On the Two Conceptions of the Lawgiver in the *Cratylus*

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In this paper, I compare the two conceptions of the "lawgiver" in the Platonic dialogue *Cratylus*. I present both the idea that words constitute imitations of things (resemblance naturalism) and the claim that names are tools which "separate" and "teach" being (the tool analogy). Then I examine the respective figures of the lawgiver (*nomothetes*) appearing in each of them. These are the lawgiver of the tool analogy (one who makes names on the model of a craftsman producing tools), and that of the lawgiver who introduces names constituting phonetic imitations of things. I argue that with respect to name giving, the former is in a much better position than the latter, and that mimetic naturalism faces the insuperable "paradox of institution." My main claim is that, read in conjunction with the tool analogy, the notion of ἔθος introduced in 434e, offers a helpful framework for successfully overcoming the challenge of establishing the first names. Furthermore, the adoption of this perspective by Socrates allows him to navigate a complex position. This is a position that steers clear of both Cratylus's "resemblance naturalism" and Hermogenes's unadulterated conventionalism.

Keywords: tool analogy – paradox of institution – linguistic naturalism – conventionalism – ἔθος

I. Mimetic Naturalism and the Lawgiver

In Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, Socrates engages in a discussion concerning the "correctness of names."[1] His first interlocutor, Hermogenes, defends the view

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[1] It is customary when discussing the Cratylus to start with a clarification of what "name" (ὄνομα) means. Suffice it to say that "names" is – to a greater or lesser extent – equivalent to our term "words," even "language." See, for example, Anagnostopoulos (1972, 693), Meißner (2023), and Sedley (2006).

that names are correct by "convention and agreement" (384 d, συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία). His position that there are no incorrect names resonates with the relativism of Protagoras. Hermogenes is a proponent of linguistic conventionalism as opposed to the eponymous character Cratylus, a staunch advocate of linguistic naturalism. Two distinct conceptions of the "lawgiver" (νομοθέτης) appear, one introduced by Socrates himself within the framework of the so-called tool analogy (388 b – c), and the other by Cratylus in his exposition of the naturalist thesis. The name "*nomothetes*" itself in the setting of a naturalist theory bears, as Nancy Demand has pointed out, "a double, conflicting nature" (Demand 1975, 106).

The naturalist thesis is promoted by Cratylus in the final section of the dialogue, which comes after the long part on etymology (394e – 421c).[2] At the heart of Cratylus's thesis is a parallelism of names with ζωγραφήματα, pictorial representations of things. For Cratylus, the analogy between names (ὀνόματα) and paintings (ζωγραφήματα) extends to the experts who produce them. He thus envisages an initiator of names whom he calls *nomothetes*, "lawgiver" or "rule-setter" (431e). This lawgiver is similar to a painter as they both produce *imitations* of reality:

> Socrates: And you also agree that a name is an imitation of a thing?
> Cratylus: Absolutely.
> Socrates: And that a painting is a different sort of imitation of a thing?
> Cratylus: Yes (430b) (Plato 1997a, 146).

Socrates then revisits the question of the correctness of names in connection to the claim that names are pictorial imitations of things. Are there degrees of success in lawgivers' and painters' imitations of things? Cratylus had claimed that unlike in the case of painters or builders, there cannot be better or worse lawgivers, and definitely not better or worse names. In so far as they are names, he insists, names are correct (ὀρθῶς κεῖται) (429a – b). Characteristic is the example of the name "Hermogenes." In Cratylus's view, Hermogenes is misnamed, or rather he is not named at all, for the name "Hermogenes" does not at all represent the nature of the person whom others call so. Hermogenes does not belong to the progeny of Hermes and, apparently, he is not at all successful in commercial affairs (383b). A person who addresses him with the name "Hermogenes," is only addressing him *partially*; he is merely producing meaningless sounds (ψοφεῖν). According to Cratylus, unlike in the case of

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[2] Here I follow the division of *Cratylus's* text into shorter units given in Meißner (2023).

paintings, names, in being imitations (μίμημα*)* of things, are *necessarily given correctly.* Socrates, by contrast, sees no difference between the two cases: comparing names with paintings, he argues that just like in paintings there is a gradation in how faithfully they represent the thing they imitate, so is the case with how names represent things (430d).

Cratylus's refusal to accept that a name may be less or more correct is central to how he conceives the role of the name-giver. As he sees it, the latter – just like a painter – produces imitations of reality by bringing together simpler constitutive parts. The ultimate constituents of paintings are colors and of names not further analyzable, irreducible phonetic elements – the στοιχεῖα. Cratylus believes that the connection between things and their mimetic representation in both painting and language is *natural* and metaphysically prior to artistic and linguistic practice, respectively.

II. Does the Lawgiver Establish the First Names with Knowledge?

As regards names, Cratylus's mimetic view of language presumes that the lawgiver is cognizant of the nature of things and that he establishes names on the basis of his knowledge. The lawgiver cannot establish *correct names* if he is ignorant of the metaphysical ground connecting a name with the thing it pictures. For Cratylus, though, this equals not establishing *names at all,* given his position that a name is by definition correct. At this point, an important difficulty raises its head**.** What about the very first names? Does the lawgiver establish the first names *knowing* (εἰδότα) the nature of the things they name, or not? (438a). If the answer is yes, as Cratylus seems to think, a further question follows. Did he himself acquire such knowledge non-linguistically? Socrates asks:

> But from what names had he learned or discovered the things, if the first names had not yet been given, and if we declare that it is impossible to learn or discover things except by learning or ourselves discovering the names? (438 a – b)

Socrates's question raises the so-called "paradox of institution"[3] and an ensuing dilemma between the following two alternatives: Either a) The lawgiver's knowledge arises through some prior names. These would also have to be established by means of knowledge (εἰδότα) and that would require still prior names, and so on ad infinitum. The infinite regress would invalidate the lawgiver's effort to establish the first names naturally; Or, b) The knowledge

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[3] This is a term introduced by Paul Livingston (Livingston 2015, 13). In this paper I am using it in the same way as Livingston.

based on which the lawgiver establishes the first names is available to him non-linguistically; he then establishes the first names through his own, non-linguistic mental representations. This means that to establish a name, the lawgiver would need to draw a line connecting a thing in the world with its picture in his mind. The latter, however, would be a third element between a thing and its name. The same difficulty would then hold concerning the connection between the mental picture and the object, as for the one between name and object. So the matter regresses to the initial question of whether the lawgiver establishes the connection between names and things based on knowledge reached through prior names, or not.

Option (b) entails that the lawgiver establishes names through his own mental understanding which cannot be communicated to others, given that language has not been established yet. If the first names are given by the lawgiver without any non-subjective, independent criterion of correctness, they are open to the charge of arbitrariness. Their correspondence to things is established only on what the lawgiver himself subjectively considers to be a correct connection. Such arbitrariness is then diffused through all names established on the basis of the first names.[4]

Cratylus, then, cannot show how the mental picture used by the lawgiver as an intermediary between word and object is a valid representation of the latter. Overall, his mimetic perspective fails to account for the institution of first names, which according to him are *pictures* of things. This is a decisive setback for his position.

Whether knowing things non-linguistically is possible or not, is an intractable philosophical problem. This problem exceeds by far the confines of the present paper. The difficulty confronting the lawgiver of *Crat*. 438, however, is not whether he has non-linguistic knowledge, reached through mental pictures or any other way. The problem is that even if the lawgiver has knowledge of things in any kind of non-linguistic way, such knowledge cannot be linguistically expressed because it has to be presupposed for language to be established. A piece of knowledge that is not expressible in language, though, cannot be subject to any objective criterion of correctness. Whether the lawgiver

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[4] This picture evokes the private language problematic explored by L. Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. See, for example, § 258 where Wittgenstein claims that in the absence of a shared language there can be no criterion concerning correct use of words. "But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'" (1969, 92).

has indeed knowledge or is mistaken about what he takes the natural links between things and names to be cannot be evaluated by anybody apart from him. If this is so, the connection between a thing and the name the name giver bestows on it is totally subjective rather than read off objectively from the thing named.

On Socrates's part, his lack of enthusiasm for Cratylus's naturalism is most clearly seen in the argument that a totally perfect picture of Cratylus would not constitute an imitation of the person Cratylus but a reduplication of him: we would be having two Cratyluses, rather than Cratylus and his representation (432 b-c). Socrates's point that a picture of Cratylus which is absolutely similar to the original would not be a picture of Cratylus but a second Cratylus, is an unambiguous attack on representationalist naturalism. Rudolph H. Weingartner sums it up lucidly as follows:

> Socrates next proceeds to a powerful argument which undermines, on logical grounds, the very possibility of perfect representation – regardless of what the mode of representation might turn out to be. This is the ingenious argument of the two Cratyluses: a perfect representation of Cratylus in all his characteristics would not be a representation at all, but a second Cratylus. Hence a completely natural language without any element of convention is logically impossible (Weingartner 1970, 12 – 13).

Scholarly debate on whether Socrates's sympathies lie with the naturalist thesis or some form of conventionalism notwithstanding, it is significant that he considers name-giving to be primarily a kind of *acting*. Moreover, Socrates claims that both things and actions, among which also the practice of name-giving, have a reality of their own, independent of fallible human opinion (387c – d). The tool analogy is clearly an expression of the emphasis he places on the *practice* of language.

III. The Lawgiver in The Tool Analogy

In the early part of the dialogue, Socrates argues that speaking (ὁμιλεῖν) is an *action* (πρᾶξις) and that naming (ὀνομάζειν), in being a part of speaking, is also a form of action (387 b – c). It is not, this is to say, a primarily theoretical engagement and contemplation of things from a standpoint external to them. It is rather πρᾶξις and active involvement with them, through which they are distinguished from each other as beings with a certain natural constitution. Just like other kinds of action, speaking comes with its specific tools, the names. The definition of names as tools ensues: "A name is, then, an instrument

of teaching (διδασκαλικόν) and of separating (διακριτικόν) reality as a shuttle is an instrument of separating the web?" (388c).

The analogy between names and shuttles is based on the idea that they are both used to separate a specific part out of undifferentiated or entangled stuff. Just as a shuttle is used to detangle and separate the fibres used in weaving in order to produce new fabric, so a name is used to separate a part of being and mark it out from others. The term "διακριτικόν" appearing in 388c denotes that which is capable of and conducive to separating or distinguishing (Liddell-Scott 1996, 399). According to the tool analogy, names are such tools. Analogous to the way in which a shuttle (*kerkis*)[5] delivers threads for weaving out of an initial shapeless mess, so names "cut" separate kinds out of initially undifferentiated being. Upon being used they set beings within their ontological boundaries. This is an act of ontological "separation" and delimitation. Socrates's claim that names are tools for delineating being, points towards a view of language as an indispensable element of our engagement and understanding of things.

In the tool analogy Socrates gives centre stage to a lawgiver (νομοθέτης), to whom he refers with the quite unique term ὀνοματουργός, or name maker (389a). ὀνοματουργός is a word analogous to terms describing various other kinds of craftsmen. Socrates presents this lawgiver (from now on "lawgiver-*onomatourgos*") as an expert in making names, by analogy to the shuttle maker, the skillful craftsman producing the tools for weaving. This lawgiver is quite different from the one envisaged by Cratylus in 431e. As already seen, the conception of the lawgiver is central to Cratylus' naturalist thesis and the vehicle for putting flesh on his conception of names as imitative representations. The lawgiver *onomatourgos*, on the other hand, does not aim at producing names imitating things.

Unlike the lawgiver introduced by Cratylus in 431e, the lawgiver *onomatourgos* does not seek a projecting line uniting a thing with a name. So he does not have to give an account of how names supposedly resemble things. What he does, though, in giving names to things, is to "look" at what a name itself is. (389d) This is analogous to how the shuttle-maker "looks" at the εἶδος of the shuttle. He works, this is to say, with an understanding of what a model name is, and tries to provide names as close to this ideal, as possible. The names he will come up with will certainly be less perfect than the ideal name, just like the shuttle used by the weaver is less perfect than the form "εἶδος" of shuttle.

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[5] Francesco Ademollo has argued that *kerkis* is not a shuttle, but more like a tool used to unravel weft and warp fibres entangled together. Interpreted in this way, the "separating" metaphor of the tool analogy is reinforced (Ademollo 2011, 108 – 110).

This is a very Platonic point of view according to which all empirical particulars are imperfect approximations of their corresponding form. Seen in this light, the task of the lawgiver is to produce names as similar to the form of name as possible. It is not an attempt to seek a similarity between names and their nominata. The latter is the logic of resemblance naturalism which sees naming as a correspondence between names and things.

The shuttle-maker takes the form (εἶδος) of shuttle as his model. In 389b Socrates calls the latter "αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν κερκίς," rendered as "what a shuttle itself is" (Plato 1997a, 108) or as "the absolute or real shuttle" (Plato 1926). He does not, we are told, pay attention to a broken shuttle (389b). The reference to a broken tool here may come as a surprise. For why would Socrates not suffice by saying that the craftsman's guiding model is the εἶδος, rather than the empirical, tangible tool? Plausibly, the broken state of the shuttle evokes the fragmentary character of all beings in a world of flux, as well as subjective human beliefs about them. A broken shuttle has lost any substantial connection to its εἶδος and as a result, it cannot be used for the task of weaving. By analogy, a name made with no consideration of the εἶδος of names will also fail to perform its function- to separate being properly, along natural lines. Moreover, just like a shuttle has to be constructed according to the nature of the material on which it will be used (in 389b Socrates mentions light or thick garment, linen or wool), so a name has to be made taking into consideration the nature of being.

The lawgiver *onomatourgos* has to make name-tools to be used to separate being. This means that he is not giving names to beings that are *already separate from each other.* Beings are separated through the application of names that the *onomatourgos* produces.

IV. The Dialectician as Use Expert

Next to the lawgiver, the tool analogy introduces a second expert. This is the dialectician (διαλεκτικός), who is presented as the paradigmatic user of the names made by the lawgiver *onomatourgos.* The dialectician is analogous to the weaver who uses the shuttle made by the shuttle maker to weave. The analogy centers on the ability of the dialectician to evaluate the names made by the lawgiver through using them, just like the weaver assesses through weaving whether a shuttle is well constructed or not. In Socrates's view, the dialectician, being an expert in use, is in a better position than the lawgiver to determine whether names are properly made to perform their specific task, or not.

Imogen Smith argues that there are two distinct aspects of a tool, the structure and the function. Consequently, there is a difference in the respective

focus of those who make and those who use tools. The tool maker has knowledge about the structural characteristics of the tool, whereas the tool user is knowledgeable about its functional characteristics (Smith 2014, 26). The tool analogy presents the dialectician as the expert tool user. Applying Smith's distinction on the two experts of the tool analogy, we can conclude that the specific task of the dialectician is about the function of words in use.

By the terms of the analogy, the dialectician uses names as tools for his craft. But which is his craft exactly? Apart from what we get in 390 c – d, there is no more information about the dialectician in the *Cratylus*. The term reappears in the *Republic*. There the dialectician is presented as the meta-physician par excellence: he apprehends the forms by means of the non-discursive and unmediated intuition that Plato calls *noesis*. According to the simile of the divided line (*Rep.* 509d – 510a) *noesis* is the characteristic mental state of those who advanced so high as to contemplate the forms. The term "dialectician" also appears in the *Phaedrus,* 265e – 266b. Here the dialectician is conceived as a person who has the ability to 'cut up each kind according to its species along its natural joints' (Plato 1997b, 542). In 266b, Socrates expresses his admiration for people gifted with such an ability, stressing that he is himself "a lover of these divisions and collections, so that [he] may be able to think and to speak" (Plato 1997b, 542 author's emphasis).

Two points in the conception of dialectician in *Phdr.* 265e – 266b stand out: a) Dialecticians divide being according to *natural* lines. The dialectician divides (separates) beings from each other based on how they are naturally constituted (ᾗ πέφυκεν, *Phdr.* 265e) b) To separate and bring together being(s) properly is indispensable for speaking and also for thinking. Proper division and collection are crucial for understanding beings according to their own nature, rather than by way of misleading and subjective conceptions.

Combined with the definition of names as tools for separating being, (a) yields that the dialectician uses names to divide being along natural lines. Combined with (b) the same definition underscores the connection of language and thought with the proper classification of being through the use of successful name-tools. This picture of dialecticians as thinkers engaged in the delimitation of being in the *Phaedrus* concurs with the conception of the dialectician in the tool analogy. There the dialectician uses the names made by the lawgiver *onomatourgos* as tools for thinking and speaking about being.

Once more, this picture is quite different from the resemblance-based naturalist view of language propounded by Cratylus.

To spell out the parallel between names and tools, let us introduce an example of using scissors. In line with the framework of the tool analogy, both scissors and names are cutting tools. Let us assume that a tailor has at his disposal a large piece of fabric, which he uses to produce a pair of trousers and a jacket. He starts by using the scissors to cut two smaller pieces out of the given material, the fabric at his disposal. With scissors as his cutting tool, he cuts the first piece in the size and shape required for making the trousers, and then the second one in a different shape and size that is suitable for a jacket. The two pieces of fabric become two separate things, "trousers" and "jacket," respectively after they are cut out of the initial fabric. *Before* the cutting tool, scissors, is applied to the fabric, there are no two distinct visible items which are *then* given the names "pants" and "jacket." By analogy, there are no distinct beings that can be objects of human thought and cognition before names, as cutting tools, separate them from each other.

With the tool analogy Socrates suggests a way of looking at the name-nominatum relation different than Cratylus's linguistic naturalism. Earlier in the dialogue (386e), in discussing with Hermogenes, he had asserted emphatically that things have their own nature which "does not change according to our fancy." This claim is important for the tool analogy, as well. It entails that the beings to be separated through the use of names have their own nature, which is independent of subjective human opinions. Moreover, the tool analogy posits the dialectician as an expert in the use of names. The dialectician has the ability to "divide and collect" different kinds of being according to their natural constitution (see 7 – 8 above). From this, we gather that the dialectician assists the lawgiver in making names that delimit beings based on beings' own nature. Here it has to be pointed out that on the model of the tool analogy, names and their nominata are *internally* connected. A properly constructed name must be appropriate for the nature of the being it names. This can become clearer by highlighting that being crafted through the use of *shuttles*, as opposed to another kind of tool, is essential to what woven fabric is. Analogously, being delimited through names, and not through some other kind of tool, such as subjective mental pictures, is essential to *beings*.

V. Ἔθος and the Institution of Names as Tools

The question now is *how* exactly the lawgiver *onomatourgos* of the tool analogy establishes names. Again, the text does not explicitly address this. In the face of

it, a reading of the tool analogy together with the notion of ἔθος, introduced in 434e can be illuminating.

In 434c a specific case, the name σκληρότης (that is, hardness), is introduced. This is a word comprising the sounds σ and ϱ which, according to Cratylus, naturally represent hardness – but also including the sound λ which is said to be a natural picture of softness. This latter point constitutes a problem for linguistic naturalism, for it allows a component of the name to represent the exactly opposite quality than the one the name is supposed to naturally represent. The soft sound λ is present even in the Eretrian variation "σκληρότηϱ," a version which includes a second ϱ in the place of the final ς, and so constitutes a "better" name according to the naturalist point of view. How then, Socrates asks Cratylus, do we understand the meaning of this name, which includes the sound λ, to be 'hardness'? The answer is custom – ἔθος (434 e).

For Socrates, the capacity of language to express the distinction between truth and falsity is of paramount importance. Given this, he needs to retain the idea that language is intertwined with being, without, on the other hand, falling into the impasse of the mimetic model proposed by Cratylus. In order to avoid the latter, he claims that no resemblance between a name and a thing, without the presence of convention (συνθήκη), can establish a name's meaning (435 b – c). Despite expressing his preference for names that are as close to the nature of things as possible, Socrates acknowledges that the power of a name to "attract" the thing named is quite limited. He then claims that "we have to make use of this worthless thing, convention, in the correctness of names." (435c) (Plato 1997a, 151). His understanding of convention, however, is focused differently than Hermogenes's. In 384d Hermogenes had emphatically claimed that the notion of correctness of names cannot but consist in convention (συνθήκη) and agreement (ὁμολογία.) On his part, Socrates is bent on loosening the grip of the mimetic view of language and of the natural similarity of names to things that it presupposes. Naturally, he explores the concept of custom (ἔθος) and attempts to clarify how it differs from convention (συνθήκη), as well as what each of them entails for the correctness of names:

> When you say 'usage', do you mean something other than convention? Do you mean something by 'usage' besides this: when I utter this name and mean hardness by it, you know that this is what I mean? Isn't that what you're saying? (434e) (Plato 1997a, 150 – 151).[6]

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[6] C.D.C. Reeve's translation of ἔθος as "usage" is a bit of a stretch here; "custom," is a better alternative (Plato 1997a, 150 – 151).

In addressing this question to Cratylus in 434e, Socrates attempts to highlight the difference with regard to custom between his position and Hermogenes's unrefined understanding of convention. As he sees it, the latter carries the risk of a potential break in linguistic communication. Custom, on the other hand, enables mutual understanding (γιγνώσκεις) of the meaning with which one's interlocutors use a word. Here he seems to think that despite the fact that ἔθος is close to συνθήκη, neither of them is arbitrary in quite the way Hermogenes assumes. This is part of his realization that successful establishment of names does not only consist in pairing a name with its nominatum. It requires a level of shared understanding among language users concerning the nature of the "object" itself. So names must conjure up *the same being* and express the same meaning for every speaker. In Socrates's eye, such an agreement is necessary for preventing a Protagorean type of relativism from bringing linguistic communication to a halt. The example of the name "σκληρότηρ" presses home the idea that a "naturally soft" sound, λ, can coexist with "naturally hard" ones in a name that denotes hardness. Despite including a "naturally soft" sound, custom makes it possible for speakers to understand "σκληρότης" to mean "hardness." In other words, custom enables language users to understand the meaning of names, and so ensures successful communication.[7] Combined with the definition of names in the tool analogy, this notion of custom introduced in 434e can offer a convincing account of how names are established and function. What's more, such a move makes clear how the lawgiver *onomatourgos* succeeds in establishing names, without the problems the lawgiver of the naturalist thesis is confronted with.

The tool analogy sees the lawgiver as a kind of craftsman making names, parallel to the shuttle maker. The shuttle is introduced as a tool for weaving, an activity aimed at producing fabric. Weaving, on its part, is a practice originating in the human need for clothing and covering. By analogy, names are tools introduced by the lawgiver *onomatourgos* within the practice of speaking, which Socrates considers to be "a kind of action concerned with things" (πράξις περί τά πράγματα) (387c).

The lawgiver *onomatourgos* introduces names in response to the need people have to understand being and to share this understanding in communication with each other. In being conceived as tools, names in the tool analogy are considered, right from the start, to be *already connected* to the beings they refer

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[7] For a thorough discussion of whether the rejection of resemblance naturalism entails the rejection of the naturalist thesis as such, see Anagnostopoulos (1972, 691 – 736).

to. This connection, however, arises through the function of names-tools in delineating and communicating the nature of beings. In other words, what is crucial here is the *practice* of speaking, rather than the effort to seek an elusive "natural" resemblance between names and things. Etymologically evoking a sense of repetition, ἔθος, points in the direction of settled ways of acting that become established and customary through common use. This fits very well with the conception of the lawgiver in the tool analogy, in so far as the analogy considers names as tools, put to use on a regular basis. Moreover, the notion of ἔθος as introduced by Socrates does not carry with it an idea of *natural* resemblance between names and beings. Consequently, it does not lead to the serious difficulty faced by Cratylus's lawgiver, namely the problem of institution.

Francesco Ademollo has convincingly argued (Ademollo 2011, 390 – 404) that even if Socrates appears to prefer names including more sounds "naturally" resembling the thing named (like the Eritrean "σκληρότηρ," for example), he does not subscribe to the idea that language is grounded in resemblance of things.

Based on this, Ademollo argues that Socrates enters the dialogue as a naturalist about language, challenging Hermogenes's conventionalism, and then ends up rejecting naturalism to find himself arguing that custom – and so convention – is indispensable for names to be meaningful. For Ademollo what enables the listener to understand that the speaker refers to X when he pronounces "X" is συνθήκη. What "X" represents, is not a mental picture in the speaker's mind, but the thing X itself (2011, 398). We can take this to mean that according to Socrates, linguistic communication does not go through mental pictures which "naturally" and mimetically pair with things in the world. Moreover, it is worth noting that such mental pictures themselves face the problem of initial institution-besetting names conceived as imitations of things.

Given this, Ademollo's point is especially important for understanding Socrates' position and the significance of convention and custom within it. In Ademollo's reading of Socrates, the name is not connected to a mental picture in the speaker's mind, but to the actual object which it delineates ("separates") upon its being used. This concurs with Ademollo's idea that the speaker in saying "X" refers to the X that is in front of both the speaker and the listener so that they both understand the speaker to be referring to X. This mutual understanding gradually becomes customary, a part of ἔθος.

If this is so, Socrates sees the institution of names as a process embedded in shared understanding among speakers, rather than in a singular act of baptism on the part of a name-giver, be it Cratylus's resemblance naturalist, or Hermogenes's linguistic conventionalist. What blocks both of these unhelpful

conceptions is Socrates's emphasis on praxis, rather than on pre-existing subjective and mostly incommunicable thinking, from which names supposedly derive. Such a perspective clouds the conception of an original name-giver if by this we are to imagine that there is a person who finds himself in a vantage point preceding all language and establishes names by an inexplicable fiat.

At this point, one may wonder whether Plato works with a literal conception of the law-giver as a unique individual with an authoritative position, or not. If, as I argue, Plato considers linguistic usage (ἔθος) to be indispensable for establishing the meaning of words, then the assumption that he talks about the lawgiver in literal terms, is weakened considerably. Moreover, both lawgiver figures are sketched in very rough lines. The text of the *Cratylus* is silent about anything that would show the lawgiver as a concrete person of a recognizable kind. The lawgiver who attempts to establish names on the basis of a natural similarity with things seems unable to resolve the paradox of institution. Cratylus acknowledges as much in 438c where he conjectures that "a more than human power" (Plato 1997a, 153) establishes the first names, "so that they are necessarily correct." In his rather disbelieving response Socrates identifies such a supreme power with a daimon or a god (δαίμων τις ἢ θεός).

This reference to the divine is quite telling in a number of ways. For what we are concerned with here, it strengthens the position that language cannot be initiated by the efforts and decree of one person. This makes it possible to see the lawgiver as a metaphor for the origination of language.

As for Cratylus's claim that it takes a divine power to establish names for things, I believe that it can be interpreted in two different ways. The first way is to interpret it literally and "read" it as similar to the Biblical view that God gives names to things.[8] The second possible way to interpret the reference to a super human power establishes the first names, is to consider it a metaphor. To assume, in other words, that the appeal to a such a power is a metaphorical way to convey a philosophical point: namely, that resemblance naturalism does not work. This means that to establish meaningful first names at the dawn of language is not a task any human being can ever succeed at. But if no human being can potentially succeed in carrying out the institution of first names, it is plausible to suggest that the task itself is a misconceived endeavor. Meaningful names, this is to say, cannot be established by decree.

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[8] See Gen. 1:5, 1:8, 1:10, or Gen 2: 19 where God brings the animals to Adam to give them names. See also online: https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/words/Naming. (Last accessed, December 7th 2023).

I believe that the second interpretation is stronger than the first. My main reason for so thinking is that the idea of god given names to things does not really appear in Greek mythology and religion. It belongs essentially to the monotheistic perspective, which is temporally posterior to Plato.

It is also worth noticing a subtle difference between the words Cratylus himself uses in introducing his point and those of Socrates in responding to him. Cratylus does not use any term such as 'god' or 'divine,' but simply talks about "a power greater than the human" (438c, μείζω τινὰ δύναμιν ἢ ἀνθρωπείαν). It is Socrates who uses the words "god" or "daemon" in a reflex response.

In "The Nomothetes of the 'Cratylus'" Nancy Demand argues that "A Nomothetes who gives names φύσει is a contradiction." (Demand 1975, 108 – 109). Responding to Demand's argument, Steven L. Churchill argues that from *Crat*. 434 onwards, Plato's main effort is not to refute the naturalist theory of the correctness of names, but to discredit the idea that the constitutive parts of names must bear a likeness to reality. He claims, further, that the etymology of the name νομοθέτης corroborates Socrates's point about the name σκληρότης: namely, that what confers upon a name its singular meaning, even if it includes contradictory elements, whether letters or syllables, is *use.* (Churchill 1983, 92) As Churchill puts it, after the nomothetes has completed the production of words, "the users of language then take over." This results in various changes in pronunciation, spelling, etc. but the original meaning of names remains largely unaffected. He concludes:

> The Nomothetes has, then, captured the nature of things in sounds and syllables φύσει, and, indirectly through the mouths of the language's everyday speakers, established a νόμος. In short, ὁ νομοθέτης ἔθηκεν νόμον φύσει. (= established a custom by nature, author's translation) (Churchill 1983, 93).

Churchill's analysis clearly concurs with the point that ἔθος is an indispensable part of any institution of names.

VI. To Sum Up

In seeing naming as a tool using practice, through which people grasp the nature of beings and indicate it in language, the tool analogy escapes both the problem of institution and the problem of arbitrariness faced by conventionalist models.

The lawgiver *onomatourgos* of the tool analogy, unlike the nomothetes envisaged by Cratylus's naturalism, does not face the problem of the institution

of the first names. The conception of names as tools, coupled with that of ἔθος, conveys the idea that names are shaped within what is the customary usage of many speakers. Understood in this way, the tool analogy suggests that names are given by the *onomatourgos*, but that this process takes place with the praxis of speaking, which outstrips a single individual. This may give the impression that the correctness of names is totally a matter of convention, determined by the arbitrary agreement of the community of speakers. Socrates, however, believes that things have their own specific nature, which names demarcate. Names do not *picture* things through imitation, but *indicate* them, with a greater or lesser degree of success, in the praxis of speaking.

In conclusion, I have argued that Socrates does not support Cratylus's resemblance naturalism. At the same time, I claimed that he is not a conventionalist, either. This is because he believes that names "separate" and teach the nature of beings, which is independent of human opinion. The position I have argued for falls in neither camp A nor camp B of expert scholarly opinion about the *Cratylus*, according to Meißner's classification (see "Exegetical Divides," (Meißner 2023, 2)). My argument has more in common with the position of scholars whom Meißner places in Group C. These are people who see Socrates as arguing against Cratylus's resemblance naturalism, but without, on the other hand, adopting a conventionalist position. I have also argued, in the same vein, that a) Socrates rejects Cratylus's mimetic naturalism, but that b) he retains a mild naturalism based on the idea that names are tools constructed with a view to conveying the *ousia* (διδακτικόν τῆς οὐσίας).

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