Book X, the commonalities between the passages I just described and the opening of the Cratylus are extraordinary. Both dialogues distinguish explicitly between the “maker” (or “craftsman”) and the “user” (Crat. 388e-390d; Rep. 601d-602b). Both dialogues argue that the maker employs the knowledge of the user as a guide in making (Crat. 390d; Rep. 601e-602a). Both dialogues suggest that there are standards of use by which the product of the craftsman may be normatively evaluated (Crat. 389d-390a, 431d; Rep. 601e, 598e). The subject matter of the two passages, however, would appear to be quite different: the Cratylus is discussing words, whereas the Republic is discussing couches. Nevertheless, in both cases, it is heavily implied that both words and couches have standards for judgment, and at least some of the time these standards for judgment seem to be the Forms (Crat. 438d-e, 439d; Rep. 597d).

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3 It is obvious that the “user” is a person who, say, sits on the couch, and Plato clearly puts the user in an exalted cognitive position in respect to the couch. But it is hard to see why the user would have any specialized knowledge about the couch, much less the sort of knowledge that would be absolutely essential to the craftsman. Perhaps the claims about the user make the most sense when we consider a context where the craftsman is not capable of using the relevant object: fighter jets and skateboards might be good examples.
In Republic X, of course, Socrates is not really concerned with interior decorating; he is concerned with the nature of virtue, and the vicious effects of imitative poetry. The entire conversation about imitating material objects aims to reveal how deficient poetic imitations of moral objects (the virtues) are. When the discussion turns to virtue, we can understand how the connections between the Cratylus and Republic X can illuminate the nature of virtue in the Republic. I believe that the moral analogue of the craftsman’s couch is a linguistic object: the particular word we use to describe each individual virtue. The craftsman of virtue uses refined and accurate poetry (“making”) to teach true beliefs about this word, I will argue, and the ordinary citizen acquires demotic virtue as a result of this interaction.

Section 2: On Virtue

As we have seen, Book X presents an “intermediate” couch: a couch that is neither the “Form” of the Couch, nor any particular sensory appearance of a couch. This intermediate couch is the creation of the craftsman. The couch only matters, however, insofar as it is analogous with the genuine topic of interest in Book X: virtue. Socrates aims to demonstrate that the imitator of virtue (the poet) makes products quite as deficient as the imitator of couches (the painter). For this analogy to work, however, there must be both three-part divisions that I discussed above, in the context of virtue as well as couches. And this is what we find in Book X, although Plato’s depiction

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4 By “appearance,” I mean either (a) the type of sensory experience caused by an intermediate (e.g. a couch as seen from a particular angle), or (b) a reflection, shadow, or image of an intermediate object. Perhaps unexpectedly, Plato does not claim there is an important distinction between seeing a couch from one perspective and seeing a painting or a reflection of the same couch. All these are phantasmata. For an illuminating discussion of the nature of appearances, see again Moss, “What is Imitative Poetry?”.

5 A number of commentators have recognized this, including Burnyeat, in his third lecture on Culture and Society in Plato’s Republic. Burnyeat talks about intermediate virtue as an “ordinary, second-level” (314) version of understanding virtue, and says that “the nonphilosopher’s second-level knowledge of values is ‘knowledge’ only by courtesy, better called opinion” (315). M.F. Burnyeat, “Culture and Society in Plato’s Republic,” The Tanner Lectures on Human Values 20 (Salt Lake City, 1999), 314-315.
of certain aspects of the analogy is not always quite clear. The poet is the analogue of the painter; the lawmaker is the analogue of the craftsman; and the philosopher is the analogue of the “user.”

Where the craftsman makes an intermediate couch, the lawmaker makes “intermediate virtue.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>USER</th>
<th>COUCHES</th>
<th>VIRTUES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>User</td>
<td>Form of the Couch</td>
<td>Form of the Virtue</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maker</td>
<td>Intermediate couch (Product of craftsman)</td>
<td>Intermediate virtue (Product of craftsman of virtue?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imitator</td>
<td>Painting of a couch</td>
<td>Virtue portrayed by an imitative poet</td>
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If this were all the information the Republic gave us about intermediate virtue, an analysis of its nature would be speculative indeed. But we are given one additional clue earlier in the Republic, and this clue is a decisive one. In Book VI, Socrates explicitly calls the guardians of his imagined polis “craftsmen of temperance and justice and the whole of demotic virtue” (500d, δημιουργὸν ... σωφροσύνης τε καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ συμπάσης τῆς δημοτικῆς ἀρετῆς). This passage clearly connects the Book II-IX themes of “molding” or “shaping” (πλάττειν, 377b-c, repeated at 500d) citizens into virtuous activity with the Book X theme of “making/crafting virtue.” In Kallipolis, the craftsman of virtue is the guardian, and the product he produces is demotic virtue.

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6 Imitators of virtue (poets) are contrasted with lawgivers like Lycurgus, Charondas and Solon; innovators like Thales and Anacharsis; practitioners of a “way of life” (600b) like Pythagoras. The common thread here is that these latter people claim to “understand what sorts of habits make people better or worse” (599d), and that the beneficiaries of their craft “take part in” a certain type of “training” (παιδείας, 600d) which they believe is indispensable to them (599e; 600c-e). Intermediate virtue is the object of this training.
What is demotic virtue, then? In Platonic tradition, it is understood as the type of civic virtue that “comes from habituation without philosophy and reason.” My analysis reveals something more. Demotic virtue manifests speech and action that is somehow in accordance with the Forms, without involving knowledge (Phaedo 82a-b; cf. Rep. 619c, 518d). As Veltman and Barney (among others) have argued, demotic virtue is available to nonphilosophers who possess the correct beliefs about virtue – and this arguably includes every single citizen of Kallipolis. Athenian lawgivers, like Solon, cannot effectively craft demotic virtue because they do not know the truth about the Forms, but (as I argued in the first two chapters) Kallipolan lawmakers have no such barrier. The guardian crafts demotic virtue in a way that is fully adequate for the moral education of a citizen; as we see in Book III, this involves a thorough indoctrination in certain true beliefs about virtue that are judged essential to the city. A craftsman of virtue, then, is someone who devotes his life to the education of others in a particular way, by instituting norms in the form of true beliefs, or by instilling habits. This craftsman has “correct belief” (601e) about matters of value. As he bestows these true beliefs upon others, they are empowered to act virtuously; this is intermediate virtue.

To summarize, then, an intermediate virtue is a product which the craftsman of virtue provides the broader public by means of (largely verbal) moral education. Ideally, this virtue will somehow conform to the Form of the relevant virtue, though this connection will only occur when

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9 Ordinary citizens of Kallipolis receive certain lies from their rulers, but none of these lies directly pertain to virtue. For more on the relationship between demotic education and deception in Plato, see Nicholas D. Smith and Thomas Brickhouse, “Justice and Dishonesty in Plato’s Republic,” Southern Journal of Philosophy 21 no. 1 (1983): 79-95.
the process is guided by a dialectician. The intermediate virtue manifests itself in the beliefs of the individual, and these beliefs explain the moral decisions of the individual. The ordinary person possessed of an intermediate virtue will believe in certain norms, and possess certain habits, and these norms and habits will tend to make her a better person (599d). Education may be inferior in either (or both) of two ways: (1) by inculcating intermediate virtues that are not themselves in complete accordance with the Forms (i.e. the laws of Solon or the teachings of Protagoras), or (2) by operating at one further remove from reality, as the imitative poets do. Once we understand that (on Plato’s view) poets like Homer are both using defective models (defective intermediates) and operating at a further remove, we may be able to see more clearly why Plato has such a negative attitude toward poetry. We will certainly see why some sort of reformed musical education is a critical ingredient of his republic.

Section 3: On Words

My position in this chapter is that intermediate virtue plays a more central role in Plato’s vision of philosophical investigation than it is ordinarily given credit for. Intermediate virtues are

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10 This point that action manifests belief may be simply thought of as a corollary to Plato’s intellectualism about moral behavior. On the traditional interpretation, Plato is an intellectualist about virtue: he believes that virtue is knowledge, and he therefore believes that one cannot learn that Xing is wrong without thereby ceasing to X. When we extend this view to true and false beliefs, we would have the view that “demonic virtue is true belief,” that “one cannot acquire a belief that X is wrong without thereby ceasing to X.” This interpretation is consistent, so far as I can tell, with every mention of belief in Plato’s dialogues, and it is positively confirmed by one of them. In the Meno, Socrates makes the argument that true belief has all the same effects as knowledge (97a-d). Since the action-compelling nature of knowledge is one of knowledge’s effects, it stands to reason that true belief would be action-compelling, as well.

11 One might think that primary education in Kallipolis operates at this more distant level, as well, but I think that is a misunderstanding. The “poetry” told to the children there is not imitative (in the sense the word is used in Book X). This, I would speculate, is because it consists exclusively of true beliefs. As I will discuss in Section 3, and Chapter IV, the distinction between merely apparent objects and “trustworthy” objects (objects of pistis) is determined by their objective accuracy.

A number of articles have dealt with the difficult question of why the additional level of imitation manifested in poetry would lead people astray. Pictures provide only partial information about their subject matter, but this partial information is not inaccurate merely because it is partial. For ways of addressing this problem, see Moss “What Is Imitative?” (above).
examined through the “serious” (σπουδαίον, 603c) or intellectual portion of the soul\textsuperscript{12}, they are measureable (603e; cf. 602d-603a), and they have standards of correctness that are determined by the Forms (598d-e). Intermediate objects cause appearances to appear, and yet they themselves are “caused,” in some sense of the word, by the Forms (601e-602a; cf. 509b). They occupy a place between what is fully rational (Forms) and what is irrational (appearances). Intermediate virtues are similar to the Forms in that they can be understood through the intellect, but dissimilar to the Forms in that they are objects of sensory experience. Their status as sensory objects that play an educational role has not been emphasized in the literature.

Once we realize that intermediate virtues are sensory objects that play an educational role, it is a small yet ambitious step to say that they are words. I shall take that step by appealing to the Cratylus, and specifically the claims I have made about Plato’s philosophy of language in Chapters I and II. In those chapters, I believe I have established that (1) the Cratylus was a serious attempt at philosophy of language, even if the etymologies were not always meant seriously, (2) the dialogue’s consistent assertion that words are “images” or “imitations” is a genuine view that Plato held, and (3) that, when the Cratylus addresses the connection between “things” (πράγματα) and their names, the “things” being talked about are the Forms.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} There is some dispute among scholars about how the twofold distinction between the “serious” (603c) and the “irrational” (605d) parts of the soul in Book X should be reconciled with the threefold distinction between reason, spirit, and appetite in Book III. Competing proposals can be found in Jessica Moss, “Appearances and Calculations: Plato’s Division of the Soul,” Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 34 (2008): 35-68. Todd Ganson, “The Rational/Non-Rational Distinction in Plato’s Republic,” Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 36 (2009): 179-197. For a proposal that the distinction in Book X is a distinction within the rational soul, see Alexander Nehamas, “Plato on Imitation and Poetry in Republic 10,” in Plato on Beauty, Wisdom, and the Arts, eds. J. M. E. Moravcsik and Philip Temko (Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

\textsuperscript{13} This assumption is supported by the discussion of “true beauty” at 439c-d, which is strikingly similar to Plato’s discussion of the “form of beauty” in the Symposium.
I have argued that Socrates portrays intermediate virtues as sensory objects that somehow “link up” with Forms, in something like the way that the couch made by a carpenter “links up” with the Form of the Couch. Plato describes this link by using the term mimesis. The intermediate object corresponding to the Form of Courage is an imitation of Courage that is nevertheless (unlike the Form) a sensory object – in particular, an auditory object. Words are, on a straightforward understanding of Plato’s philosophy of language, precisely this sort of object. They are “imitations” (Crat. 423b) or “images” (Crat. 431d) of the Forms; they are audible objects; they have the power to refer to real things (πράγματα, Crat. 436a) that exist in a way that they themselves do not. The contrast between the Forms of virtues and intermediate virtues, then, is the contrast between purely cognitive objects, on the one hand, and sensory objects that refer to cognitive objects, on the other. In the schema given by Book V, intermediates are objects of opinion, not knowledge. They may be, at best, the objects of true belief; they can never be known. Nevertheless, they are “imitations” of things that can be known. In terms of qualities, they are remarkably similar to words.

I will put forward four significant claims about how intermediates are similar to words: (1) Intermediates and words “are” in a sense that mere appearances are not. (2) Both intermediates and words are objects of sensory experiences, in the sense that they “show themselves” to the senses. (3) Both intermediates and words are the products of the craftsman’s true opinions. (4) Intermediates and words have a level of stability that is manifested in the fact that they can be measured, and that they can be incorrect. For the remainder of this chapter, I will explicate those four claims. The combination of the four will, I hope, go a long way toward establishing my thesis.

1. Intermediates and words “are” in a sense that mere appearances are not.
My first comparison between intermediates and words turns on an often overlooked passage in Book X. In this passage, which I have already touched on, Socrates makes the controversial suggestion that objects at the intermediate level are real in a way that appearances are not:

Please tell me this about the painter: Does it seem to you that he attempts to copy each thing itself as it genuinely (ἐν τῇ φύσει) exists, or the works of the craftsman? The works of the craftsman. As they are, or as they appear to be? [As they appear]. (597e-598a)

Three categories are indicated: (1) realities that do not appear (Forms), (2) intermediates that possess both an appearance and a reality, and (3) appearances detached from any reality. What can Socrates mean by saying that the couch made by the carpenter has a “reality” (τὸ ὄν, 598b), a word that we might have expected him to reserve for immaterial Forms? What is this “reality”? It is obviously not the sort of robust reality that the Forms have, since Plato expressly specifies that the Form of the Couch has a sort of “genuine existence” (δινώς οὐσία) that a particular couch (κλίνης τινὸς, 597d) doesn’t have. Though it is difficult to discern Plato’s purpose in using the term τὸ ὄν in this context, I will suggest and defend the following understanding: in relation to the Forms, the carpenter’s couch is “coming to be” (γίγνεσθαι), but in comparison with appearances, it “is” (ἐἶναι).

14 I follow Vlastos, among others, in considering the language of “being” in Book X to be a matter of genuineness or “degrees of reality,” not a matter of literal existence and nonexistence. A painting of a couch clearly exists, but its existence (insofar as it is a “couch”) is derivative in a way that the couch’s existence is not. Gregory Vlastos, “A Metaphysical Paradox,” Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association 39 (1965): 5-19.

15 Tate claims that a fourth category is implied by the question “as they are, or as they appear?” He thinks that such a question suggests a type of imitation (especially in the realm of poetry) that imitates the reality of things. But I would argue that this proposal is incoherent in the realm of painting, since a painter who copied things as they really are would be a craftsman, not a painter. (See the argument about two Cratyluses at Crat. 432a-b.) So it is unclear why there could be poetic imitations of the reality of things, when there can be no pictographic imitation, and it is far more plausible that Plato considers all poetry to be an imitation of appearances. Belfiore provides a helpful responses to Tate. J. Tate, “‘Imitation’ in Plato’s Republic,” CQ 22 (1928): 16-23. Elizabeth Belfiore, “A Theory of Imitation in Plato’s Republic,” in Ancient Literary Criticism, ed. Andrew Laird (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 133-135.

16 In my use of “is” and “comes to be,” I intend to preserve any ambiguities that might be found in the Greek variants of these terms. For an interesting argument that Greek philosophy systematically benefited from the ambiguity contained in the verb ἐἶναι, see Charles Kahn, “The Greek Verb ‘To Be’ and the Concept of Being,” Foundations of Language 2 (1966).
The same sort of contrast is found in the *Timaeus*, where Timaeus describes a “third and intermediate kind of existing thing” (οὐσίας εἴδος), which is created out of the combination of that “which exists always in the same way” (ἀεί κατὰ ταὐτὰ ἔχουσης οὐσίας) and that “which is divided into physical entities” (τῆς ... περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένης μεριστῆς, Tim. 35a). The use of οὐσίας to describe the intermediate resonates with this usage of τὸ ὅν in Book X.

The sense in which the carpenter’s couch is coming to be, I think, should be reasonably clear: the carpenter makes it, and, once it is made, it remains subject to change (e.g., it could be reupholstered). The sense in which the carpenter’s couch “is,” perhaps, is less clear. In order to understand this, we shall have to consider a consistent (and perhaps annoying) trait in Plato’s discussions of ontology. Plato often seems to insert epistemological arguments where we might expect metaphysical ones. Book X is no exception. In his discussion of poetry in Book X, he distinguishes the ontological status of objects on the basis of our cognitive access to them. We have access to objects in two primary ways: (1) Through measurement (603a) and/or an understanding of the purpose of things (601e-602a) and (2) Through an appeal to mere appearances detached from any sort of reality (602a-b). The first type of access only allows for an engagement with objects that “are” (in some relevant sense): the Form of Couch and the couch made by the carpenter. Things that have content independent from their appearances can be measured and understood; other things cannot. Appearances can only be accessed through other appearances.

Plato seems to be suggesting that, since we do not cognitively engage with couch-appearances in the same way that we do with couches, there must be two types of objects with which we engage.18

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17 A third form of access is mentioned at 601e: we might access cognitive objects through correct testimony about a thing’s nature or purpose.
18 This may be begging the question against the bundle theorist, who says that couches just are a bundle of appearances, but that is an objection Plato would plausibly have missed. If one does give that part of the argument a
This point applies equally well to words, as well as couches. Insofar as a word is an appearance, it consists of various sounds with different qualities; but what makes the phoneme a word and not a succession of sounds is its capacity to refer. Modern philosophers might explain this property of language by saying that there is something interesting about our intentions when we use particular words. Plato appears to have thought, to the contrary, that there was something interesting about the words themselves. In the Cratylus and elsewhere, he expressed this point in terms of imitation. Words are imitations of the things they refer to. They are distinguished from other sensory objects, then, not only insofar as they are referential, but also insofar as they are representational. Just as a painting is an image of what it represents, so a word is an image of the Form to which it refers (if there is such a Form).

The language of representation is a major motif in Book X. With respect to couches, we are told that the craftsman of the couch makes “something that is in some way like reality (τὸ ὤν), but is not (ὦν δὲ υὐ)” (597a). The craftsman’s couch has its level of “reality,” then, precisely because it resembles real being. A couch will be a good couch if it resembles the Form closely, a bad couch if the resemblance is strained. A word will be a good word if it resembles its referent closely – that is, if the beliefs which are somehow “bound up” with that word are true of its referent. Both intermediates and words, then, have the capacity to “borrow” some level of real existence, insofar as they attain to the standards which govern them.

pass, the conclusion that couches are ontologically superior to couch appearances would appear considerably more sensible. There is something airy and ephemeral, even “unreal,” about an object that available to experience, but obstinately eludes analysis.

19 This claim may seem objectionable, in that I speak as if the theory of Forms was already functional in the Cratylus. That is not my intention, however. Although it seems likely that the Cratylus is engaged with Plato’s specialized doctrine of Forms – see, for instance, 439d-e, where Socrates’s discussion of “the beautiful itself” echoes Symp. 211a-b – the theory of naming discussed in the Cratylus need not make any specific mention of Forms, only “things” (cf. the discussion of investigating things “through themselves” at 438e-439b). If we apply that theory to an ontology that does include Forms, we find that Forms take the place of the “things” which clearly do play a central role in the Cratylus.
2. Both intermediates and words are objects of sensory experiences, in the sense that they “show themselves” to the senses.

Despite the fact that Socrates says that the intermediate couch has a certain sort of being (598a-b, 599a), he is also at pains to clarify that it exists in a way that is inferior to the Forms. The couch “does not differ from itself in the slightest” (598a) depending on the angle from which it is viewed, but it is nevertheless an object that is subject to the senses: it “presents different appearances” (ibid.) in different situations. The couch emits “phantasms” or “appearances” (see 598b) which are the immediate object of our sensory experience, just as shadows are the immediate object of the prisoner’s experience in the cave.

The nature of the intermediate couch might be understood using the language of dimensionality. We often say that we can “see” three-dimensional objects, but it is nevertheless false that we can ever see all three dimensions at once. What we see, at any given moment, is a two-dimensional visual field which we know - through testimony and inference, presumably - contains three-dimensional objects. The third dimension is never simply “given” to us in experience; and thus, the existence of the three-dimensional object itself is not given to us in experience, either.\(^\text{20}\) In just the same way, the craftsman’s couch is not directly accessible to the senses, but only indirectly accessible. When we talk about “the couch,” we are talking about the three-dimensional object, but none of our experiences contain the object in its full dimensionality. “The couch” is the thing that causes couch appearances, just as the three-dimensional (or “real”) apple is what causes my two-dimensional experience of an apple from various perspectives. Two-dimensional images are

\(^{20}\) The point applies much more straightforwardly to the sense of sight than the sense of touch, however. And it is much more difficult to present an argument for something like the “compresence of opposites” when we consider the sense of touch, as opposed to the sense of sight, since touch does not seem to admit of perspectives in the same way. I take it for granted that Plato was not particularly concerned with the cognitive implications of touch.
straightforwardly an object of the senses; three-dimensional objects are only objects of the senses insofar as they cause such two-dimensional images to exist.

I would like to propose that this notion of dimensionality can be fruitfully compared to the sort of distinction I discussed in Chapter I, the distinction between a “name-as-phoneme” and a “name-as-concept.” Socrates, in the Cratylus, mentions the sharp distinction we must make between an “ideal name” and particular phonetic structures in human languages – more than one of which may accurately embody (or instantiate) this name. We might call this ideal name a “conceptual name,” the name that carries with it information about the stereotypes speakers apply to the thing being named. This information is opaque to a speaker of the language unfamiliar with the word, until they draw conclusions from contextual clues about the beliefs embedded in the concept, clues which emerge from a close observation of how the word is used. Just like the intermediate couch presents different appearances at different times, a conceptual name is appealed to (by the use of a phoneme) in a number of different scenarios, which appear quite different. A “red” couch does not look much like a “red” stop light. Nevertheless, just as the observer acquires beliefs about the couch by accumulating and analyzing couch appearances, the linguistic learner acquires the culturally endorsed concept of redness by observing and analyzing the circumstances in which the phoneme “red” is used.

Moreover, there seems to be a sense in which the usages of the phoneme “red” are caused by the concept of redness, similar to the way that couch-appearances are caused by the intermediate couch. The reason that people use “red” instead of “potato” to apply to certain objects is that they have certain stereotypical understandings of what redness is, and their concept of redness applies to those objects. Note that their action of using the phoneme is not caused by the Form of Redness (at
least not directly), because they could correctly apply their understanding of the concept redness without describing something that actually participates in the Form. Thus a medieval doctor might make a speech act blaming an illness on “phlegm,” where the use of this word (rather than another) is very much caused by the doctor’s concept of phlegm, not based on the actual properties of phlegm. The word “cause” here, of course, does not refer to any notion of an efficient cause, but rather to an explanatory cause. There is truly a sense in which our concepts – even our flawed concepts – explain our actions.

The interpretation I propose here explains what might otherwise be a puzzling aspect of Book X’s ontology: what can Plato mean by suggesting that intermediates are “more real” than appearances – in particular, that intermediate virtues are more real than appearances of virtue? If we follow Plato in saying that “real” things are precisely those things that cannot be experienced through the senses, then it should follow that an object will be “more real” insofar as understanding it involves abstracting away from the senses – as we do when we come to understand a concept, as an inference from the way a phoneme is used. Plato believes that the knowhow that goes into making (or conceptualizing) a couch is not purely sensory, and he certainly believes that our understanding of words involves a type of cognition that transcends a merely sensory encounter. He calls this type of cognition *pistis* (511e), and he regularly suggests that this is the type of cognition associated with true opinion. And so I will turn now to true opinion.

3. Both intermediates and words are the products of the craftsman’s true opinions.

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21 Obviously, calling it a “formal” cause would be unhelpful, since I am precisely insisting that the relevant speech acts are not (directly) explained by the Forms.

22 Although I feel that the subject is too large and controversial to broach here, the discussion of “moving forms” in Book III, in the *Timaeus*, and elsewhere, surely has some relevance to the topics I discuss here. A moving form, like a concept, has a substantial resemblance to a Form without being a Form. Moreover, since it is moving, it would appear to be a sensible object of some sort. See Chapter IV for more on moving forms.
What does it mean, in Plato’s ontology, to say that something is an object of sensory apprehension that nevertheless has some important relationship to the Forms? It almost certainly means, for one, that we should identify the object as an object of “pistis”: it is the sort of object we might “trust” (πιστεύειν), even if it is not the sort of object that might be known. Both in the Republic and elsewhere, this sort of object is constantly being referred to as an object of “true opinion.” Objects of true opinion have a level of reliability that exceeds that of other sensory objects, as evidenced by the word pistis itself, which often denotes a “pledge of good faith” or an “assurance.” Nevertheless, Plato never gives any suggestion that true opinions “transcend the realm of the senses” or manage to be directed at the Forms. Indeed, Plato’s conception of belief is, to modern ears, quite curious for its constant appeal to the senses. In the Sophist and the Theaetetus, for instance, belief is envisioned as the outcome of a sort of internal dialogue within the soul (Soph. 263e-264a, Theaet. 189e-190a); so far from being a “propositional attitude,” belief is envisioned as a spoken word.

True opinion is contrasted with knowledge, but it is also contrasted with the type of ignorance that is not informed by any sort of authority whatsoever. In Book X, Plato dramatizes this distinction by appealing to the “user,” the “maker” (or craftsman), and the “imitator.” The “user” of a couch has knowledge of the Couch itself (602a); the craftsman of the (intermediate) couch has true belief about couches (πιστιν ὀρθὴν, 601e; δόξαν ὀρθὴν, 602a); and the imitator of the couch only has familiarity with “what appears good to the many, who know nothing” (602b; cf. 493a-c). The user’s knowledge is (among other things) knowledge of “the sorts of good and bad things that arise from [an object’s] use” (οἶα ἁγαθὰ ἢ κακὰ ... ἐν τῇ χρείᾳ ὃς χρήται, 601d-e) and of the type

of condition that could make it fine or defective (κάλλους τε καὶ πονηρίας, 602a). We should assume, then, that the craftsman of a couch does not know either (a) the Form of the Couch, nor (b) the properties that would make an individually crafted couch a “good couch” or a “bad couch.”

Rather, we should say that the craftsman has true beliefs about how to make or how to identify a physical object that manages to be an imperfect instance of the Form. If a couch is made well, it will embody these true beliefs. The painter, by contrast, merely knows how to create sensory representations that imitate her sensory experience of the couch.

The craftsman’s true opinions distinguish him from the imitator, and they also, no doubt, distinguish the craftsman’s product from the imitator’s product. Whatever it is that makes the intermediate couch more real than the painting of a couch, this quality adheres to the intermediate couch because the craftsman used his true beliefs to put it there. The “reality” (τὸ ὄν) of an intermediate object is caused to be there by the action of the craftsman of that object. The craftsman’s true beliefs explain why the object is not merely a multitude of various appearances, but rather a relatively stable object of cognition. Moreover, it is the craftsman’s beliefs – not just technical expertise – that are being evaluated whenever we use standards of correctness to evaluate whether an individual couch is a

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24 It may be that knowing the Form of the Couch precisely is knowing the conditions that make individual couches good or bad couches.

25 This analysis of true belief conforms to other discussions of true belief in the dialogues. So, for instance, the Meno says that true belief (so long as it remains true) is functionally adequate for making judgments about action (97c) and the Symposium describes true beliefs as intermediate between knowledge and ignorance (202a), and (on a plausible reading) suggests that true opinions about the beauty of individual sensible objects are stepping stones to knowledge of the insensible Form of Beauty (210a-d).

26 Are these true opinions about the Forms? I don’t think so. Socrates uses the example of flute playing, and says that, whereas the user knows what sorts of flutes lend themselves to skillful use, the maker of the flute merely has true belief about the excellence or deficiency of the individual flute (602a). The craftsman is not even interested in the Forms for their own sake, but must be “compelled” (601e) to learn the properties that make flutes good or bad. Once he is familiar with these properties, however, he has a facility with various materials that might be shaped into an instance of a flute.
“good” or a “bad” couch, since the couch is an embodiment of these beliefs. The couch will be good insofar as it reflects the Form accurately, and bad insofar as it reflects the Form inaccurately.

This vision of the nature of a craftsman will be familiar to any careful reader of the Cratylus. The craftsman of words in the Cratylus (the legislator) lays down words in accordance with her own beliefs: if these beliefs are true, the resultant words will also be “true.” Words are meaning-rich entities that are only accurate or “true” insofar as the beliefs of the namegiver are true. The determiner of the truth of a word is, as in the case of couches, the Form that corresponds to it. We might therefore divide words into two classes: correct and incorrect words. Correct words, like intermediates, have a rugged connection to the things themselves: they are first-order imitations of those things. If we start from the obvious assumption that a craftsman necessarily makes something, and we likewise assume that the product made by the craftsman of virtue manifests his true opinions, it should begin to appear more and more likely that the product made by the craftsman of virtue is the (meaning-rich) name of a virtue.

Moreover – and this is perhaps the most striking connection between the Cratylus and Book X – the same exact distinction between a “user” and a “craftsman” is made in both works. We have seen, above, that the user in Book X informs the craftsman about the standards by which an intermediate ought to be made. This is exactly the picture we get in the Cratylus, as well, in relation to words: “Who would best guide the lawgiver’s activity and judge when it is complete? ... Would this not be the user?” (390c). In both cases, the “user” is identified with the dialectician (ibid.), and in both cases, the craftsman appears to have an inferior grasp of the object, as compared with the user. Given that the focus of the later portion of the Cratylus is the opinions of the craftsman of
words, it is no stretch to say that the craftsman of words holds true opinions, though not necessarily knowledge.

4. **Intermediates and words** have a level of stability that is manifested in the fact that they can be “measured,” and that they can be incorrect.

The intermediate couch is not simply a sensory object (an “appearance”), but it certainly is not a purely intellectual object. It is a sort of hybrid, just as a word is a hybrid between a sensory object and a concept. The intermediate couch consists of both a reality and a plurality of appearances, both of which are in some way accessible to the human mind. How do we cognitively approach the reality of the intermediate couch? Plato seems to leave it open that we might approach it through its appearances, but it cannot be approached merely through appearances. This point is not made explicit by Plato, but it is implicit in the image of the couch. “Does a couch differ from itself in the slightest, if you should view it from the side or the back or any direction at all, or does it remain identical, while appearing different? ... It remains identical” (598a). There are a set of facts about the couch that are stable, no matter which particular appearances the spectator is engaging with at the moment. Although these facts may be subject to change in one sense (e.g. the couch could be destroyed), they are not subject to perspectival change. One cannot say of the couch: “I moved to the other side of the room; now the couch is no longer rectangular.” The couch has some sort of stable existence, though the nature of this existence is not given by any particular sensory experience.²⁷ This stable nature can, at best, be inferred to by certain appearances – an inference that is not done through the senses (see the discussion of “provocatives” at 523a-535a).

²⁷ Nor even, arguably, through the sum of the appearances. One might not understand the nature of a watch merely by perceiving it in all possible sensory contexts. Indeed, Plato seems to think that knowing an object’s nature is synonymous with being able to make that object; and, on that view, sensory perception would certainly not teach a person to understand watches.
The relatively stable existence of the intermediate couch makes it possible for one to make judgments about the couch as a whole that are true or false. As we have seen, the Form of Couch acts as a standard of correctness from which to judge the individual couch. Epistemologically, the stable nature of the intermediate couch makes it, unlike appearances, subject to measurement. Measurement helps us to ascertain the genuine qualities of the couch as a whole, just as measurement is of assistance to the craftsman who “looks to the Form” in order to produce some (complete) product.

How does this notion of measurement apply to words? Here the answer is by no means obvious. The notion of “measuring” words is nearly incomprehensible, and the idea that a word can be incorrect or “false” seems hardly more explicable. The latter claim, however, is clearly a thesis that Plato takes quite seriously, as we have seen in Chapter One. Just as a couch is a bad couch if it diverges from the nature of the Form of Couch, a word is a bad (or “false,” Crat. 430c-d) word if it fails to be an accurate image of the thing it refers to. “Justice” is a false word if it conveys to the listener information that is false of the Form of Justice. Names can be incorrect without failing to refer, on Plato’s view.

In the case of appearances, by contrast, it is puzzling how an appearance could be false, qua appearance, since appearances lack the sort of stability involved in grounding such a judgment. (See Phil. 59b; Crat. 440a; Theaet. 152-154.) One cannot sensibly say that “the stick’s appearing bent when submerged” is false. But it is perfectly coherent to ask the question of whether the stick is in fact straight, despite its bent appearance (602c-d). Moreover, even if an appearance might be true (as perhaps suggested by Theaet. 166e-167a), it is necessarily incomplete, since it does not capture the whole of the object that generates it.

Such a claim is puzzling, since human measurements rely on the assumption that at least some of our sensory experiences are accurate. If no experience is veridical, then no scientific claim can be advanced about the things which are subject to the senses. The field is ripe for skepticism.

Through much of the Cratylus – though perhaps not the whole dialogue – this information is envisioned as being encoded onomatopoeically in the syllables of the word. See Spellman, “Naming and Knowing.”
The claim about measurement remains a puzzle, however. If intermediate virtue is linguistic in nature, then how does it admit of measurement? We can begin to address this question by looking at what Socrates says about the behavior of the virtuous individual, in Rep. X:

> When it falls out by chance that a reasonable man should, say, lose his son or anything else he values most highly, we said that he would bear it more easily than anyone else. ... This is not to say that he would not grieve at all, for that is impossible, but rather that he would act moderately in response to his pain (μετριάσει δὲ πως πρὸς λύπην, 603e).

Those who indulge in tragedy are taken to task because they do not “moderate” their grief. The word for “moderate” here is μετριάζω, and it is clearly meant to be the moral equivalent to μετρέω at 602d, a word used to describe the way that intermediate objects like couches are subject to measurement. Socrates says that this sort of moderation of grief proceeds from “reason and law” (λόγος καὶ νόμος), whereas lack of restraint would flow from “the misfortune itself” (αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος, 604a-b). Moderation and “measured action” proceeds from the intellectual part of the soul; dissolute and diffuse action from the “vexatious part” (τὸ ἁγανακτητικόν, 604e).

What does all this have to do with words? For the person learning demotic virtue, a lot. In Book VIII of the Republic (560c-561a), Plato makes it clear that errors in moral language underlie errors in moral education. The man who believes that temperance is effeminate (560d) fails to act in a temperate fashion, precisely because he has the wrong beliefs about temperance. As we have seen above, a training in words is a training in actions. Plato’s view, in this respect, is strikingly similar to comments Protagoras makes about education, in the dialogue that takes his name:

> As soon as a child can understand what is said to him, nurse, mother, tutor, and the father vie with each other to make him as good as possible, instructing him through everything he does or says, pointing out, “This is right and that is wrong, this honorable and that disgraceful, this holy, that impious; do this, don’t do that.” ... The teachers take good care of this, and when boys have learned their letters and are ready to understand the written word as formerly the spoken, they set the works of

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good poets before them on their desks to read and make them learn them by heart, poems containing much admonition and many stories, eulogies, and panegyrics of the good men of old, so that the child might be inspired to imitate them and long to be like them. (Prot. 325c-326a)

On Protagoras’s view, the child learns the application of the words “right,” “holy,” and “honorable” by being given one example after another, until she is able to apply the words accurately of her own accord; this education is begun by her instructors and completed by exposure to exemplary poetry. The child learns the scope of these words as precisely as possible. In Wittgensteinian terms, she learns the proper conditions of the word’s use; but, packed into these lessons, she learns a thorough course in the art of demotic virtue, which is the practice of following these rules: doing things that fall under some virtue term, avoiding things that fall under some vice term. In the terminology of measurement, she learns to “measure” her actions in accordance with these words.

In this way, we can understand how someone who “sees through words” – that is, a person lacking in philosophical acumen or potential – might still be able to act in a morally acceptable way. The waywardness of such a vulnerable soul finds its guidance in the guardian, who is a “craftsman of temperance and justice and the whole of demotic virtue” (500d). When such a person is taught the right words, she is able to see whether her actions “measure up” to these words. If she finds that

33 Plato would certainly not endorse the particular poems Protagoras has in mind, but he would – I think – nevertheless endorse the method Protagoras puts forward.

34 There must be a “meta” level of teaching in musical education, then, as indicated by the passage from Protagoras. Not only must the student be taught “this is holy”; she must also be taught “do this.” She must be taught that “the holy actions” are actions that are commanded, and “the unholy actions” are the actions that should be avoided. One might say that a character like Thrasymachus fails on this meta level, since he (at one point, at least) seems to agree with Socrates on the scope of just actions, but disagree with him as to whether just actions should be done.

35 I do not mean to imply that only the non-philosophical need education in demotic virtue. Philosophers also need this education, though not precisely for the same reason. The beginning guardians need such training primarily because, as Nehemas puts it, “all of us have an analogue to the [unruly] crowd within our own soul ... the appetitive part” (217). The education in true beliefs about virtue envisioned in Book III puts the appetitive soul in its place. Alexander Nehamas, “Plato and the Mass Media,” The Monist 71 no. 2 (1988): 214-234.

36 Belfiore fails to notice this passage when she claims that the craftsman of virtue, in Book X, should be identified with the “reasonable man” (140) – by which she seems to indicate individuals who act in appropriate ways. Such an interpretation fails to realize the importance that Plato puts upon the lawgiver, as the one who implants virtue in the citizenry. Belfiore, “Theory of Imitation.”
a certain action falls under the heading “loyal,” she will engage in it; if she finds that the action falls under “traitorous,” she will eschew it. There is, then, a way of acting morally which engages centrally with language, but proceeds without anything beyond a linguistic understanding. Individuals at this level are at the mercy of their educators, as Plato certainly believed.

Conclusion

In the above sections, I believe that I have made a plausible case that accurate language plays a central role in the inculcation of virtue, and that accurate language concerning virtue is a significant (though embedded) theme of Book X. The guardians do not forcibly control the actions of the demos, nor do they acquaint the demos with the Forms; rather, they “instill” (τιθέναι, 500d) virtue by teaching the populace the method of “moderating” their actions and “calculating” whether an action falls under a certain virtue. Their students have been “dyed” with the correct beliefs about whether or not any given action falls under the heading “virtuous,” even though the students cannot give an account of virtue itself (402a). They know the scope of virtue, as it pertains to ordinary conduct. All they need to be good people, according to Plato, is a good moral vocabulary. Though I imagine they would like a good couch, too.

37 There is more than a hint, here, of another doctrine that clearly unifies the notions of morality and measurement: Aristotle’s “mean between two vices.” For a discussion of the mean in the context of the ordinary Greek understanding of measurement, see Richard Bosley, “Aristotle’s Use of the Theory of the Mean: How Adaptable and Flexible is the Theory?” Apeiron 25 no. 4 (1992): 35-66.

38 Similarly, in a recent article, Moss claims that “we reach pistis as the conclusion of calculation that aims to determine whether x is in fact F” (227). Moss makes a helpful point for my purposes here: When Plato calls our cognitive relationship to intermediates “pistis,” he is using a variant of peithesthai, “to be convinced” which implies that pistis, unlike eikasia, is the endpoint of a process. J. Moss, “Plato’s Appearance-Assent Account of Belief,” Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 114 no. 2 (2014): 213-238.
CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE IN THE CAVE

The cave image was explicitly constructed to address education and miseducation (Rep. 514a). It is surprising, then, that Plato never makes it clear where the bad teachers are in his image; he constructs an image, but leaves it to us to seek out the sophist inside. This chapter is an attempt to find that elusive character, and I would propose that, as we find him, we shall become aware that the cave image has a great deal more to say about his specialty, language, than most commentators have realized. The cave is, I will argue, the region of education that is both permeated by, and circumscribed by, language. Beyond the cave, in the outside world, philosophers are free to learn things other than language, things that an “education through names” (Crat. 439a) could not even begin to approach.

I will be providing a number of (I hope) compelling reasons to believe that language is a key to understanding the cave image, reasons why such an interpretation either supplements or supersedes various other interpretations of the cave. First, however, I wish to simply present a puzzle. In Book VI of the Republic, Socrates comments that the sun gives life and visibility to the natural world, and poses an analogy to the Form of the Good in the following way: “This thing that provides truth to the things known and gives the person who knows his ability to learn, call this the ‘idea of the good’” (508e). This characterization, presumably, is meant to apply to the “upper portion” of the divided line, where the Form of the Good makes everything that is intelligible intelligible.

But what of the lower portion of the divided line? The objects in this region are not intelligible or knowable; it is not even clear whether they are “true” or “genuine” (ἀλήθεια). They do have some cognitive status, however: they are “opinable.” But if Plato thinks that there must be some thing that makes intelligible things intelligible, shouldn’t we expect that there is also some thing
that makes opinable things opinable? What is this thing? Whatever it is, it should be the sort of thing that (adapting the above) “provides plausibility to the things opined and gives the person who opines his ability to opine.” The best candidate for such a thing, I would propose, is language. Language is the light that illuminates the darksome cave; goodness is the light that illuminates the real world. The whole of my dissertation is an attempt to validate the proposal that language plays such a central role in the cave. I shall make that case in the space below.

Part I: Why the Puppets are Virtue Words

This final chapter will draw a great deal on the three previous chapters, so it will be prudent to review those chapters here, and briefly locate them in the context of the cave image:

(1) In the first chapter, I discussed the contrast between “education through names” and “education through things.” Education through things results in a knowledge of the things which names refer to; education through names results, at best, in true belief about those things, and it will only result in true belief if the namegiver was originally guided by the dialectician. Although names link up with their referents by convention, there may nevertheless be a correctness of names, since the names themselves somehow have information embedded in them, and this information may be false of the referent.

If I am right about those theses, then I do not think there is any difficulty understanding them in the context of the cave image. On nearly every interpretation of the cave, the objects that exist inside the cave are ordinary sensory objects. Since names are sensory objects, they exist inside the cave, whereas things (i.e. Forms) exist outside the cave. Education through names is, at the very least, one type of education that goes on inside the cave. The resemblance relation between a name and its referent must be something like the
relationship between puppets/shadows in the cave and the real things outside the cave. When the resemblance is a poor one, bad education ensues. Even a good education inside the cave, however, will not result in knowledge, only true belief.

(2) In the second chapter, I argued that Plato applies his theory of naming to various aspects of primary education in the Republic, although he does not explicitly tell the reader he is doing this. Sophists and demagogues are criticized for their use of false names, as when they call license “liberty” or shamelessness “courage” (560e-561a). The notion of the guardian as a legislator (νομοθέτης) who “puts norms” into citizens is made much more cogent when we understand these norms to be embedded in the language of Kallipolis itself, in the sorts of terms provided for us in the Cratylus.

It should be quite obvious that both true and false beliefs exist within the cave, and therefore (on the view I propounded in Chapter I) the cave contains both true and false names. The contrast between sophists and demagogues, on the one side, and philosophers and statesmen, on the other, is a contrast that manifests itself in two very different kinds of “onomastic” education: one which is based on falsehoods, the other which is based on truth. The philosopher’s expertise in Forms extends to a correspondent expertise in names: “Down you must go [into the cave] ... for once your eyes adjust you will discern [the things there] infinitely better than its denizens, and you will know the nature of each image (εἴδωλα) and its original” (520c). The contrast between sophist and philosopher, then, may be played out in the distinction between the type of guidance about shadows that the freed prisoner gives when he returns to the cave and the type of guidance prisoners give to one another.
(3) In the third chapter, I argued for a reading of Republic X which placed an emphasis on what I called “intermediate virtue.” Intermediate virtue occupies a place parallel to the craftsman’s couch, and it should be understood to be the creation of another kind of craftsman: the craftsman of virtue, whom the Republic identifies with the guardian. For any individual virtue, I argued, the corresponding intermediate virtue was precisely the word in the language used to refer to that virtue: thus the word (or word-as-concept) “courage” is an intermediate virtue corresponding to the Form of Courage. Drawing on my work in Chapter I, I argued that these virtue names have meanings embedded in them by the lawgiver, and that these names can be correct or incorrect, depending on the beliefs of the lawgiver.

In this chapter, I will be arguing for a number of theses which situate the vision of virtue presented in Chapter III in the context of the cave, so I will only say a few words here. First of all, the notion that there is a certain “elevated” form of opinion is a notion confined to two parts of the Republic: (1) the line and the cave, and (2) Book X’s discussion of poetry.¹ The divided line envisions a level of belief called “pistis,” in which one’s beliefs are, presumably, more trustworthy (πιστός); this level surely locates the intermediates. As I will argue, there is too much evidence here to argue that Book X and Books VI-VII are quite independent. Secondly, we can see in the cave image that the intellectual movement from shadows to puppets is an upward movement, which proceeds from a region of instability to a region of greater stability. This upward movement would parallel the movement from imitative virtue toward demotic virtue in Book X. If I am right, then the upward

¹ Both of these passages may seem to be in tension with the stark division between opinion and knowledge presented in Book V. But, as I have argued in Chapter III, intermediates are precisely the sorts of things that objects of opinion are: they are sensory objects. The fact that they have properties that other sensory objects don’t have – greater stability, standards of correctness – does not disqualify them from being objects of opinion.
movement in both Book VII and Book X frees a person from an education mediated by sophists, poets, and the like, and allows the person to contemplate the outlines of “real” things, even if these real things are (from another perspective) nothing but what we might call “toy models” of the Forms.

These suggestions are tentative, but I would like to put them on more sure footing. In the course of this chapter, I will do that and more, focusing on the cave image itself and the conclusions about language that might be drawn from it. In the first half of the chapter, I will survey how the literature about the cave addresses the issue of “second-level” objects, and I will argue that both the Sophist and the Cratylus introduce a distinction within Doxa that will help illuminate the cave. In the second half of the chapter, I will explain how my view has significant explanatory power, and I will respond to two interesting objections to my view.

Surveying the Cave

Although the literature on Plato’s cave image is extensive, there has been comparatively little scholarship on the nature of the puppets on the second level of the cave. Scholars have focused, instead, on the nature of objects at the purely sensory level of the cave: the shadows cast on the wall. Their understanding of objects at this first level (which I will call C1) tends to dictate their understanding of objects on the second level (C2).² I will proceed in exactly the opposite way. As far as I can tell, the key to understanding Plato’s cave image begins at the second level, not the first. An analysis of the second level will illuminate the darker regions of the cave beneath it.

All analogies are to some degree imperfect. Nevertheless, I take it that good analogies will tend to be those which either have the fewest irrelevant details, or those which clearly indicate which details are irrelevant. Since Plato does not, in the cave image, flag any aspects of the image as irrelevant, it is perhaps not unreasonable to hope that the image includes few, if any, irrelevant details. Interpretations of the cave image, then, which account for as many aspects of the image as possible, have an interpretive advantage. The text includes the following passages about second-level objects:

Between the fire and the prisoners there is an upper path, and I want you to imagine a wall buttressing the path, arranged just the way that circus performers place barriers in front of themselves, above which they display their curiosities. (514b)

These people are holding up (φέροντας) a wide assortment of equipment along the wall: men and animals of all sorts, fashioned out of metal and wood and every material, no doubt some of the (puppet-masters) making noise and others quiet. (514c-515a)

Do you imagine men of this sort would have seen any characteristic of ... [the puppets] ... except what is directly in front of them: the shadows that strike the cave wall? (515a-b)

[Consider] someone who is released and abruptly forced to stand up and turn his head around and walk, and turn his eyes toward the light. Doing all this would cause him pain and he would be unable because of the dazzling light to fasten his gaze on the objects whose shadows he had seen before. And what do you think [the prisoner] would say, if someone ... held up various puppets and forced the prisoner to answer what the objects were? Don't you think he would get flustered and have the opinion that the things he is used to seeing are more genuine than the things now pointed out to him? (515c-d)

Based on these passages, C2 objects have the following characteristics within the image:

1. They are manmade representations, and they can be used to produce misleading images that do not resemble either themselves or the objects at C3/C4.

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3 The passage is interpolated from two questions Socrates asks successively, but the second question is impossible to render without the first.
2. They are subject to change (indicated by “φερόμενον”; for usage, see Crat. 404d, 411c).

3. One cannot become (painfully) accommodated to seeing real objects unless one first becomes (painfully) accommodated to seeing the objects at C2.

4. They are more real (or more “true”) than the objects at C1, but less real (true) than the objects at C3/C4.

Existing interpretations of the objects at C2 do not explain all of these features of the analogy. When Cross and Woozley say that C2 is the level where liberated captives are free to draw their own conclusions from the facts, their interpretation does not explain #4; for why should conclusions one reaches independently be more real than conclusions that are thrust upon one? Ferguson’s view that both C1 and C2 are but dual aspects of a corrupt political system runs afoul of #3, since there is no reason to believe that any aspect of such a corrupt system would help one proceed out of the cave. Reeve’s position that the objects at C2 instantiate “modes” which represent folk wisdom is not designed to handle #1, since Reeve seems to think that C1- and C2-objects differ merely in degree of resemblance to the Form, not in kind. Morrison proposes that the objects are “moving forms,” but this claims seems difficult, if not impossible, to square with #1. Morrison’s moving forms are abstract objects, not manmade objects. Wilberding offers the unique interpretation that the objects at C2 are the opinions of the multitude, which sophists at C1 cater to, but this interpretation gets #4 wrong. Pace Wilberding, sophists are not more ignorant of reality than

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4 Cross/Woozley, Plato’s Republic, 220-221.
8 See, for a variant of this criticism, J. Malcolm, “The Cave Revisited,” Classical Quarterly 31 no. 01 (1981): 60-.
ordinary people; they are at the same level (Phaedrus 260c, Rep. 601a). Moreover, none of the views mentioned above adequately explain the pain that the prisoner experiences in the ascent from C1 to C2. This pain, however, is one of the most striking and consistent themes in the whole of Plato’s own rendering of the image.

Dale Hall’s interpretation comes closest to explaining all four attributes. Hall does not see the second level of the cave as deceptive, in any way whatsoever, but he also does not believe that the people at the second level are thinking critically. C2 depicts “the natural state achieved when men are freed from apaideusia by the right paideia.” It “represent[s] the condition of men when ruled philosophically.” Hall’s argument for this point is detailed and subtle, but it centrally turns on a relatively basic point that some others seem to have missed. Since the Republic itself contains two different types of education (primary/musical and secondary/dialectical), Hall contends that the cave image ought to envision two types of education. The prisoner’s approach to the objects at C2 is clearly a form of paideia, but it does not involve a genuine encounter with real things (Forms). It stands to reason, then, that the approach to C2 is meant to symbolize the primary education of the citizens of Kallipolis—an education received by all citizens, not merely guardians. All people in Kallipolis are educated to the level of the puppets, though only guardians engage in the second, dialectical stage of education, advancing to the level of real things.

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9 Wilberding says that sophists are more ignorant than the demos, in that sophists are subjectivists about truth, whereas ordinary people are objectivists. I appreciate this point, but it still does nothing to explain #4. For in the case image, it is not merely the case that people at C2 are closer to reality than those at C1; it is also true that the objects they experience are more real, in themselves, than the objects at C1. Wilberding does not explain how this could be true in the context of his interpretation. Wilberding, “Prisoners and Puppeteers.”

10 Hall, “Interpreting Plato’s Cave.”

11 Ibid., 82.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid. 82-83. Most scholars of the cave image would agree with this somewhat minimal claim. For dissenting views, see Wilberding “Prisoners and Puppeteers” (above) and J. R. S. Wilson, “The Contents of the Cave,” Canadian Journal of Philosophy, supp. vol. 2 (1976): 117-27.
By my reckoning, Hall’s analysis, though otherwise stellar, falls short in two ways. First, Hall fails to account for #1, since he does not explain, nor even attempt to explain, how the objects at C2 might be used to mislead. He argues – quite in accordance with the text – that C2 is not fundamentally a deceptive region, since it constitutes a necessary step in genuine education. But he fails to recognize that objects that are not intrinsically deceptive (puppets modeled after real things) might be made deceptive through their use (as when one uses two fingers to project a shadow image of a rabbit). Hall also hastily and indefensibly rejects the suggestion of Ferguson and others that the puppets at C2 might be manipulated by sophists, demagogues, and the like. Second, although Hall gives an account of #3 that persuasively explains the cognitive superiority of C2, his account does not tell us why the move from C1 to C2 would be painful. Is there any reason to believe that philosophical paideia would be unpleasant? If not, then why does Plato include pain in his account of the cave?

In this chapter, I advance a modification and expansion of Hall’s position that will answer these questions. I will present a novel and plausible explanation for why Plato included all four of the features mentioned above in the cave image. The thesis, put simply and somewhat inaccurately, is that the objects at C2 are words. Words are changeable, manmade artifacts which are imitations of real objects (the Forms), and yet – as I have demonstrated in the prior three chapters – these imitations can be used to deceive. Words approach reality more successfully than other sensory objects, and yet words themselves are always deficient – and sometimes dangerous – ways of approaching reality (see Chapter III). Words (especially virtue words) are subject to change in a way

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14 Malcolm has something like this in mind, when he uses passages in the *Sophist* (234, 264) to argue that, on Plato’s view, false things may be images of true things.
that their referents may not be. Finally, words clearly contain representational content, content that is a necessary prerequisite to the acquisition of knowledge.

I believe, then, that my thesis would unify a whole set of concerns that are obviously central to Plato in Book VII. There is nevertheless a problem with my interpretation in toto, and a very obvious one at that: Plato could have explicitly said that he meant the objects at C2 to represent words, and yet he never did. This omission gives me a significant burden of proof. It will not suffice to say that words have a number of things in common with the objects at C2, for different objects can nevertheless possess a number of the same properties. In addition to listing these commonalities, then, it is also incumbent upon me to demonstrate that words play precisely the educational role that Plato wants the objects at C2 to play, in the context of Platonic education.

Socrates’ primary concern in proposing the cave image was surely not to make a point about language, and I should never claim that it was. My claim, rather, is that the metaphysical status that Plato gives to words in other dialogues is completely compatible with the status of C2 objects in the cave. Plato did not pause in the middle of Book VII to explain precisely how language relates to knowledge. Nevertheless, it would be hard to imagine how the type of vision of Platonic education that we see in Book VII could fail to include the proper use of language, at the very least as a precondition for dialectic – which is to say, as a precondition for one’s escape from the cave. Indeed, a large portion of the Republic is explicitly concerned with the proper uses of language in education, including (but not limited to) Books II, III, and X. My interpretation explains how these books, and Plato’s comments on reformed poetry, may be directly incorporated into the cave image.

Why Should We Think that the Puppets Are Words?

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15 See Chapter II.
At this point, I will advance the thesis for the chapter directly, by pointing out the advantages to my view. In prior chapters, I have developed the idea that words themselves (for Plato) embody beliefs, and that primary education is an “education through names” that communicates to students the beliefs of the namegiver. This idea can be applied, basically in its entirety, to the cave image. On this view, the movement from the first to the second level of the cave would be the movement from one (inferior) type of education through names toward another (superior) type of education through names. So long as we stay in the cave, however, all we learn about is words and how to apply them. Individuals who advance to the second level have a sort of acumen that allows them to discern which things “fall under” which words, and they also have a moral commitment to act according to those words which are taught to be virtues. They have no ἐπιστήμη with regard to moral objects, and yet they are capable of behaving as a virtuous person would. They have been “dyed” with the proper true beliefs, beliefs which are embedded in the very language that they speak.

This is the view. I shall now begin to list a number of advantages to this view.

The first major advantage to the view is that it explains how one might be in some sense learning about justice in the cave, while in another sense learning about a mere sensory object. The word “justice,” as I have explained, is a sensory object that is patterned after the Form of Justice – at least, in the context of any adequate educational system, it is. I am not familiar with any other interpretation of the cave on which the students of Kallipolis are genuinely learning about some sensory object at the second level, and yet not learning about the Form of Justice. At best, scholars have argued that the people (or objects) that somehow embody or instantiate Forms are sensory objects; but this interpretation simply doesn’t make sense in the context of the cave image, which separates the actor (the puppet-master) from the act (the puppet). Words are used by someone. “The
just man,” in contrast, is not “used” in any way. It is, therefore, hard indeed to imagine how Plato might envision the just man as a puppet.

Another significant advantage is that my view makes sense of the notion that the objects at the second level of the cave are manmade. One reasonably straightforward way of reading the cave image connects it closely with the *Timaeus*, and argues that C2 objects are the sort of things that the Demiurge creates when shaping the recalcitrant receptacle into material things. That explanation may seem to work in the case of animals and plants, but it does not explain how the objects are manmade, and it does not seem to make any sense in the context of virtues like justice or moderation. The Demiurge does not create these things “after the pattern of the Forms,” since he does not create them at all. Insofar as they can be said to be created, they must be the creations of the namegivers, who (ideally) look to the Forms when they give names to things. The second-level objects that Plato cares about are not the handiwork of a god or *daimon*; they are produced by a human being, and this is a reason to believe that they are words.

The third advantage of my view is that it unifies and illuminates the comments Plato makes about language in the *Republic*, the *Cratylus*, the *Sophist*, and a variety of other dialogues. I have made the case for this sort of consilience throughout this dissertation, but I would like to crystallize that case in the space below. What we will find, I think, is that Plato found the broad notion of Doxa insufficiently precise, and so he consistently used the dialogues to subdivide that notion into what we might call “higher opinion” and “lower opinion.” The cave dramatizes that division and encapsulates various comments about imitation in the dialogues mentioned above. Higher opinion is the realm of accurate language, the place where imitation can genuinely be a path to truth – even if this truth does not consist of ultimate realities.
I shall make the case for consilience in the space below.

Part II: Unifying the Evidence

I will first demonstrate that my reading illuminates certain issues found elsewhere in the *Republic*. In Rep. VI, Socrates draws an analogy between the sun and the Good, whereby, just as the sun is the medium by which visible things become visible, the Good is the medium by which intelligible things (Forms) become intelligible. The Good makes education possible. The sun analogy is, of course, central to understanding the *Republic*. But one aspect of the analogy often goes overlooked. In the Cave image, Socrates describes the underground region of the cave as illuminated by a light which presumably makes things in the cave visible, at least insofar as they are visible. Scholars tend to see this light inside the cave as an analogue to the sun, and thus divide the cave world and the exterior world in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside the Cave</th>
<th>Sun</th>
<th>Visible World</th>
<th>Visible Objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside the Cave</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Intelligible World</td>
<td>Intelligible Objects (Forms)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This division of things is simple and attractive. But it won’t do. Although it is true that the cave ostensibly represents the region revealed “by sight” (δι’ ὅψεως, 517b), Socrates makes it clear that the opinions that people in the cave have are not exclusively about visible objects. In point of fact, they hold opinions about things like justice, beauty and goodness (517e). Is justice a visible thing? Surely not. And yet a shadow of justice appears at the first level of the cave.

Now what kind of object is justice? On Plato’s view, no doubt, it is an intelligible object. To say that “S has an opinion about justice” should be equivalent to saying that S has an opinion about an intelligible object – that is, a Form. But this won’t do either. For according to Book V, opinions
are set over opinables, and knowledge is set over knowables. We cannot say that the people at C1 hold an opinion about a knowable. But what can we say? Logic compels us to say that the opinions about justice held at C1 are not, strictly, opinions about the Form of Justice, but rather opinions about some inferior object that is somehow related to the Form of Justice. What is this inferior object?

My analysis in Chapter III clears the way for a potential answer. An opinion about justice is an opinion about a word: a sensory object that has a degree of stability superior to the mere appearances, but inferior to Forms. Words belong in the cave, because they are aspects of sensory experience. But they also “bridge the gap” between the cave and the real world, since they reliably indicate (and, ideally, reliably describe) real things. As we have seen in previous chapters, Plato cashes out these notions of reference and description through the concept of an “imitation.” Despite being sensory, words point toward what is exclusively intelligible.

These intermediate objects, it might be objected, are completely unlike the other objects at C2: people, animals, and artifacts. But this objection misses the point. Words are sensory artifacts,

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16 Harte argues that the words of the cave-dwellers genuinely refer to Forms, but her argument stems on a questionable assumption. She plausibly argues that Rep. 515b should be understood to imply that the cave-dwellers words do not refer to shadows, but she then assumes without argument that these words must genuinely refer to Forms. There is, of course, a third option: that these words not to shadows, but to puppets. I myself remain agnostic on the question of what the prisoners’ words refer to. All I insist upon is that the cave-dwellers do not have opinions about Forms, whether or not they unwittingly refer to Forms. Harte’s interpretation is very much on the right track, in that she sees a normative line stretching from Forms down to ordinary words in the language. As I argued in Chapter I, Plato holds the curious view that words can be true or false, since they are somehow linked to Forms which provide standards for their truth or falsity. Verity Harte, “Language in the Cave” in Maieusis: Essays in Ancient Philosophy in Honour of Myles Burnyeat, eds. Myles Burnyeat and Dominic Scott (Oxford University Press, 2007): 195–215.

17 It would not be entirely inaccurate to say that it is “an opinion about an Opinion,” where an “Opinion” with a capital “O” denotes something with linguistic (as opposed to ontological) stability. This may be roughly the same type of stability that philosophers often ascribe to terms like “begging the question,” when people use the term incorrectly. The philosopher is not saying that the phrase “begging the question” has a natural meaning discoverable by investigation, but is rather insisting that its conventional meaning is not subject to a Humpty-Dumpty type of linguistic subjectivism.
even if they are not three-dimensional objects. As we have seen, they are the works of a craftsman who excels in the ability to put reality “into appropriate syllables” (Crat. 389d). The tremendous virtuosity of the wordsmith is his ability to put all kinds of things into words (389d), just as the implied craftsman of the objects at C2 has made miniature imitations of all kinds of things (Rep. 515a; cf. Rep. 596c). What is needed at C2, however, is not only virtuosity at imitation; it is – as in the Cratylus – some sort of understanding of the thing being imitated. If there were no such understanding, then characteristics #3 and #4 above would not make sense. How can movement from C1 to C2 represent genuine intellectual progress if the maker of puppets is no more knowledgeable than the maker of shadows?

By reading Book VII alongside Book X, and by applying a Cratylean understanding of imitation, we can reveal what sorts of artifacts exist at C2. They are the handiwork of a statesman like Solon, who sets the terms of discourse. This is not to say that the objects at the second level of the cave will always resemble the Forms. They will not – and they will be especially unlikely to resemble the Forms if the lawmakers (as in democratic Athens) have been infected with the corrupted beliefs of the poets and the sophists. Thus, as we saw in Chapter II, a corrupt populace may, over time, acquire corrupt beliefs about the virtues, by the working of an inferior education through names. But C2 objects have imitative standards that, when met, genuinely enable the populace to acquire demotic virtue. In an effort to make all these claims more plausible, I will now turn our attention to a series of passages in the Sophist and the Cratylus, passages which confirm and develop my discussion of the Republic.

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18 This fact may be indicated straightforwardly by Plato, when he describes the use of language by both prisoners and puppeteers in the Cave. (See Rep. 515b). The passage is a reasonably vexed one, however, since it does not make clear who is doing the speaking.
Eikastikê Versus Phantastikê

There is a fascinating passage about imitation in Plato’s *Sophist*, a passage which is often read alongside *Republic* X, but rarely compared with *Republic* VII. In the passage, the Stranger claims that the sophist possesses “a kind of appearance-based (δοξαστικὴν) knowledge about everything, but not the truth” (233c), which enables him to produce plausible appearances of everything, though he does this in a fashion similar to the graphic artist, who “devises imitations which bear the same name as real things” (μιμήματα καὶ ὁμώνυμα τῶν ὄντων, 234b). The sophist does the same thing in the context of language (περὶ τοὺς λόγους, 234c), “beguiling his auditors by displaying spoken facsimiles of all things” (234c), in an effort to produce certain advantageous beliefs in the young, without concern for their truth.

The passage is almost a direct parallel to the passage at *Republic* 601a-b, with its emphasis on the imposition of appealing falsehoods upon the undiscerning, although clearly the *Sophist* passage is targeted at sophists instead of poets. More to the point, however, the passage once again repeats the cave image’s emphasis on the virtuosity of the imitator, producing “all things”; but here, the sort of production involved is not nearly as multifaceted as the production of the craftsman. The sophist uses a single medium, whereas the craftsman of Book VII builds out of “metal and wood and every material” (515a). This is why Plato calls the sophist’s work “shadow play” and “illusion.” Plato gives the name “phantastikê” to the monochromatic imitation practiced by sophists (and presumably poets), and he contrasts this with a type of imitation called “eikastikê,” which “designed according to the pattern of its model in all three dimensions, giving the appropriate color to each part” (235d-e).
It is *prima facie* plausible, from what I have said above, that the *phantastikê/eikastikê* distinction in the *Sophist* can be – at least roughly – imported into the context of the cave and divided line. (I am assuming, without argument, that the cave and line images relate to each other in a straightforward manner, as implied by Socrates’ comments at 517b). The realm of shadows is *phantastikê*; the realm of puppets *eikastikê*. If anything, this scheme resonates even more with the divided line. The lowest portion of the line, after all, denotes “picture thinking” (*eikasia*), which is contrasted with what we might call “stable thinking” (*pistis*).\(^{19}\) *Pistis* is set over things ordinary material things, which are (presumably) three dimensional and polychromatic; an imitation that renders in three colorful dimensions would, presumably, also be a subject of *pistis*.

Above I have established a reasonably small point: that Plato consistently thought of imitation in binary terms, and that the same basic distinction among types of imitation is reiterated in the *Republic* and the *Sophist*.\(^{20}\) A more consequential point comes next: I am going to argue that the *phantastikê/eikastikê* distinction plays a critical role in the *Cratylus*. The argument is more speculative than the above, but it also, if plausible, it will provide a powerful example of the sort of unifying work that my thesis accomplishes.

**Rhetoric and Poetry in the *Cratylus***

In earlier chapters, I have argued that the *Cratylus* depends upon two fundamental theses: (1) that words are images, and (2) that words embed information that can be true or false. I have

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\(^{19}\) I think this connection is the most plausible one, despite the obvious etymological connection between *eikastikê* (which I place on the second level) and *eikasia* (which I place on the first). In Book X of the *Republic*, Plato continually uses the word *phantasmata* to describe artistic objects, which clearly belong at the lowest level of the divided line. The production of *phantasmata* would obviously be *phantastikê*; this leaves *eikastikê* to describe the production of something else.

\(^{20}\) I find it likely that this distinction is ubiquitous in Plato’s dialogues, though elsewhere it may be somewhat harder to discern. The *Phaedrus*’s distinction between superior and inferior rhetoric, for example, might be understood along the same lines.
not, however, discussed the greater portion of the dialogue, a portion where Socrates offers a set of etymologies that range from thoughtful to ridiculous. A central question of the dialogue, however, revolves around the following question: If Plato meant the linguistic theories espoused in the *Cratylus* to be taken seriously, why did he illustrate them with apparently facetious examples?

I do not have any complete or satisfying answer to that important question, but I can make an observation: the *Cratylus* is far more concerned with poetry, and rhetoric in general, than critics usually allow. This will become clear when we juxtapose Socrates’s concluding diatribe about education with the actual content of various etymologies in the dialogue. As various commentators have observed, there is something of a drama being played out through the etymologies, a competition between the notion that all things are in Heraclitean flux and the notion that there is an “abiding nature” (440c) in some things. This drama is played out in the etymologies: competing etymologies of the same words yield different results, some Heraclitean, some Platonic. At the conclusion of the dialogue, Socrates becomes fed up by the unreliability of any educational scheme that relies on investigating such words: “No intelligent person will put himself or the nourishment of his soul under the guardianship of names” (*Crat.* 440c). In typical fashion (cf. Socrates’s discussion with Hippocrates in the *Protagoras*), Socrates is concerned lest the talented Cratylus be overly persuaded by sophistical techniques predicated on linguistic analysis, and thus neglect an “education through things.”

In Chapter I, I argued that Socrates does not merely have teachers of etymologies in mind, at 440c; he has in mind other sophists too, since sophists acquire reputations for wisdom by exploiting the meanings of words. Socrates does not merely target sophistry with these words,

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21 There is no indication, however, that our existent words must be correct. Quite the contrary. It may be that our existent word “epistêmê” indicates movement, despite the fact that its referent (“knowledge itself”) is stable.
however; he also targets the teachers of the sophists. From the dialogue, we can have no doubt who these teachers are: they are the poets. As Socrates goes through the etymologies, he continually – and almost exclusively – appeals to Homer and Hesiod as authorities on the usage of Greek words; and from their usage, he develops his etymologies.\textsuperscript{22} If these etymologies were fully endorsed by the text, this habit might make us think that Plato has a newfound respect for the intellectual standing of the poets. But, given the general aura of jesting in the etymologies – and given the fact that most of the given etymologies endorse Heracliteanism (see Crat. 411d–412c, e.g.) – it is no great leap to imagine that here, as elsewhere, Plato is once again being critical of the poets. They are surely among the targets of the sardonic criticism that

> the primeval givers of names ... [are] like our modern philosophers, who, in their search after the nature of things, are always getting dizzy from constantly going round and round. ... And this appearance, which arises from their own internal condition, they suppose to be a reality of nature; they think there is nothing permanent, but only flux and motion. (411b-c, trans. Jowett)

We find a more detailed catalog of the mistakes of the inferior namegiver toward the end of the dialogue. There, we are told that no namegiver can capture the complete essence of any object in a name, since images that are complete cease to be images (432a-c), but that the good namegiver will capture the “basic character” (τύπος, 432e) of the thing named, whereas the bad namegiver gave names according to a false conception of their referents (436b). The errors of the inferior namegivers, then, are not errors of being bad “renderers,” but of having bad models from which to render. Surely this is also the case for the poets, who do not – in Book X of the Republic – portray virtues falsely out of spite, but rather because their own impression of that virtue is shallow and two-dimensional.

\textsuperscript{22} The examples are almost too numerous to count. Socrates appeals to Hesiod as an authority on the uses of words at 397c–398c, 396c, 402b, and 406d. He appeals to Homer at 391d–393b, 402a, and 407a-c. He appeals to the poetic tradition, in general, at 395c and 404b, to the “poets” at 412b, and to the Orphic poets at 400c. The entire discussion is concentrated on poetic sources.
As I see it, then, there is a straight line running through the practice of naming in the *Cratylus*, the production of images in the *Sophist*, the action of “makers” in *Republic* X, and the fabrication of objects of Doxa in *Republic* VII. In every case, a two-dimensional inferior imitation is contrasted with a three-dimensional adequate imitation which is more intellectually respectable – and more educationally sufficient – than its poetic/sophistical counterpart. The discussion of dimensionality necessarily becomes more metaphorical and obscure when applied to normative terms instead of physical objects, but it is (as I argued in Chapter III) no less applicable. A two-dimensional virtue is a merely the appearance of virtue on a given occasion, which may, indeed, be identical to the appearance of vice on another occasion. A three-dimensional virtue is a cognitive attitude that embodies stable true beliefs about the (Formal) virtues. When sophists and poets are faulted for being bad educators, they are faulted precisely because their understanding of virtue tends toward the two-dimensional, because there is something fundamentally “perspectival” (or perhaps “relativistic”) in their notions of virtue. Sophists and poets practice *phantastikê*, not *eikastikê*. As I have argued earlier in my dissertation, the type of verbal education that tends toward “three-dimensional” virtue (what the *Sophist* calls *eikastikê*) is the prerogative of legislators, or philosophers insofar as they play the role of legislators.

**More from the *Sophist* and the *Cratylus***

The connections between these two dialogues and the cave image run deeper. English translations of the cave image blithely state that the puppets are being “carried” above the wall at C2. This translation, though adequate, misses a great deal about the meaning of the word *φέρειν* in Greek, and, in particular, the way Plato uses the word. Two particular uses of the word matter for my purposes here. First, the word *φέρειν* is commonly used to mean “moving.” Thus Plato
often, in discussions of Heraclitean flux, uses this word to mean not that “all things are being carried” but that “all things are in motion” (Theaet. 182c). Second, the word φέρειν is occasionally used – particularly by Plato – to denote the application of names. Thus at Sophist 237c, the Stranger talks about “correctly applying” (φέρων ὀρθῶς) names, a phrase that might more conventionally take the word τιθέναι (Crat. 389a, 406b). If I might speculate, however, the word φέρειν might be used when the connotations of τιθέναι are odious – when the author wishes to explicitly describe using a word, as opposed to establishing it.23

Both these usages of φέρειν support my interpretation here. The first usage suggests, in the context of the cave, that the entire cave (including the second level) is a place of constant movement, not unlike the universe imagined by self-styled Heraclitean philosophers like Cratylus himself. Socrates says that the things named “are moving (φερομένοι) and flowing and coming into being” (Crat. 411c) and that “names indicate their nature to us, at least if we assume that all things are in motion (φερομένου) and flux” (436e). Now suppose that these names were correct, and all things were in motion. In that case, there would be nothing other than the cave – nothing other than “coming to be” – then we need nothing more than names to know all the truth there is. But Socrates, both early (386d-e) and late (438e-440a) in the Cratylus, calls this line of thinking into question: Not only are many words suggestive of stability instead of motion, but there are clearly standards of things like beauty and goodness, and these things are standards precisely because they do not move. If we understand the puppets at C2 to be words, we can understand these standards to be standards of linguistic usage. Motion belongs in the cave, but the “things carried” can be modeled after the things

23 See Chapter One, note 50.
beyond. When a person “applies” (φέρειν) a word correctly, the word “carries” (φέρειν) the right denotation; this is musical education, properly understood.

This may have been the sort of thing Plato talked about at Rep. 402, where he likens children who learn to discern their letters “in all the contexts that carry them around (περιφερόμενα)” to the guardians, who learn to recognize the “forms” (εἰδή) of the virtues when they are “carried around everywhere” (πανταχοῦ περιφερόμενα). There is no need to understand “forms,” here, as anything more than sensible manifestations of virtues. Indeed, to claim that Plato is speaking about “the Forms” presents insuperable problems, since Plato is here discussing knowledge that proceeds from musical education (402c), not from dialectic. No, his point here is not that the guardians must know the Forms; but rather that the guardians must learn how to apply a sort of “language,” not reflected through distorted sophistical φαντάσματα (see Rep. 402b, Soph. 234c), but in its original and uncorrupted form. This would work roughly in the way I described in Chapter III: there are a set of Forms of virtues, and a set of intermediate virtues which are linguistic imitations of these Forms. The linguistic imitations do not have a “nature” in the full sense of the term, but they are “measureable,” in the sense that they have a restricted range of things they apply to. There are a set of actions that “fall under” courage, and a set of actions that fall outside it. In primary education, the student acquires the ability to measure which are which. This is the sort of “knowledge” – or at least awareness – that people acquire when they have ascended to the second level of the cave.

Language and Immanent Forms?

There is one additional way that my interpretation unifies our existing understanding of various dialogues. For decades, Plato scholars (e.g. Vasiliiou, Keyt, Fahrnkopf, Wilson, and Grube) have discussed the notion of “moving” or “immanent” forms, as a category in Platonic thought
inferior to Forms but somehow cognitively significant in a way that appearances are not. So, for example, there has been much discussion of the “equals themselves” (Phaedo 74c) – as distinguished from the Equal Itself – and there has been speculation that this passage in the Phaedo is referring to the same thing the Timaeus seems to describe as a moving form (50c).

Although I cannot defend the thesis here, there is an interesting case to be made that the Republic engages with some or all of these passages in a passage I have already discussed. At 402b, Socrates insists that we must recognize the “forms” of the virtues wherever they may be found moving (περιφερόμενα). I argued above that this passage can be fruitfully applied to the assumption that these “moving forms” are words. But then, the notion immediately occurs: what if immanent/moving forms are words throughout the dialogues? I have no real argument to make about the question; it goes too far afield from my topic (the Republic), and it would take a great deal of analysis to untangle. Nevertheless, my thesis suggests a way to explain something quite obscure (“immanent forms”) in terms of something quite ordinary and explicable to us (words). It is, after all, rather plausible that Plato considers words – at least certain words – to be “the likenesses of eternal realities modeled after their patterns in a wonderful and mysterious manner” (Tim. 50c, trans. Jowett). If my view suggests such a unifying and overarching solution to a Platonic problem, this is certainly something in its favor.

Objection #1: Are the Sophists Puppeteers?

I will now discuss two objections to my thesis, and my response to them. Here is the first objection.

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24 This claim has the added advantage of incorporating many of the arguments Morrison gives for situating “moving forms” at C2. Unlike Morrison, however, I claim that moving forms are sensory objects with the capacity to refer, not purely abstract objects.
In the course of this chapter, I have suggested that the sophist can be found at the second level of the cave, along with his counterpart, the statesman. Both statesman and sophist work with the same raw materials – words – but the content of their educational programs are quite different. The sophist (whether intentionally or unintentionally) deceives the public by presenting false words that look like true words, just as the shadow-puppeteer exhibits shadows that look nothing like the things that cast the shadows. The statesman, on the contrary, tells young people of the demos “suitable stories” (Stat. 304d) in order to instill a “bond of true conviction” (Stat. 309d, trans. Skemp) among them about “the fine, the just, and the beneficial” (Stat. 309c).

There would seem to be a problem with this interpretation, however. It places the sophist (along with the statesman) at the second level of the cave, and presumably at a higher cognitive state than the people who see everything through the medium of shadows. And yet elsewhere, Plato goes to great lengths to emphasize that ordinary sophists, rhetoricians and poets know nothing more than their audiences (Phaedrus 260c, Rep. 601a). Moreover, the nature of words, on my rendering of the cave image, is puzzling. Are words stable entities which, when we encounter them, are a step in leading us “out of the cave”? Or are words the unstable, shifty sort of entities that might be freely exploited by sophists and tricksters? My interpretation must address these issues.

The best response, I believe, begins by observing something I discussed at length in the first two chapters. When a teacher “teaches the student a word,” she is teaching him a set of beliefs about a concept – and, as in Chapter III, when a virtue word is “taught,” a pattern of behavior is being taught as well. Now, it should be obvious that there are at least two ways of acting: virtuously and viciously. Neither virtuous nor vicious action is identical to the appearance of virtuous or vicious action, just as an apple is not identical to the appearance of an apple. The vicious person’s vicious
actions manifest his false beliefs about virtue (see Chapter III), false beliefs that, again, are not identical with the appearances that proceed from these false beliefs. Thus the shameless actions of a grave robber do not in appearance resemble Euthyphro’s nonchalant prosecution of his father, despite the fact that both actions manifest the same vice: impiety.

An interesting result emerges. A vice is not a model upon which people might base their lives (akin to virtue), but rather it is the way a person acts when she has false beliefs about virtue – or, in terms of Platonic psychology, when her beliefs about virtue are determined by her appetitive or spirited soul. These false beliefs could, perhaps, be native to the person who holds them (as a child might naturally think the earth is flat), but they could also be imposed upon a person in childhood, in the form of corrupt education. This is where poets and sophists come in. Like guardians, poets and sophists take it upon themselves to mold children into an image, but the image they mold them into is not patterned after the Forms. One might call it a sort of “demotic virtue,” but only with the proviso that this kind of demotic virtue is not wholly good – indeed, it could be quite bad.

We see, then, that there must be at least two possible “versions” of the cave. The first version is the “Kallipolan cave,” which consists of accurate intermediate virtues which reliably guide the student toward (genuine) demotic virtue. The second version we might call the “sophist’s cave.” In this cave, the blind lead the blind, and education is a perverse sort of parody of genuine education. Like always, the content of the words at C2 is determined by the νομοθέτης, but this νομοθέτης

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25 I do not say that “this is Plato’s theory of vice,” but only that I am drawing out one clear aspect of that theory, whatever it is. Vice necessarily proceeds from false belief – though it may not necessarily proceed from false beliefs in the rational soul, since the lower soul parts are capable of determining action in an unharmonized individual. The connection between vice and false belief is guaranteed by Plato’s intellectualism.

26 This should not be surprising, since (at least among students) sophistry often presents the appearance of genuine philosophy, and Homeric poems often present the appearance of philosophically educational myths. Ordinary people are completely incapable of knowing “which cave they are in,” which is precisely why such care must be taken to make sure that the constitution of the state is guided by philosophers who do know the difference.
has false beliefs about the things the words describe. Education, in this cave, can at best access the flawed opinions of one lawgiver; and it will be unlikely to do even this, if sophists or poets keep ordinary people “in the dark.”

In some sense, then, the sophist is at the second level of the cave. But in the sophist’s cave, there is no way “up” and no way “out.” As the sophists themselves taught (at least, as Plato understood them), there is simply no “Truth” that human beings have access to, only the world of opinion wherein the opinions of the powerful prevail. One does not win court cases or elections by acting virtuously or speaking truly, but only by manipulating the beliefs of the public to one’s advantage. The language the sophist uses will not tend to lead a person toward Truth, since it is not designed by people who have access to the truth.

These observations become even more compelling when we recall the name Plato gives to “second-level” cognitive states: trust (πίστις). In the Cratylus, Socrates warns of the immense dangers one incurs by “entrusting” (ἐπιτρέψαντα, 440c) oneself to an education through names. This warning is echoed manifold times in Platonic discussions of the sophists (e.g. Prot. 312c), and was even heralded in a comment Heraclitus makes about the masses: “What understanding or intelligence have they? They put their trust in popular bards and take the mob for their teacher, unaware that most people are bad and few are good” (B104). The best that ordinary people can hope for is to have good teachers, teachers that will instruct them in the language of right and wrong. They have no way of confirming the veracity of these teachers; instead, they must simply “have faith” (πίστις).

Objection #2: Why Does the Prisoner Experience Pain?
The second objection is a much simpler one. In this chapter, I set out to give a reading that explains all the characteristics of the cave image, with respect to C2. But, thus far, I have not done so. I have not explained why ascending to the second level of the cave is described as painful. And it does not seem that it would be painful. The children of Kallipolis, after all, are simply hearing purified stories, listening to specific rhythms, and imitating good characters; this is their primary education. A critic might find those activities otiose, but hardly painful.

The best response, I believe, is based on the close affinity between the description of ascending to C2 and descriptions of experiencing Socratic elenchus, elsewhere in the dialogues (e.g. *Meno* 80a-b). It is painful to endure elenchus. On the other hand, elenchus (at least in its fledgling non-dialectical stage) does not seem to be necessary in Kallipolis. Elenchus purges the mind of harmful moral beliefs (*Apol.* 36b-d; *Apol.* 41e-42a), but the very purpose of Platonic censorship is to prevent children from encountering such beliefs. We might expect, then, that Athenian individuals would benefit from elenchus a great deal, whereas Kallipolan individuals would not. Might we suppose that the cave image, as we have it, is a description of Athens, not Kallipolis?

I think so. Let me appeal to the “two caves” I discussed above, the sophist’s cave and the Kallipolan cave. Individuals in the sophist’s cave can only ascend to C2 through an arduous process of elenchus. Individuals in Kallipolis, however, casually move to C2 in the course of ordinary education. This interpretation would be open to various interpreters (Malcolm holds a version of it), but it resonates particularly well with my own. For on my view, elenchus in Athens would be the purification of one’s language – in essence, the process of overcoming one’s ordinary understanding of words. Since elenchus does not end in a doctrine, one’s ordinary understanding is not replaced with anything, though one may (after elenchus) stand in a better position to see the harmful exploits
of the poets and sophists. The puppets in the sophist’s cave do not accurately represent anything. It is obvious why such a process would be startling; after all, it might seem to land one in a sort of moral skepticism. Kallipolan primary education, on the contrary, would result in a variety of largely comforting and stable beliefs that are building blocks to knowledge. There is no reason for that process to be painful.

Conclusion: What is the Cave?

I hope my analysis has left the cave roughly as it was before, though maybe a bit brighter inside. Perhaps it was already obvious enough that the cave was the region of language, and that the outside was the region of reality-beyond-language; but one can be forgiven for stating an obvious claim that others seem to have overlooked. I believe that I have found where the sophist must be situated in the cave, and, as a consequence, precisely why the ideal city can have absolutely no place for sophists (or imitative poets, for that matter!). All such individuals not only have a disregard for the truth (since they are motivated by their appetites and spirit), but they also have false and unreliable beliefs about the truth, beliefs which inevitably infect their practice. The cave will only be well governed when these beliefs are rooted out and replaced with intermediate objects (words) which point to and describe the inspiring and wholly authentic world outside the cave. As long as citizens are kept from any access to that world, demagoguery and democracy will ensue.
CONCLUSION: PROPAGANDA IN PLATO’S CAVE

There is reason to think that, in the time surrounding when he wrote the Republic, Plato’s thoughts about the purposes of communication were experiencing some amount of upheaval. Whereas the Protagoras, the Gorgias, the Apology, and the Euthydemus all seem to call into question the validity of non-rational forms of persuasion, the Phaedrus radically reverses course, carving out a place for a positive rhetoric. This rhetoric “plants λόγους scientifically, ... which give seed to other λόγους which nourish habits [ἡθεσι] in the listener and ... make him as happy as a person can possibly be” (Phaedrus 276e-277a). As we have seen, the Republic envisions a similar role for primary education, a kind of education which persuades a person to believe in what is good and true, yes, but persuades using a method (poetry, storytelling) that is capable of presenting either truth or falsity. It is, in that sense, non-rational. Likewise, the persuasive capacities of the statesman, in both the Statesman and the Laws, are (at least partially) employed not in an attempt to make the public learn - in the strict sense of “come to ἐπιστήμη” - but rather in an attempt to nourish and sustain certain true beliefs that redound to the stability and virtue of the polis.

The 20\(^{th}/21\(^{st}\) century poststructuralist movement argued (among other things) that language is a political tool which shapes the thought of its auditors. This claim is controversial and often misunderstood, but from what I have argued here, it would seem that Plato would wholeheartedly endorse it. Plato, like the poststructuralist, tends toward the view that all rhetoric is propaganda. Nevertheless - again, like many poststructuralists - Plato is of the opinion that some propaganda is better than other propaganda, and moreover that indoctrinating young people into the right moral viewpoints is of critical importance. To some, this might appear to be an artificial imposition on the minds of the young, who (as we say) ought to be permitted to “form their own opinions.” And
yet, in practice, we find that many moral reformers, even in the modern day, do not leave individuals
to form their own opinions. They strategize ways to appeal to both the rational and the irrational
aspects of a person’s psychology, shaping their rhetoric to suit the psychic structure of the audience
in much the way Plato describes in the *Phaedrus*. The good goal of producing a morally enlightened
individual is used to justify the questionable method of indoctrination. And indeed, this may seem
justified, especially in the context of raising children. It is hardly possible not to raise a child to
acquire certain moral biases, and it would certainly be surprising if all such indoctrination (e.g.
“don’t spit on people”) was wrong.

The staggering audacity of Plato’s vision in the *Republic*, however, is that everyone is
indoctrinated in the same way, by the same “parents” (see Rep. 538c). On this scale, indoctrination
rightly takes on the name “propaganda.” According to one modern handbook, propaganda is the
“deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior
to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”¹ Kallipolis is a polis
utterly circumscribed by propagandistic language, and only those who advance beyond primary
education are freed from the spell of such language. French philosopher Jacques Ellul said that
propaganda

tries to surround man by all possible routes, in the realm of feelings as well as
ideas, by playing on his will or his needs, through his conscious and his
unconscious, assailing him in both his private and his public life. It furnishes him
with a complete system for explaining the world, and provides immediate
incentives to action. We are here in the presence of an organized myth that tries
to take hold of the entire person.²

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² Jacques Ellul, “Characteristics of Propaganda,” in *Readings In Propaganda And Persuasion*, eds. Garth Jowett and
One could hardly describe a more thorough picture of Plato’s cave image, which wholly surrounds its occupant through its use of media, and only allows occupants to access reality insofar as it can be mediated through words. Those inside the cave “see through words,” and are only capable of as much good behavior as the words allow them. Nevertheless they have a “complete system of explaining the world” and they have no doubt about why they should do what is required of them.

When the details of this indoctrinary scheme become quite clear, Plato’s thought is remarkable both for its arrogance and for its insight. Does anyone doubt that advertising, media programming, and censorship work in almost exactly the ways that Plato anticipated – especially among children? We no longer need a philosopher to advance that claim; it is plain enough from experience. And it is true in more subtle contexts as well, the very contexts that poststructuralists would place emphasis on. How many of us would object to propaganda, and yet we are firmly attached to our own chosen terminology to describe certain morally controversial concepts? We agree about reference, but bicker over sense. What one person calls “affirmative action” another calls “reverse discrimination.” What one calls a “freedom fighter” another calls a “terrorist.” What one calls a “panderer” another calls a “responsive politician.” Even the term “propaganda” itself is malleable in this way: where does rhetoric end and propaganda begin?

These are important questions about the malleability of human language, and the dangers of relying on an education that relies overmuch on the names which we use. And yet, the arrogance of Plato’s solution to these dangers is quite astonishing. The beliefs of the philosopher are imposed upon the populace, thereby stripping the populace of its moral autonomy in the interests of the good of the state. Plato does not envision a world without the cave, but a world with a better cave. It is worth noticing that, if Plato is right that there are Forms, and if a person who has seen the Forms
comes to rule the city, and if this person desires the good of the city, then Plato may be quite right in claiming that this sort of indoctrination is justified – at least insofar as this person could “craft” intermediate virtues that tend toward the best interests of each citizen. But these three conditions require a great deal, and Plato himself arguably came to believe that they would never be satisfied in the real world.

Nevertheless, Plato’s full-bodied support for propaganda might give us pause. Do we honestly reject moral propaganda in modern society, or are our airwaves full of it? How should the government respond when its own values are being undermined by the diametrically opposed values of a smaller social community? How do the linguistic choices of modern media sources surreptitiously affect the beliefs of their audience, and how important is it that the audience become aware of these effects? Is it morally permissible to air public service announcements that appeal to irrational impulses, not rational aims?

Questions like these come into sharper focus when we put them in the context of the cave image. The discussions we have about them in the cave, however, can only take us so far. If any truth is to be found to guide our propaganda, it will not be found in words and shadows, but in the things themselves.
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ABSTRACT

THE SOPHIST IN THE CAVE
EDUCATION THROUGH NAMES IN PLATO'S REPUBLIC

by

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The Cratylus is often considered an isolated dialogue in Plato’s corpus, and the major theses of the Cratylus are often seen as disposable and problematic elements in Platonic thought. When one carefully compares this dialogue, however, to Plato’s comments elsewhere about rhetoric and dialectic, a set of fascinating connections emerge. In this dissertation, I argue that the Republic ought to be read in light of the Cratylus. In the former dialogue, Plato is vitally concerned with the use of accurate language in his republic, a fact most clearly brought out by his accusation against demagogues: that they “give names” to things on the basis of the beliefs of the populace, not on the basis of reality. I argue that this sort of popular false nomenclature should be identified with Plato’s discussion of deceptive names in the Cratylus. Moreover, I explain how Plato’s discussions of sophistical manipulation of names in the Cratylus, the Euthydemus, and the Sophist can be used to illuminate the epistemological landscape of the Republic. In particular, I contend that the cave image can be best understood only when we understand that the cave itself is the realm of human language,
a realm that includes two very separate regions: the shadow language which is presented by the sophist, and the truer language represented by the puppets which cast the shadows. This second region of language, I argue, plays a central role in the education of the guardians.
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Upon the receipt of his doctorate, Daniel Propson will be an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Oakland University in Rochester Hills, Michigan. He grew up in Rochester Hills, and attended Bishop Foley High School. He earned his Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and taught as a high school English teacher for seven years in Ypsilanti. During that period, he met and married Priscilla Greathouse; they have five energetic children. Daniel entered graduate school at Wayne State in the Fall of 2009. In his time there, he published papers on Hume and bioethics, though he has since fallen in love with ancient philosophy.