An Enquiry into Plato's and Wittgenstein's Conception of Language

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"Die Sprache ist ein Teil unseres Organismus, und nicht weniger kompliziert als dieser."

Ludwig Wittgenstein – Notebooks

"Ein jeder, weil er spricht, glaubt auch über die Sprache sprechen zu können. "

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe – Maximen und Reflectionen

Contents

Introduction

There are two important manners in which one can approach the notion of linguistic correctness. First of all, it is possible to ask whether a word is used correctly. Correctness is then related to the application of a linguistic utterance or word by a member of the human species. Secondly, one could raise the question whether our words are correct representations of things. Is language correct in relation to the world, or is there no such thing as language being correct or incorrect in comparison with the world? In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche:

"Ist die Sprache der adäquate Ausdruck aller Realitäten?"[1]

Both approaches to linguistic correctness are expressed clearly by Saint Augustine in his *De Magistro*, in which he gives two conceptions of words:

1. "Words exist so that we may use them."[2]
2. "Words are signs."[3]

The former conception carries with it the notion of use and the idea of correct and incorrect use: words exist so that we may use them and such use can be correct or incorrect in nature. Use entails correctness. If a human being who is learning the English language applies the word 'goat' to a horse, then he is evidently using the word incorrectly. The possibility of him being rather stubborn and saying 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean'[4], does not change the incorrectness of his use. The latter conception of words, viz. words are signs, is connected with the relation between words and the world: are words correct signs of things? More general: are our words made correct by the world, or is that impossible?

The two forms of linguistic correctness we have distinguished here are precisely the two forms with which Plato and Wittgenstein are occupied in their philosophical work. Plato enquires into the nature of linguistic correctness, both in relation to the world and in relation to use, in his *Cratylus*.[5] Similarly, Wittgenstein is preoccupied in his later work with 'linguistic normativity'[6], the arbitrariness of grammar, and rule-following. In this thesis, I will look into the relation between Plato's and Wittgenstein's account of linguistic correctness. The question which will serve as a guide whilst pursuing this enquiry will be: how should the relation between Plato's view of linguistic correctness and that of Wittgenstein be conceived of?

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Lüge in Außermoralischen Sinne," in *Werke 3* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1997), 311.
[2] Saint Augustine, *De Magistro*, translation Peter King (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1995), 9.26, Page 129.
[3] Saint Augustine, *De Magistro*, 2.3, Page 97.
[4] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (New York: Everyman's Library, 1992), 254.
[5] Plato, *Cratylus*, translation H.N. Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939).
[6] David Pears, *Paradox and Platitude in Wittgenstein's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 20.

My attempt to answer this question consists of five chapters. The first of those has an introductory character, i.e. it gives an introduction into the predominant view, mainly derived from remarks by Wittgenstein himself, regarding the relation between the linguistic views of Plato and Wittgenstein. The second chapter is dedicated to Plato's *Cratylus* and tries to give a survey of the main components of that dialogue. This survey makes way for a more general interpretation of the work and above all Plato's views on linguistic correctness. My emphasis on this particular dialogue of Plato's, namely the *Cratylus*, is motivated by the reason that this dialogue is of all Plato's dialogues the most extensively and exclusively devoted to language, although several commentators, as shall be discussed later, believe that the work serves not primarily a linguistic, but rather an 'epistemological end'[7].

The third chapter evolves around Wittgenstein's notion of meaning and his idea of the arbitrariness of grammar. Both are fundamental to his conception of language and his treatment of linguistic normativity, of the correctness of words and their use by those 'perishable creatures'[8] we call human beings. His notion of meaning, and more particularly the slogan that has been attached to it, namely meaning is use[9], has become rather famous, but fame does not necessarily imply understanding and hence some enquiries into that notion are not superfluous and serve our purposes. Wittgenstein's idea of the arbitrariness of grammar is equally important and stands in need of some elucidation, because it is liable to misunderstandings, as was acknowledged by Wittgenstein himself, who mostly used it with some reluctance[10] and was aware of the fact that it might be misunderstood.[11]

Closely related to the notions of meaning and the arbitrariness of grammar are Wittgenstein's opinions on rule-following and linguistic normativity in general, which form the content of the fourth chapter of this enquiry. Neither the term rule-following nor the term linguistic normativity is used explicitly by Wittgenstein himself, but both terms apply to important passages from his work and refer to ideas which are at the centre of Wittgenstein's view on linguistic correctness. The fifth and last chapter contains an analysis of the relation between Plato's account of linguistic correctness and Wittgenstein's. This analysis aims at bringing the previous chapters to a synthesis and makes room for the conclusion of this enquiry, which succeeds this chapter.

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[7] L.M. de Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: A Philosophical Commentary* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1986), 217.

[8] Aristotle, *De Anima*, translation W.S. Hett (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1957), Book 2.3, 85.

[9] G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning: An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations, Volume 1 – Part 1*, second edition, extensively revised by P.M.S. Hacker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2009), 155.

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, R. Rhees, and Joachim Schulte (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), § 497, Page 432.

[11] G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity: Volume 2 of An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations*, second edition, extensively revised by P.M.S. Hacker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2014), 338.

Chapter 1   Plato and Wittgenstein: Setting the Stage

1.1: Plato and The Augustinian Conception of Language

Plato and the later Wittgenstein are usually seen as philosophical antagonists, whose views, most notably regarding language and linguistic correctness[12], are entirely different and who pursue philosophy by different methods and from distinct traditions.[13] This image has been strengthened by Wittgenstein's insistence in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* that Plato was a representative of his own early philosophy[14], which he had by now come to reject. The idea of there being similarities between the thought of Plato and Wittgenstein's early philosophy was also held, and even earlier than Wittgenstein himself did so, by Gilbert Ryle, who conceived of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* as resembling Plato's ideas.[15] Accordingly, Plato was said to hold views on language contrary to Wittgenstein's later thought.

The most important idea which Wittgenstein ascribes to Plato and which he tries to repudiate in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* is the idea that names correspond to simple objects or elements in reality.[16] Those simple objects or elements cannot be further conceived: they can only be named. The conception of a link between a name and an element or simple object in reality is incorporated in Wittgenstein's notion of the 'Augustinian Conception of Language'[17]. The central thought of that conception is that a name acquires its meaning through correspondence with an object.[18] The meaning of a word is 'der Gegenstand, für welchen das Wort steht'[19].

Meaning, therefore, is a consequence of reality: objects in reality determine the meaning of our words, such as our names, which refer to simple objects. This implies that linguistic correctness, such as we are examining it here, is made possible by reality: reality accounts for meaning and hence for the correctness of our language. The simple objects e.g. of which the world is composed give our names meaning and correctness. Wittgenstein ascribes this view of names and simple objects to Plato based on a passage from the *Theaetetus*, in which Plato appears to defend such a view.[20] Hence Plato and Wittgenstein are considered counterparts regarding linguistic correctness.

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[12] David Pears, *The False Prison*, Volume 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 206
[13] G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning: An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations, Volume 1 – Part 1*, second edition, revised by P.M.S. Hacker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2009), 271.
[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 48, Page 265 – 266.
[15] Gilbert Ryle, "Plato's Parmenides (II)," in *Mind*, Vol. 49, No. 191 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 325.
[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 46, Page 263.
[17] Gordon Baker, *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, ed. Katherine J. Morris (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 38.
[18] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 1, Page 237.
[19] Ibidem.
[20] Plato, *Theaetetus*, translation John McDowell, 1st edition 1973 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 201e – 202b, Page 95.

1.2: Wittgenstein and Plato's Quest for Definitions

That Wittgenstein positioned Plato in the philosophical camp of those who defend ideas in line with the Augustinian conception of language is not the only cause for the image of both philosophers as being opponents. Another cause is Wittgenstein's dismissal of Plato's 'insistence that understanding must be exhibited in giving *Merkmal*-definitions'[21]. Plato believed, according to Wittgenstein, that understanding a word amounts to being capable of giving a definition of that word. Wittgenstein states about Socrates' search for a definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*:

> *"Nimm […] des Sokrates Frage: 'Was ist Erkenntnis?' […] So wie das Problem gestellt wird, scheint es, als ob etwas mit dem gewöhnlichen Gebrauch des Wortes 'Erkenntnis' nicht stimmt. Es scheint, als ob wir nicht wissen, was es bedeutet, und daß wir deshalb vielleicht nicht berechtigt sind, es zu gebrauchen. Wir würden antworten: 'Es gibt keine exakte Gebrauchsweise des Wortes Erkenntnis; aber wir können uns mehrere solche Gebrauchsweisen ausdenken'."*[22]

Understanding and using the word knowledge is for Wittgenstein not having the capacity to give a satisfactory answer to the question what knowledge is. One need not possess a conclusive definition of knowledge, i.e. an answer to the question what knowledge is, in order to understand and apply the word. So when Socrates tries in the *Greater Hippias* to find a definition of beauty and fails[23], this would not be seen as a problem by Wittgenstein. We are entitled to use the word beauty, although falling short of a proper definition of the word. Wittgenstein accordingly believes that general terms, such as knowledge and beauty, are not referring to a particular essence of things, but are applied to several things due to 'Familienähnlichkeiten'[24]. As John Wisdom remembered him saying during a lecture:

> *"He said that in applying the same word to several instances we mark a family resemblance – not the possession of something in common."*[25]

Wittgenstein consequently holds that we neither need a definition of particular concepts, nor could find one if we had needed it. There are no strict definitions of concepts, but if there were, we could do without them.

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[21] P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Mind and Will: An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations, Volume 4* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1996), 478.
[22] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Das Blaue Buch*, translation Petra von Morstein (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013), 50 – 51.
[23] Plato, *Greater Hippias*, translation Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1939), 333 – 432.
[24] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 67, Page 278.
[25] John Wisdom, "Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1934 – 1937," in *Mind*, Vol. 61, No. 242 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 258.

1.3: Wittgenstein and Plato's *Cratylus*

It could be said, based on what we have seen until now, that Wittgenstein conceived of his rejection of his early philosophy as a rejection of his, what David Sedley calls, 'Socratic phase'[26], or his Platonic phase. Is this disavowal of his alleged Socratic or Platonic phase also a rejection of Plato's *Cratylus*? Well, there is, to my knowledge, only one reference to that dialogue of Plato to be found in Wittgenstein. In *The Big Typescript* Wittgenstein refers to the following sentence from the dialogue:

> *"Representing by likeness the thing represented is absolutely and entirely superior to representation by chance signs."[27]*

According to Wittgenstein, this quotation brings forward our inclination to see words as representing things by being alike them.[28] When we talk of words, we are tempted to think that they represent things, that they are pictures of things for example. This view is thus as well attributed to Plato by Wittgenstein. It is striking that the only quotation from the *Cratylus* that can be found in Wittgenstein is combined with dismissal, with rejection. Wittgenstein does not quote Plato here with agreement. And it is believed by some, such as J.N. Findlay, that the content of the *Cratylus* is in contradiction with Wittgenstein's philosophy. Findlay writes:

> *"It [i.e. the Cratylus] rejects the basic premiss of the Wittgensteinian theory [sic] of language: that there is no understanding or percipient grasp of ideal natures prior to the use of linguistic expressions."[29]*

Although Findlay's reading of Wittgenstein here is somewhat controversial – Wittgenstein after all rejected explicitly that he was providing a theory of language[30] - the general conclusion of Findlay can, given also Wittgenstein's quoting from the *Cratylus* with dismissal, be considered plausible. It is very likely that Wittgenstein's judgment of this dialogue is in line with his more general tendency to be sceptical and critical towards Plato's dialogues:

> *"Wenn man die sokratischen Dialoge liest, so hat man das Gefühl: welche fürchterliche Zeitvergeudung! Wozu diese Argumente, die nichts beweisen und nichts klären?"[31]*

Presumably this rather harsh judgment also applied to the *Cratylus*.

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[26] David Sedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011), 15.
[27] Plato, *Cratylus*, translation Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939), 434a, Page 169.
[28] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, ed. Luckhardt and Aue (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013), 35.
[29] J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge, 1974), 218.
[30] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 109, Page 298.
[31] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), 468.

1.4. Wittgenstein's General View of Plato and Conclusion

Though Wittgenstein is said to have, at least somewhat, admired Plato[32], he generally quotes him, as we have seen, without approval. Most references to Plato in Wittgenstein's work are not combined with agreement and hence A.J. Ayer writes about Wittgenstein that 'there are no signs in his [...] work of Platonic ideas'[33]. However, it is of importance to recognize that the mere fact that Wittgenstein quotes Plato shows that he held him in a certain esteem. There are not many philosophers who are quoted explicitly and extensively by Wittgenstein. That Plato forms an exception to this rule makes clear that Wittgenstein did think highly of Plato. And he wrote to Maurice Drury about the recognition he felt whilst reading Plato's *Theaetetus*:

> *"Plato in this dialogue [i.e. the Theaetetus] is occupied with the same problems that I am writing about."[34]*

So although Wittgenstein did not conceive of Plato as a philosophical ally, he did not have contempt for him, though his exclamation about the Socratic dialogues might suggest so. Wittgenstein's view of Plato is one of disagreement but not of aversion. The following quotation illustrates this:

> *"I can characterize my standpoint no better than by saying that it is the antithetical standpoint to the one occupied by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. For if I were asked what knowledge is, I would enumerate instances of knowledge and add the words 'and similar things'."[35]*

Thus we have here discovered that Wittgenstein did not see himself as philosophically in line with Plato. Plato is a philosopher who represents views different from Wittgenstein's, according to Wittgenstein himself. Plato's account of names and elements is related to the Augustinian conception of language and Wittgenstein's early philosophy; Plato's search for definitions is approached in a sceptical manner by Wittgenstein; Plato's *Cratylus* is not quoted with assent by Wittgenstein. The general picture is one of diverging views, most importantly on language. Wittgenstein's idea that Plato represented views in line with his early philosophy and the Augustinian conception of language brings it about that he sees them as not being in agreement on language and linguistic correctness. Ascribing to Plato the view that a name refers to an element of reality is seeing him as a philosopher who holds reality to be the determining factor in linguistic correctness: a name is made meaningful and correct by a simple object.

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[32] G.H. von Wright, "Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Biographical Sketch," in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol.64, No.4 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1955), 543.
[33] A.J. Ayer, *Wittgenstein* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), 14.
[34] Maurice O.Connor Drury, "Conversations with Wittgenstein," in *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 149.
[35] Ludwig Wittgenstein and Friedrich Waismann, *The Voices of Wittgenstein: The Vienna Circle*, edited and translated by G.E. Baker (New York: Routledge, 2003), 33.

Chapter 2   Plato's Cratylus: *Orthotēs tōn onomatōn*

2.1: The Dialogue

Plato's *Cratylus* has met with a quite remarkable fate. The interpretations of the work are so different and even contradictory that one wonders whether it is at all possible to genuinely understand the content of this dialogue. Konrad Gaiser claims that the *Cratylus* 'nicht zu Unrecht als Platons schwierigstes Werk gilt'[36]. The difficulty of the work and the fact that it is one of 'der problemreichsten [Dialoge] des Corpus'[37] may have caused the radical differences in interpretations among commentators. Whereas some commentators have seen the dialogue as a rigid 'criticism'[38] of a conventionalist approach to linguistic correctness, others have been of the opinion that Socrates 'exits from the dialogue as a conventionalist'[39] and hence that the dialogue should be seen as an endorsement of a conventionalist stance on the subject. Others subscribe to a position in between and see the *Cratylus* as a 'Vermittlung'[40] or a 'reconciliation'[41] between conventionalism and naturalism concerning linguistic correctness.

2.2.: Linguistic Conventionalism and Linguistic Naturalism

The aforementioned terms 'conventionalism' and 'naturalism', which are generally applied by commentators to the *Cratylus*[42], need some explanation. A conventionalist account of linguistic correctness maintains that 'human conventions'[43] determine such correctness. Linguistic correctness, both in relation to the world and in relation to use, is thus a matter of convention, custom, human agreement. A naturalist stance on the contrary holds that linguistic correctness is accounted for by the world, by nature and not primarily or not at all, depending on the degree of naturalism, by human customs. This is related to the idea of 'die Sprache als Widerspiegelung der Welt'[44]. Language reflects the world and is hence made correct or incorrect by that world. The correctness of language depends upon nature and not on the conventions created by humans. The dependence on nature which is here meant, is not a dependence on e.g. human nature or human instinct, which is also a possibility, but rather a dependence on things, on the world.

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[36] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1974), 7.
[37] Albin Lesky, *Geschichte der Griechische Literatur* (Berlin: Francke Verlag, 1958), 492.
[38] J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* , 218.
[39] Francesco Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato: A Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 421.
[40] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos*, 29.
[41] Norman Kretzmann, "Plato on the Correctness of Names," in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.8, No.2 (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 137.
[42] Ibidem, 126.
[43] J.N. Findlay, *Wittgenstein: A Critique* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 147.
[44] Merrill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka*, Untersuchungen zu Wittgenstein,* translation Joachim Schulte (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996), 304.

This has implications for correct use as well. If we use a word correctly, we do so also in relation to nature: nature provides for the correctness of our language and thus also in a particular sense for our use. But of course, there can in such a naturalist view be some role for human agreement. The naturalist can be sensitive to the 'stillschweigenden Abmachungen zum Verständnis der Umgangssprache'[45], i.e. for the supposed need of human agreement and conventions. A good example is to be found in the work of Arthur Schopenhauer, who distinguishes 'Begriffe' from 'Wörter'[46] and claims that the first are universal and the latter are components of particular languages. So the concept of for example 'wisdom' is in this view natural and universal, i.e. correct by nature, but every language attaches a specific word to it, e.g. 'Weisheit' in German. Schopenhauer calls this an 'enge Verbindung des Begriffs mit dem Wort'[47]. Though naturalism does therefore not exclude a certain degree of convention and agreement, linguistic correctness remains in the naturalist' account a matter of nature, of the world:

> *"Things have to be named conformably to their natures."[48]*

Accordingly, linguistic correctness is in this view determined by nature.

2.3: The Disagreement between Cratylus and Hermogenes: 383a – 390d.

We have seen that there are somewhat diverging views among commentators as to how the *Cratylus* should be read. What cannot be doubted is that dialogue starts with a disagreement between Cratylus and Hermogenes about the, what is mostly translated as, 'correctness of names'[49] or 'Richtigheit der Namen'[50]. The problem with translating Plato's *orthotēs tōn onomatōn* as correctness of names is that for Plato the word *onoma* has a much wider application than our modern word 'name'. Ernst Heitsch has therefore proposed to use the translation 'Richtigkeit der Bezeichnungen'[51]. Although this might do more justice to Plato's use of *onoma*, I will not follow Heitsch here, because it is standard practice among English-speaking commentators and translators to use 'correctness of names' and to mention that this includes in Plato's sense more than in our modern sense.[52]

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[45] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with a Dutch translation by W.F. Hermans (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2010), 4.002, Page 40.

[46] Arthur Schopenhauer, "Über Sprache und Worte," in *Parerga und Paralipomena: Kleine Philosophische Schriften 2,* edited Wolfgang Frhr. von Lohneysen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1986), 666.

[47] Arthur Schopenhauer, "Zur *Lehre* von der abstrakten, oder Vernunft-Erkenntniß," in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung,* vollständige Ausgabe nach der dritten, verbesserten und beträchtlich vermehrten Auflage von 1859 (Köln: Anaconda Verlag, 2009), 518.

[48] J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines,* 214.

[49] Plato, *Cratylus,* 384c, Page 9.

[50] Ernst Heitsch, "Platons Sprachphilosophie im Kratylos," in *Hermes,* 113 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985), 45.

[51] Ibidem.

[52] Mary Richardson, "True and False Names in the Cratylus", in *Phronesis,* Vol. 21, No. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 135.

However, Plato's wide use of the term *onoma* justifies reading the dialogue as not merely concerning the correctness of names, but more widely as concerning linguistic correctness in general.[53] This finds support in the work of J.O. Urmson, who remarks that *onoma* is and could be used to refer to a word in general and can accordingly be translated thus, as Urmson does.[54] Consequently, the subject of the *Cratylus* can with plausibility be called linguistic correctness, and not the correctness of names, in the restricted modern sense of the word, alone. Nevertheless, due to the dominance of the translation of *onoma* as 'name' in current literature and the fact that the translation 'word' is not entirely correct either, we will here continue using the phrase 'correctness of names' as translation of *orthotēs tōn onomatōn*.

Let us now turn our attention to the dialogue itself. Hermogenes invites Socrates to interfere in a dispute he has with Cratylus on the subject of the correctness of names (383a). According to Cratylus, there is a natural correctness to be found in names (383a). As Hermogenes explains:

> *"Everything has a right name of its own, which comes by nature."*[55]

Consequently 'there is a kind of inherent correctness in names, which is the same for all men, both Greeks and barbarians'[56]. Socrates replies to this view by stressing the difficulty of having knowledge of names (384b).

Nevertheless, he allows Hermogenes to give his own view of the matter, which is the presumption that 'no name belongs to any particular thing by nature, but only by the habit and custom of those who employ it and who established the usage'[57]. Hermogenes does accordingly not believe in the existence of 'any correctness of names other than convention and agreement'[58]. It is this view of names which Socrates starts to explore. First by establishing what its content it. This appears to be a rather strict form of conventionalism, which states that all names, whether given by individuals or communities, are correct (385a). Hermogenes says:

> *"I may call a thing by one name, which I gave, and you by another, which you gave."*[59]

So no name can be considered more correct than any other one. Names are made correct by convention and all conventions are equally correct.

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[53] David Sedley, "The Etymologies in Plato's Cratylus," in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 118 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 140.
[54] J.O. Urmson, *The Greek Philosophical Vocabulary* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 118.
[55] Plato, *Cratylus*, 383a, Page 7.
[56] Plato, *Cratylus*, 383a, Page 7.
[57] Plato, *Cratylus*, 384d, Page 11.
[58] Plato, *Cratylus*, 383c, Page 9.
[59] Plato, *Cratylus*, 385d, Page 13 – 15.

Socrates undermines Hermogenes' view by aiming to demonstrate that 'things have some fixed reality of their own'[60]. This is, Socrates makes Hermogenes admit, true of for example actions: actions have a nature of their own and that nature determines whether they are good or bad (387ab). Socrates then asks Hermogenes: "Is not naming also a kind of action?"[61] Hermogenes agrees with this conjecture of Socrates and must consequently grant the correctness of Socrates' statement that naming also has a nature of its own and can be done in either a good or a bad manner. Names cannot be applied to things arbitrarily, but naming is a 'skill'[62], or, as Proclus calls it, 'the art that creates names'[63]. Socrates compares it both to carpentry and to weaving (388c). Naming is a craft which requires skill and knowledge.

The comparison of naming with weaving is for Socrates of major importance. The name has the same function in the art of naming as the shuttle has e.g. in the art of weaving. A name is 'a kind of instrument'[64], i.e. the 'appropriate instrument for naming things'[65]. As an instrument, a name has to 'separate things according to their natures'[66]. Jetske C. Rijlaarsdam gives a concise description of what Socrates says: "Mit dem Namen sonderten wir das Wesen der Dinge, wie wir mit dem Weberschiffchen das Gewebe sondern."[67] This separating of things according to their natures is pursued by craftsmen, so-called *nomothetēs*, who practice the craft of naming and who need to be, in order to perform their craft well, under the supervision of the dialectician (390d). Socrates then brings the discussion to a temporary conclusion:

> *"Then, Hermogenes, the giving of names can hardly be, as you imagine, a trifling matter, or a task for trifling or casual persons: and Cratylus is right in saying that names belong to things by nature and that not every one is an artisan of names, but only he who keeps in view the name which belongs by nature to each particular thing."[68]*

Thus Socrates here takes the stance of Cratylus: names are not attached to thing randomly, but there is an art or craft of naming which is pursued by *nomothetēs*. Consequently, Hermogenes' belief in the correctness of all names and the arbitrariness of naming is refuted. Hermogenes is not particularly eager to relinquish his conventionalism. Socrates understands this and proposes to further investigate the now developed ideas (391ac).

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[60] Plato, *Cratylus*, 386d, Page 17.
[61] Plato, *Cratylus*, 387c, Page 19.
[62] Plato, *Cratylus*, 388e, Page 25.
[63] Proclus, *On Plato's Cratylus*, translation Brian Duvick (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 18.27, Page 27.
[64] Plato, *Cratylus*, 388a, Page 21.
[65] David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.
[66] Plato, *Cratylus*, 388b, Page 23.
[67] Jetske C. Rijlaarsdam, *Platon über die Sprache: Ein Kommentar zum Kratylos*, 88.
[68] Plato, *Cratylus*, 390d, 31.

2.4: Etymologies: 391d – 427d

We have not encountered anything so far which could prove a considerable hurdle for the interpreter of the dialogue. This changes entirely with the following etymological section, which is presented by Socrates as an investigation into the natural correctness of names (391d). The main difficulty concerning this section is to establish whether Socrates is serious in his etymological enterprise and whether he ascribes philosophical value to it. One view of the matter is that Socrates is 'not serious for long stretches of this section'[69]. The section is, in this interpretation, such as is defended by A.E. Taylor and Timothy Baxter, believed to be a 'caricature'[70] or a 'parody'[71]. Socrates is not earnestly doing etymology, but is ridiculing such a pursuit.[72]

What favours this view is the fact that Socrates alters his tone completely at the beginning of this section and claims to deliver the etymologies under the influence of the priest Euthyphro (396d). This provides the reader with the impression that Socrates is trying to make fun of the method of etymology. But a slightly sceptical approach towards this initial impression of the reader is presumably justified, since we modern readers are strongly inclined to exclaim: "Wozu diese Unmenge von Etymologien?"[73] To a present-day reader, the way Socrates conducts the etymological pursuit may seem ridiculous. However: "Daß wir diese Etymologien lächerlich finden, ist kein Argument."[74] We must refrain from ascribing our own presumptions to Plato.[75]

But more importantly, there are also many scholars of Plato who believe the etymological section to be, even though containing perhaps some ironic elements, 'not just philological fun'[76]. David Sedley has e.g. tried to make a case for the view that the section is of vital importance and ought to be taken seriously by readers of the dialogue. He acknowledges 'that there is a good deal of fun in the etymological section'[77], though he is convinced that the etymologies reflect 'Plato's own serious assumptions about names'[78]. So the etymological section need not be considered a philosophical joke of Plato, as commentators have tended to think. An opinion which finds support in Konrad Gaiser, who gives an overview of the 'Bestimmte Rangordnung' and 'enzyklopädische Vollständigkeit'[79], i.e. the systematic nature, of the section.

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[69] Rudolph H. Weingartner, "Making Sense of the *Cratylus*," in *Phronesis*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 22.

[70] A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1971), 88.

[71] Timothy Baxter, *The Cratylus of Plato: Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 106.

[72] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2008), 181.

[73] Jetske C. Rijlaarsdam, *Platon über die Sprache: Ein Kommentar zum Kratylos*, 136.

[74] Ibidem, 139.

[75] Konrad Gaiser, "Grundfragen der Platon-interpretation," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Thomas Alexander Szlezak (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2004), 4.

[76] L.M. de Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: A Philosophical Commentary*, 236.

[77] David Sedley, "The Etymologies in Plato's Cratylus", 146.

[78] David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, 46.

[79] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos*, 58.

We can now cast a glance at the section itself. Since current-day philosophers are not genuine etymologists, I will not explore the section in its entirety, which would be a colossal undertaking, although e.g. Pierre Boyancé has done so.[80] My target shall be what Socrates says in between the etymologies, for those remarks seem to me to be the main clues for finding an answer to the question whether the section is essentially earnest or merely whimsical. Socrates starts his pursuit with stating again that they are exploring the correctness of names (397a). He then gives a range of etymologies[81], which is succeeded by his observation that Hermogenes seems to have ample faith in the power of etymology (399a). Hermogenes admits that he has and Socrates says that this faith is justified (399a). This acknowledgement of Socrates that Hermogenes is right to believe in the power of etymology appears to show the sincerity of Socrates' undertaking.

However, the statement Socrates adds to his assurance that Hermogenes' faith is justified makes one suspicious: "Just at this very moment I think I have had a clever thought, and if I am not careful, before the day is over I am likely to be wiser than I ought to be."[82] The irony in this expression can hardly be missed. The same is true of Socrates' insistence that he has, whilst being under the influence of Euthyphro and doing etymology, a 'swarm of wisdom'[83] in his mind and is 'already far along on the road of wisdom'[84]. In spite of all these seemingly ironic remarks on the etymological pursuit, Socrates then says something which has serious philosophical weight. He claims that those who have given the things their names were under the influence of a strong belief in flux (411bc). This cannot but be an earnest remark, since the flux-thesis is evidently a pillar of Plato's enquiries.[85] So here the etymological enterprise is imbedded in serious philosophy.

Socrates' introduction of the flux-thesis is accompanied by some critique towards those who have 'created' our names. For example, he rejects the term 'Sphinx' and maintains that 'Phix' would have been better (414d). Such arbitrary adding of letters, as Socrates sees it, is rejected: "If we are permitted to insert and remove any letters we please in words, it will be perfectly easy to fit any name to anything."[86] The latter is not desirable, but is precisely what has happened, according to Socrates. He remarks: "Words get twisted in all sorts of ways."[87] Several of our words, Socrates aims to show, are corrupted. The etymologies illustrate this corruption, as Socrates makes clear (414c). Even though some words do possess correctness (416d).

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[80] L.M. de Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: A Philosophical Commentary*, 235.
[81] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos,* 54 – 57.
[82] Plato, *Cratylus*, 399a, Page 59.
[83] Plato, *Cratylus*, 401e, Page 67.
[84] Plato, *Cratylus*, 410e, Page 95.
[85] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, translation Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), Book 1.6, Page 43.
[86] Plato, *Cratylus*, 414d, Page 107.
[87] Plato, *Cratylus*, 421d, Page 129.

The section then reaches its conclusion. Socrates states: "The correctness of all the names we have discussed was based upon the intention of showing the nature of the thing named."[88] Here we meet with an important statement, which suggests that there was seriousness in the section. His analysis was aimed, in the view of Socrates himself, at discovering the natural correctness there is in names, such as in the names of justice (412d) or wisdom (416d). An aim such as this is not in accordance with Socrates' alleged joking for a considerable part of the dialogue. And in favour of reading this section as a serious section is the view of Proclus, who shows no sign of seeing the section as a jest and who even provides us with eight compelling reasons for seriously doing etymology.[89] Proclus in general pays a strikingly amount of sincere attention to the content of this section.[90]

Is it therefore certain that the etymological section is to be considered an episode of serious philosophical enquiry? Well, Socrates' utterances at first, being somewhat ironical in nature and including the claim to be under the influence of Euthyphro, gave the impression of it being a parody or a caricature. But Socrates' explicit mentioning of the flux-thesis in relation to words and his insistence that words can be and have been twisted change that impression and provide a strong argument for the idea that there is serious philosophical importance in this section. A philosophical importance which seems to consist not in making fun of etymology, but rather in exploring it seriously and drawing philosophical conclusions from it. Especially Socrates' mentioning of the flux-thesis, which is so central to Plato's philosophical enterprise, makes this conclusion a reasonable one.

However, Socrates strangely enough does not use his etymological undertaking to reach a conclusion concerning a naturalistic conception of the correctness of names. The pursuit is not employed as a refutation or support of naturalism. There is e.g. no point in it at which Socrates says: "Here we have demonstrated that a naturalistic view of the correctness of names is untenable." That no such explicit conclusion related to the initial subject of the correctness of names can be discerned means that the section should be considered more broadly, i.e. in the context of the dialogue as a whole. Its interpretation in relation to the dialogue as such therefore has to be postponed to a later stage of this enquiry. We have at least shown, in agreement with David Sedley, that the section is anything but free from philosophical earnestness and importance:

> *"Hier [i.e. im Etymologienteil] geht es um das Hauptproblem des Dialogs: die Sprache als Bedingung der Seinserkenntnis und die Bedingtheit der Sprache durch das Seiende."* [91]

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[88] Plato, *Cratylus*, 422d, Page 133.
[89] Proclus, *On Plato's Cratylus*, 47.
[90] Ibidem, 47 – 65.
[91] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos*, 78.

2.5: Names as Imitations, and Cratylus' Views Examined: 423 – 440.

The etymological section culminates not in a rejection of naturalism, but in developing a more profound form of naturalism, which defends this view:

> *"A name […] is a vocal imitation of that which is imitated, and*
> *he who imitates with his voice names that which he imitates."[92]*

That which is imitated by a name is the 'essential nature of each thing'[93]. Such an imitation is provided by the name-maker, who is, as mentioned earlier, in the possession of the art of naming (424a). Socrates is not satisfied with this form of naturalism, but cannot get hold of a better theory concerning the correctness of names, he says (426b). Then Cratylus, who has until this moment not participated actively in the discussion, enters the stage. He gives some of his views and Socrates thereupon looks back critically at his etymological statements:

> *"I myself have been marvelling at my own wisdom all along,*
> *and I cannot believe in it. So I think we ought to re-examine my*
> *utterances. For the worst of all deceptions is self-deception."[94]*

This forms the starting-point of an enquiry into the views Cratylus holds, which have so far not been stated by himself. Cratylus now replaces Hermogenes as Socrates' interlocutor and Socrates says to him: "Correctness of a name, we say, is the quality of showing the nature of the thing named. Shall we call that a satisfactory statement?"[95] Cratylus affirms that it is satisfactory and Socrates proceeds questioning him (428e). The following statements, some of which are repetitions, are made:

1. Names are given with a view to instruction (428e);
2. There is an art of naming, with corresponding artisans (428e);
3. The artisans are *nomothetēs* or lawgivers (429a);
4. All lawgivers are equally good and all names are correct (429b);
5. Speaking falsely is an impossibility (429e);
6. Names are imitations of things (430a).

These statements together provide the content of Cratylus' naturalism, which Socrates is going to consider now. Since names are imitations of things, Socrates decides to compare them to paintings and asks Cratylus: is it not possible for both a name and a painting to be a false imitation (430c – 430d)? Cratylus at first rejects this, but is later forced to grant this point to Socrates (431a). Socrates concludes that therefore, just as a painting can be a correct or an incorrect imitation of a thing, so can a name (431d). Consequently, neither all names, nor all paintings are correct imitations.

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[92] Plato, *Cratylus*, 423b, Page 135.
[93] Plato, *Cratylus*, 423e, Page 137.
[94] Plato, *Cratylus*, 428d, Page, 151.
[95] Plato, *Cratylus*, 428e, Page 151.

Socrates proceeds and asks: if a painting of you, Cratylus, would be an exact imitation, would there then not be 'two Cratyluses'[96]? Cratylus cannot but admit that Socrates is right (432c). The same is true, Socrates states, of names:

> *"The effect produced by the names upon the things of which they are the names would be ridiculous, if they were to be entirely like them in every respect. For everything would be duplicated, and no one could tell in any case which was the real thing and which the name."[97]*

So if names were genuine imitations of things, no human being would be capable of separating the name from the thing. Just as if painting and person were exact copies of each other, it would not be possible to distinguish the painting from the depicted person. Hence neither paintings nor names are identical to what they depict and not all of those depictions are, as Cratylus had defended, correct. There are standards of correctness as to in which degree a painting or name resembles a thing (432e). Socrates continues his examination of Cratylus' opinions and shows that even names which appear to be or are incorrect imitations can be understood (434e – 435a). Cratylus is here again forced to give Socrates his assent (435a).

The possibility of understanding names which appear incorrect imitations of things or which appear to be no imitation at all, i.e. which are devoid of any 'likeness'[98] with things, is used by Socrates to lead Cratylus to countenance a certain amount of conventionalism on the correctness of names (434e – 435a). He first establishes a criterion of understanding: "If you recognize my meaning when I speak, that is an indication given to you by me."[99] Cratylus approves and Socrates then remarks that this indication or understanding, given the possibility of understanding names which are no imitations of things, i.e. have no likeness with them, is brought about by custom:

> *"We should henceforth be obliged to say that custom, not likeness, is the principle of indication, since custom, it appears, indicates both by the like and by the unlike. And since we grant this […] both convention and custom must contribute something towards the indication of meaning when we speak."[100]*

The understanding of names which are not like the things to which they are applied, i.e. which have not natural correctness, makes it necessary that custom and convention contribute to such understanding.

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[96] Plato, *Cratylus*, 432c, Page 165.
[97] Plato, *Cratylus*, 432d, Page 165.
[98] Plato, *Cratylus*, 434b, Page 171.
[99] Plato, *Cratylus*, 435a, Page 173.
[100] Plato, *Cratylus*, 435a – 435b, Page 173.

Socrates concludes with some regret:

> *"I myself prefer the theory that names are, so far as is possible,*
> *like the things named; but really this attractive force of likeness*
> *is […] a poor thing, and we are compelled to employ in addition*
> *this commonplace expedient, convention, to establish the*
> *correctness of names. Probably language would be, within the*
> *bounds of possibility, most excellent when all its terms, or as*
> *many as possible, were based on likeness, that is to say, were*
> *appropriate, and most deficient under opposite conditions."*[101]

Having demonstrated that the latter is impossible, Socrates and Cratylus must allow for some conventionalism towards the correctness of names. After having done so reluctantly, Socrates gives the discussion a different direction and asks Cratylus about the function of names (435e). Cratylus answers, in line with the view they had developed earlier: "I think […] their function is to instruct, and this is the simple truth, that he who knows the names also knows the things."[102] Socrates forthwith seems sceptical as to the truth of this statement: "Do you not see that he who in his inquiry after things follows names and examines into the meaning of each one runs great risks of being deceived?"[103] For Socrates, it is likely that he who gave things their names possessed no real knowledge and believed e.g. in flux (436e).

Cratylus is not convinced by this argument and Socrates brings forward a new argument. He makes Cratylus state again that the *nomothetēs* had knowledge of the things and thereupon asks him:

> *"How can we assert that they [i.e. the nomothetēs] gave names*
> *or were lawgivers with knowledge, before any name*
> *whatsoever had been given, and before they knew any names,*
> *if things cannot be learned except through their names?"*[104]

If knowledge were to be derived from names, as Cratylus holds, then how could the name-givers be in the possession of knowledge? Cratylus is here confronted with a serious problem for his theory. He takes refuge in claiming that some god played a role in this process (438c), but Socrates repudiates this view and says that 'things may be learned without names'[105]. Especially since they have agreed on the assertion that names are imitations. It is natural, Socrates says, to prefer the things themselves over their imitations (439b). Socrates therefore concludes, contrary to Cratylus' opinion, 'that they [i.e. the things themselves] are to be learned and sought for, not from names but much better through themselves than through names'[106].

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[101] Plato, *Cratylus*, 435c – 435d, Page 175.
[102] Plato, *Cratylus*, 435e, Page 175.
[103] Plato, *Cratylus*, 436a – 436b, Page 177.
[104] Plato, *Cratylus*, 438b, Page 183.
[105] Plato, *Cratylus*, 438e, Page 185.
[106] Plato, *Cratylus*, 439b, Page 187.

Thus knowledge, and that here means, although some precaution is justified[107], knowledge of the Forms (439d), won't follow from enquiring into names, but from enquiring into the things themselves, the Forms. Names are given from a belief in flux (440c) and are correct by convention, custom, and agreement rather than by nature (435b). The conclusion of the dialogue accordingly is that knowledge needs to be found in the things themselves and not in the names which are attached to them:

> *"No man of sense can put himself and his soul under the control of names, and trust in names and their makers to the point of affirming that he knows anything."*[108]

As it is formulated in the commentary of Rijlaarsdam:

> *"Sokrates meint: Es liegt auf der Hand anzunehmen, daß man die Dinge nicht durch etwas anderes [wie Wörter] kennenlernt, sondern durch sich selbst."*[109]

So Socrates gives the thing epistemological priority over the name. And not only has the thing epistemological priority, the name can also not be seen as a bridge to the thing. The source of knowledge is not to be found in language, as Cratylus defended, but rather in the things themselves.

2.6: Interpretation: Plato, The Forms and Linguistic Correctness

What is Plato's precise view on linguistic correctness? The possibility of raising this question implies that Plato's view is not immediately clear after reading the dialogue. Nicolas P. White has claimed that Plato's view consists of the idea 'that the Forms are, properly speaking, the only things that can be named'[110]. An interpretation shared by Konrad Gaiser, who believes 'daß [für Platon] die Namen durch das sinnlich wahrnehmbare Erscheinungsbild hindurch die eidetischen Urformen der Dinge nachbilden'[111]. Correct names, as White and Gaiser read Plato, are names which depict the Forms. Thus correct *onomata* are imitations or images of the Forms. If a name is to be truly correct, that name must be an imitation, a copy of those Forms.

This interpretation seems somewhat problematic, for Socrates first mentions the Forms not in relation to names, but in relation to knowledge (439d). When he earlier in the dialogue says that a name needs to separate things according to their natures, there is no allusion to Forms to be found (388b). Likewise, Socrates ends the dialogue with connecting knowledge to the Forms and not to words which depict those Forms. On the contrary, he rejects the enterprise of searching for knowledge through names or words.

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[107] David Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus*, 167.
[108] Plato, *Cratylus*, 440c, Page 191.
[109] Jetske C. Rijlaarsdam: *Platon über die Sprache: Ein Kommentar zum Kratylos*, 185.
[110] Nicolas P. White, *Plato on Knowledge and Reality* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 138.
[111] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos*, 39.

And one is entitled to ask: if correct names were imitations of the Forms, would they then not be the appropriate entrance to those Forms? Accordingly, the reading of White and Gaiser is at odds with what Socrates says in the last part of the dialogue. His contention is after all, in Timothy Baxter's words, that 'we should examine things not names in order to find out about reality'[112]. If there were a connection between correct names and the Forms, then those names would be a key to the Forms, which Socrates says they are not, since we have to investigate the things. Knowledge cannot be made independent of names if those names depict the Forms, which Socrates says are the true objects of our knowledge (440c).

Furthermore, names are in the *Cratylus* merely imitations and not even correct ones in all cases. They appear to be closer to 'shadows'[113], to rather dim copies than to genuine pictures of the Forms. And Socrates' argument that if a name were a copy of a thing, the name would not be distinguishable from the thing makes it even more unlikely that correct names are depictions of the Forms: if a name represented the Forms exactly, then the name could not be separated from the Form anymore and there would therefore be two Forms, just as there were, in the analogy with painting, two Cratyluses. Such an opinion of Forms as identical to names can hardly have been defended by Plato himself. This explains why an explicit statement of such an opinion of Forms and names is not to be found in the *Cratylus*.

In addition, Socrates' insistence that names are made correct by convention at the end of the dialogue cannot be reconciled with the idea of correct names as depicting the Forms. If correct names were images of the Forms, how then could there be any conventional correctness in names? Well, perhaps only a small part of our linguistic apparatus is a copy of Forms and the rest is correct by convention. That is a plausible possibility, but the only problem is: where is such a view to be found in the *Cratylus*? And why did Plato not insist upon searching for such correct names? If we could find those names, we would possess a swift entrance to the forms. Those names could be a key to leaving the cage in which we are imprisoned.

But what Plato concludes in the *Cratylus* is that attempts to acquire knowledge through words are futile. The Forms cannot be reached via the meticulous study of words. Nevertheless, one argument remains: I have remarked that no allusion to the Forms is to be found at 388b, where Socrates says that a name should separate things according to their natures. Is that genuinely not a reference to the Forms? Even if it is, which is not made explicit by Plato in the text, the idea that names can lay bare the nature of things is eventually rejected. Therefore, it is altogether unlikely that Plato conceived of linguistic correctness as related to the Forms.

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[112] Timothy Baxter, *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming*, 176.
[113] Plato, *Republic*, translation Chris Emlyn-Jones and William Preddy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013), 115.

2.7: Interpretation: Plato as an Agnostic on Linguistic Correctness

Socrates' emphasis in the final part of the dialogue on knowledge and not on linguistic correctness has led some to believe that Plato does not definitively answer the question of what makes a name correct, but is far more interested in epistemology, in knowledge of the things themselves.[114] Plato is then conceived as some sort of agnostic on linguistic correctness: he has demolished both Hermogenes' and Cratylus' views without replacing those views with a better alternative and hence remains silent on the subject himself. We should therefore despair of ever finding out 'Socrates' and Plato's ultimate views in the subject'[115]. Those ultimate views cannot be derived from the *Cratylus* and are therefore beyond our grasp. In this reading of the dialogue, knowledge is seen as the central subject of the work and not language or names. The dialogue is subsequently a 'linguistic speculation serving an epistemological end'[116]. And that epistemological end stands then in no need of a definite view on linguistic correctness or names.

The etymology section can be connected to this reading. It then aims to show that no knowledge can be obtained from the study of words. So when Plotinus asks: "What art is there, what method or practice, which will take us up there where we must go?"[117], the answer cannot be: etymology, for knowledge needs to be acquired from the things themselves and hence etymology, the study of words, is not of primary philosophical importance. The etymology section is here placed in the dialogue because Plato wanted to show that it cannot be the method by which we come to knowledge of the things. And the section can bring to light Plato's disdain for language and his love for the things themselves, which are not, as the words, corrupted. The incompatibility of etymology and knowledge makes Plato into an agnostic on language: language and etymology are of no interest, although knowledge is.

This reading of the dialogue is a bit artificial in nature. Socrates develops such intricate theories on linguistic correctness and language as such that he can hardly be conceived of as agnostic or even indifferent towards linguistic correctness. Although the last section of the dialogue is concerned with knowledge rather than language, there is no good ground for thinking that the dialogue contains no clues as to what were Plato's views regarding linguistic correctness. It should be noted that Hermogenes and Cratylus provide only some basic elements of certain approaches to the correctness of words. It is Socrates who transforms those basic elements into genuine theories which can be tested. The analogy of names with instruments and the comparison of a name with a painting are e.g. made by Socrates himself.

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[114] Simon Keller, "An Interpretation of Plato's Cratylus," in *Phronesis*, Vol. 45, No.4 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 285 – 304.
[115] Francesco Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato*, 413.
[116] L.M. de Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: A Philosophical Commentary*, 217.
[117] Plotinus, *Enneads*, translation A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), Book 1.3, Page 153.

Moreover, despite the major role for knowledge at the end of the dialogue, there are strong reasons for seeing linguistic correctness, following Proclus, as the 'main topic'[118] of the work. As Julia Annas writes: "The main concern of the *Cratylus* is not the nature of knowledge but the nature of language."[119] Knowledge occurs only in the final part of the work, but is certainly not at its centre. Even if Plato's aims were epistemological, then that it not fatal for a project of trying to derive Plato's views on the correctness of names from this dialogue. An ulterior epistemological purpose does not condemn Plato to agnosticism. The contrary is true: if Plato wants to repudiate Cratylus' view that the source of knowledge is the study of names, then he has to develop a view on language, contrary to Cratylus' epistemologically naturalistic one.

Still, one could also ascribe agnosticism to Plato along the following lines:

> *"Im Kratylos wird das Problem der Sprache nicht lehrhaft abgehandelt, sondern von verschiedenen Seiten her […] in den Blick gefaßt und schließlich in der Schwebe gelassen. Platon will keine Lösungen vortragen, sondern dem Leser Denkanstöße vermitteln, ihn in eine Auseinandersetzung hineinziehen, ihn zum Weiterfragen provozieren."[120]*

Here the epistemological link is missing, but Plato is still seen as somewhat agnostic: he brings forward and develops possible views and then refutes them, without giving final answers. It is possible to state that there is no definitive verdict as to linguistic correctness to be found in the dialogue. The dialogue ends with an epistemological consideration or statement and perhaps not with the triumph of a vision. Plato seems not to crown a particular position regarding linguistic correctness with victory in the *Cratylus*. He only refutes Hermogenes' and Cratylus' views. Possibly Plato believed in the 'inferior nature of even genuinely mimetic names'[121] and held only real knowledge in high esteem and therefore did not give a final view.

But is the *Cratylus* genuinely devoid of such a final verdict? Plato makes Socrates shift to conventionalism at the end of the dialogue and links this conventionalism to knowledge, with which the last part of the work is occupied. Accordingly, it is not true that the *Cratylus* is a dialogue of *aporia* in the strictest sense of the word: the dialogue does not end with the participants admitting that they remain without knowledge. Socrates does encourage Cratylus to keep enquiring (440e), but that is not generally an ending of *aporia* or of agnosticism. And Socrates does this after having admitted the plausibility of conventionalism and the impossibility of obtaining knowledge through words. So there is no real agnosticism here.

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[118] Proclus, *On Plato's Cratylus*, 12.
[119] Julia Annas, "Knowledge and Language," in *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy,* ed. Schofield & Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), 111.
[120] Konrad Gaiser, *Name und Sache in Platons Kratylos*, 118.
[121] Timothy Baxter, *The Cratylus of Plato: Plato's Critique of Naming*, 84.

Consequently, Socrates is not a neutral arbiter who only overthrows particular views and subscribes to none himself. He is essentially the active factor in the dialogue, viz. the person who brings forward theories, who makes particular points, such as the conventionalist argument during the last stage of the dialogue. It cannot be said that Socrates takes an agnostic or even somewhat destructive attitude in the *Cratylus*. On the contrary, he affirms and denies certain positions. Therefore, Gaiser's idea that Plato does not sufficiently treat the original subject of linguistic correctness is not in conformity with the actual content of the dialogue. There is a conventionalist view defended at its end. The *Cratylus* reveals thus too much of Plato's views on language to be read as a dialogue that keeps silent about language.

2.8: Interpretation: Plato as Conventionalist on Linguistic Correctness

Socrates' acknowledgement at 435b that, although he prefers names which are entirely correct by nature, linguistic correctness needs for its existence convention and agreement, has been used as an argument for ascribing a conventionalist position regarding linguistic correctness to Plato.[122] The general idea is that Socrates started the dialogue as a naturalist, but became inclined to conventionalism at its end.[123] Hence Socrates is said to have made Socrates a spokesman of conventionalism in the *Cratylus*. Socrates' rather fierce critique of naturalism and his, albeit partial, endorsement of conventionalism in the last part of the dialogue are seen as evidence for this reading. Plato is thus said to have subscribed in the *Cratylus* to the same view as Aristotle defends in *De Interpretatione*, namely that an *onoma* is correct 'by convention'[124] and possesses no natural correctness.

In support of this reading is that it can easily be made in accordance with Plato's epistemological commitments. If knowledge is to be acquired not from words, but from the things themselves, then a conventionalist approach to language is natural: language is conventional and can therefore not bring us knowledge of the things. This connection is made in the *Cratylus*: the conventional character of understanding words is combined by Socrates with a rejection of Cratylus' idea that words are the origin of knowledge. Socrates' attack on Cratylus' naturalism, both linguistic and epistemological, consists of several pillars, one of which is the role of convention in understanding words. So conventionalism can here serve an epistemological end. An epistemological end such as defending 'die Ideenlehre', which should be seen, according to Prauss, as '[das] eigentliches Ziel des Dialogs'[125].

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[122] Malcolm Schofield, "The *dénouement* of the Cratylus," in *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy,* ed. Schofield & Nussbaum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 61 – 81.

[123] Richard Robinson, "A Criticism of Plato's Cratylus," in *The Philosophical Review,* Vol. 65, No.3 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1956), 324 – 341.

[124] Aristotle, *De Interpretatione,* translation Harold P. Cooke (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1938), Chapter II, Page 117.

[125] Gerold Prauss, *Platon und der Logischen Eleatismus* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 36

It can also not be denied that the naturalist would in vain seek for substantial support for his view whilst reading Plato's *Cratylus*. The *Cratylus* does incorporate several rather severe attacks on naturalism. Albeit all this possible support for a conventionalist interpretation of the dialogue, some opposition is possible. One could e.g. ask: did Socrates not refute Hermogenes' conventionalism at the beginning of the dialogue? That is true, but what Socrates mainly refuted is Hermogenes' idea that all names, whether given by individuals or given by communities, are true. The conventionalism which Socrates endorses at the end of the dialogue is different in nature, i.e. consists of the idea that agreement between language-users, such as Socrates and Cratylus, is necessary. That is a more mitigated form of conventionalism than the form Hermogenes defended.

So the radical conventionalism of Hermogenes is not in line with the conventionalist stance to which Socrates subscribes in the final part of the *Cratylus*. Nevertheless, there is another argument which can be used against a conventionalist interpretation, namely the argument that to be able to do philosophy, we must be capable of speaking of the Forms. This brings to the surface the following question: is it possible to speak of the Forms if linguistic correctness is a matter of custom and convention entirely? Must there not be a natural correctness in names in order to make it possible for people of all linguistic communities to speak of the Forms? The answer is negative. The name of the Form, such as 'justice' or 'Gerechtigkeit', can be said to be conventional, but the Form itself is not of a conventional nature: what is essential is not that the name attached to the Form possesses natural correctness, but that the Form itself can be known without the name or the word linked to it. If the Forms can be known by themselves, i.e. without the words, then a conventionalist account of linguistic correctness is not in the least problematic. A conventionalist interpretation of the *Cratylus* can accordingly be considered valid on the following grounds:

> ➢ First and foremost, the conventionalism Socrates refutes in discussion with Hermogenes differs from the conventionalism he defends later.
> ➢ Socrates explicitly embraces conventionalism at the end of the dialogue;
> ➢ Such an interpretation is in accordance with Plato's epistemological aims, viz. showing that we must obtain knowledge from the things and not from the words connected to them;
> ➢ This reading does not exclude the possibility of speaking of the Forms. On the contrary, speaking of the Forms can be conventional, as long as the knowledge of such Forms is not similarly conventional;

It is plausible therefore to say that Plato defended a species of conventionalism, viz. a species which is more mitigated in nature than Hermogenes' somewhat radical form of conventionalism, regarding linguistic correctness. But we will first look into another possible view before we come to our final verdict as to how the dialogue needs to be interpreted.

2.9: Interpretation: Plato's Mitigated View on Linguistic Correctness

According to L.M. de Rijk, 'Plato's own position cannot be properly called a compromise between Hermogenes' conventionalism and Cratylus' naturalism'[126]. De Rijk thus dismisses an interpretation which believes Plato to defend a middle position in between the views of Hermogenes and Cratylus. It is true that the dialogue does not include a passage in which the two approaches to names and language are brought to a synthesis. The end of the dialogue is epistemological and not a unification of the conflicting views on names with which the dialogue had begun. There is no point at which Socrates brings the conventionalism of Hermogenes and the naturalism of Cratylus together and defends his own view in between.

Is there accordingly no moderate position of Plato towards names to be found in the *Cratylus*? The absence of a synthesis between the two initial views does not make such a conclusion necessary. The image Plato provides of language in the *Cratylus* is varied and remarkably rich. And in that rich picture some mitigation can be perceived. Plato has e.g. made Socrates sensitive to both sides of the coin, i.e. for the naturalist and the conventionalist side. Socrates does represent, though shifting to conventionalism at the end of the dialogue, some mitigation, some moderation towards linguistic correctness. He clearly takes the side of a naturalist approach in the dispute he has with Hermogenes and takes the side of a conventionalist approach in the discussion he has with Cratylus.

So Socrates is constantly moving in between the two sides. But in doing so, he is not entirely agnostic either. He bends to the one side somewhat at a certain moment and to the other side somewhat at another moment. This does not necessarily make him a flexible sophist[127], but rather suggests that he is inclined to both sides. Socrates' inclination here could be used as argument for ascribing mitigation to Plato and Socrates. There are nevertheless two problems:

1. First of all, if Plato wanted to defend a middle course, why then let Socrates subscribe to a conventionalist view on linguistic correctness in the last part of the dialogue?
2. Secondly, why is the apparent inclination of Socrates to both sides not developed into a genuine middle course?

These two questions make clear that L.M. de Rijk is correct in maintaining that Plato did not bring forward or support a mitigated view on the subject of linguistic correctness. Accordingly, the dialogue cannot be seen, as Norman Kretzmann does[128], as bringing about a reconciliation or unification of a conventionalist and a naturalist position concerning linguistic correctness.

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[126] L.M. de Rijk, *Plato's Sophist: A Philosophical Commentary*, 249.
[127] Plato, *Euthydemus*, translation W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924).
[128] Norman Kretzmann, "Plato on the Correctness of Names", 137.

2.10: Conclusion: The Final Verdict

What should be our final verdict regarding Plato's conception of linguistic correctness? We have become familiar with several possible readings of the dialogue. The first interpretation we have described claimed that for Plato names are correct when they depict the Forms. It has become clear that such an interpretation of the dialogue is contrary to Plato's epistemological conclusion at the end of the work and cannot be substantiated by enough proof from the dialogue itself. The second interpretation we have met with, namely that of Plato as an agnostic, also proved untenable, for Plato states and develops too many views on linguistic correctness to be considered an agnostic on the subject. The same is true of the interpretation of Plato as being mitigated towards language: too many components of the dialogue speak against such a reading and therefore it cannot be seen as plausible.

The conventionalist reading is different, for it is both supported by explicit evidence from the dialogue, viz. the apotheosis of the work which is in a certain sense an embracing of conventionalism, and is in line with Plato's epistemological targets: if language is not the source of knowledge, then a conventionalist conception of language is reasonable. Furthermore, the naturalist conception is refuted by several arguments. Of course this alone does not bring Plato close to conventionalism, but combined with Socrates' rather conventionalist statement at the end of the dialogue things are different. The rejection of naturalism then becomes an endorsement of conventionalism, although not in the radical form Hermogenes brought forward in the first part of the dialogue, since that has been repudiated.

And in itself Plato's dismissal of naturalism is of importance: linguistic correctness is not caused by nature or by the things themselves. The correctness of words needs custom and convention, as Socrates concludes. Human language is not rendered correct by the world, by nature. As Plato describes it in his *Seventh Letter:*

> *"None of the objects, we affirm, has any fixed name, nor is there anything to prevent forms which are now called 'round' from being called 'straight', and the 'straight' [from being called] 'round'; and men will find the names no less firmly fixed when they have shifted them and apply them in an opposite sense."[129]*

So for Plato, words are made correct by convention and knowledge is to be derived from a study of things, not of words. The long etymology section is in accordance with this: it shows that names have got twisted and were partly given to things by a belief in flux. Hence those names cannot be the sources of knowledge. The source of knowledge is not conventional, but those names are. Our names could change, but the true source of knowledge never does.

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[129] Plato, *Seventh Letter*, transl. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929), 343b, P.537.

Chapter 3   Wittgenstein on Meaning and the Arbitrariness of Grammar

"Wer in das Wesen der Sprache eindringen will, der lasse alle gelehrten Wortuntersuchungen beiseite und beobachte, wie ein Jäger mit seinem Hunde spricht."[130]

Oswald Spengler here describes an approach to language that somewhat resembles the manner in which Wittgenstein approached language in his later work. The central tenet in this approach is the idea that the working of language is to reveal itself in the practices with which that language is intertwined, and hence that practices, such as the practice of a 'Jäger mit seinem Hunde', need to be observed in order to acquire knowledge of the way in which language functions. For Wittgenstein, words derive their meaning from being used in 'Sprachspiele'[131], which is translated as language-games. Those language-games are closely connected with all sorts of human practices and activities. They are part of a 'Lebensform'[132], of a form of life.

It is such a form of life which helps constituting the life of words, of signs. Wittgenstein writes: "Jedes Zeichen allein scheint tot. Was gibt ihm Leben – Im Gebrauch lebt es."[133] So the breath or life of signs is brought about by their use, which implies that those signs, or less generally speaking, linguistic utterances, are not independent of all other human activities. Wittgenstein's idea of the connection of language with human practices is clearly stated in the work of Michael Dummett: "Wittgenstein was very concerned to insist that we can understand language only as an activity which is interwoven with, and plays a role in, all our other activities."[134]

There can thus be no understanding of language as an entity independent of everything else which is included in human life. Language is interconnected with all that we do and stands 'mitten in'[135] our lives. This alliance between our words, their meanings and our forms of life expresses Wittgenstein's conviction that words have not, what could be called, 'intrinsic powers'[136]. Words do not possess a meaning of themselves which can be apprehended without looking at their application and background, such as in a context of human forms of life, practices. The meaning of a word is not 'ein Dunstkreis, den das Wort mitbringt und in jederlei Verwendung hinübernimmt'[137].

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[130] Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Berlin: Albatros Verlag, 2014), 712.

[131] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Das Braune Buch*, translation Petra von Morstein (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), 121.

[132] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 19, Page 246.

[133] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 135, Page 432.

[134] Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, second edition (London: Duckworth & Co, Ltd, 2001), 360.

[135] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Farben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), 102.

[136] David Pears, *Hume's System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25.

[137] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 53, Page 117.

Wittgenstein clearly illustrates this point:

> *"Wie ein Wort funktioniert, kann man nicht erraten. Man muß*
> *seine Anwendung sehen, und daraus lernen."*[138]

Only use can teach us as to what a word means and how it is to be applied.

3.1: The Indeterminacy of Sense

Consequently, as David Pears describes it, 'meaning is a consequence of our practices'[139]. Meaning is use[140], i.e. use in human practices, forms of life and activities. An important implication of this notion of meaning as use is that meaning becomes fairly dynamical, i.e. is without strict boundaries. Use is related to variety and not to rigour. As Wittgenstein expresses it himself:

> *"Wenn wir den wirklichen Gebrauch eines Wortes betrachten,*
> *so sehen wir etwas Fluktuierendes."*[141]

The meaning of a word, which consists of its use, is not narrowly circumscribed, not very rigid, but fluctuates and has a particular dynamic in it. Wittgenstein writes in *Zettel*: "Nur im Fluß hat das Wort seine Bedeutung."[142] A word does not have a strict meaning which it carries with it like a 'Dunstkreis', like an aura. On the contrary, it has a dynamic meaning which is related to the flux of use, the ongoing stream of use in human life.

The flexibility of meaning entails that Wittgenstein is opposed to searching for definitions and for attempts to give strict boundaries to our words and utterances:

> *"Wir sind unfähig, die Begriffe, die wir gebrauchen, klar zu*
> *umschreiben; nicht, weil wir ihre wirkliche Definition nicht*
> *wissen, sondern weil sie keine wirkliche Definitionen*
> *haben."*[143]

There is no neat definition of our concepts. And understanding those concepts is for Wittgenstein not being able to define them. Wittgenstein sometimes quotes, with some dismissal, from Plato's *Charmides*[144], in which it is said, as Wittgensteins reads this passage, that someone who masters the Greek language, as Charmides does, must be capable of defining the words in it, such as the Greek word for temperance, i.e. *sōphrosýnē*.[145]

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[138] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 116, Page 340.
[139] David Pears, *The False Prison*, Volume 2, 364.
[140] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 43, Page 262.
[141] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Grammatik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), § 36, Page 77.
[142] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), § 135, P. 198.
[143] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Das Blaue Buch*, translation Petra von Morstein (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014), 49.
[144] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, 195.
[145] Plato, *Charmides*, translation W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1955), 159a, Page 27.

In Wittgenstein's view, having the capacity to speak a language and hence having knowledge of the meaning of a word and possessing understanding of a word does not amount to being able to give a strict definition of the word which applies to every use. So when Socrates says in the *Theaetetus* that he will refrain from using those words, i.e. the word knowledge and related words, of which he has no clear definition[146], Wittgenstein, had he been Socrates' interlocutor in the dialogue, would have responded with similar wonder as Theaetetus actually does: "But Socrates, how are you going to carry on the discussion, if you keep off those words?"[147] And Wittgenstein would perhaps have added: you can continue talking of knowledge without possessing a strict definition of the word and related words. There is nothing which obstructs your being entitled to use the word and related words.

Wittgenstein's idea is quite similar to what George Berkeley writes on being just and virtuous: "A man may be just and virtuous without having precise ideas of justice and virtue."[148] Similarly, one can use those words without having strict definitions of them. Sense is indeterminate in Wittgenstein's conception and that forms no genuine problem for him. Wittgenstein recommends us 'immer an die Praxis zu denken'[149]. The practice can be our guide in revealing the meaning of a word and no strict definition is needed. And that one understands a word, as Charmides does with temperance, is made clear by one's ability to 'put forward some example of […] skill'[150], viz. the skill of using the word appropriately and correctly. Socrates' understanding of the word knowledge is made apparent by his capacity of using it. That he falls short of a satisfactory definition is not a problem here. The ability to use the word is not impaired by such a lack of definition.

3.2.: The Arbitrariness and Autonomy of Grammar

Wittgenstein's notion of the indeterminacy or flexibility of meaning is part of the broader idea that language as such can alter and is consequently not something necessary or fixed. According to Wittgenstein, our language 'ändert sich mit der Zeit'[151]. And more importantly, Wittgenstein is accordingly convinced that it is possible 'daß unserere Begriffe anders waren, als sie sind'[152]. Thus there is no necessity in our concepts. Wittgenstein is pre-eminently preoccupied with imagining languages which are completely different from our current language, such as one in which words have a different meaning in the morning than in the afternoon.[153]

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[146] Plato, *Theaetetus*, 196d – 196e, Page 87.
[147] Ibidem, 196e, Page 87.
[148] George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, edited Thomas J. McCormack (New York: Dover, Inc., 2003), 88.
[149] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), § 241, Page 601.
[150] Plato, *Laches*, transl. Lamb (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press), 185e, Page 31.
[151] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit*, § 256, Page 170.
[152] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Farben*, 65.
[153] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, § 148, Page 301.

Imagining such entirely different languages is done with the following purposes, as described by Maurice Drury in a lecture:

> "*[Wittgenstein is trying] to free us from thinking that our traditional concepts are the only possible ones, that one must see the world in this way.*"[154]

Language need not be what it is now and could be strikingly different. An implication of this assertion is that the grammar of our language – Wittgenstein's understanding of which is the subject of 3.3 – is somewhat arbitrary. Wittgenstein explains: "Die Grammatik ist der Wirklichkeit nicht Rechenschaft schuldig."[155] Grammar is not necessitated by reality, but is arbitrary in the sense that there is no external justification for it. Our grammar is independent of reality and hence Wittgenstein is entitled to write: "Die Grammatik gibt der Sprache den nötigen Freiheitsgrad."[156] Grammar can allow language some freedom, for it is in not made necessary by or dependent on reality. It is autonomous and 'could be different'[157].

This view of grammar as arbitrary can appear to Wittgenstein's readers as considerably more controversial than a truism, but Wittgenstein is nevertheless said to have had the habit of treating it as such. G.E. Moore writes in his account of Wittgenstein's lectures that Wittgenstein 'often asserted without qualification that all "rules of grammar" are arbitrary'[158]. As he is said to have claimed in a lecture attained by Alice Ambrose:

> "*The rules of grammar are independent of facts we describe in our language. To say that a grammatical rule is independent of facts is merely to remind us of something we might forget.*"[159]

Granted that the arbitrariness and autonomy of grammar can be treated so confidently as Wittgenstein did apparently, the question arises: how then is grammar justified, if it cannot be justified by pointing at reality and is independent from it? Wittgenstein holds that justification is an internal matter: the justification of grammar is internal to it.[160] To alter a phrase of Wittgenstein himself: grammar must take care of itself. Justification belongs to the 'Sprachspiele' we play and cannot be extended any further, i.e. to reality. The arbitrariness of grammar ends where our 'Sprachspiele' begin.[161]

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[154] Maurice O.Connor Drury, "Dublin Lecture," in *The Danger of Words and Writings on Wittgenstein* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 5.
[155] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, 184.
[156] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Bemerkungen*, ed. Joachim Schulte and Heikki Nyman (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015), § 38, Page 74.
[157] G.E.M. Anscombe, "Was Wittgenstein a Conventionalist?," in *From Plato to Wittgenstein*, ed. Mary Geach and Luke Gormally (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), 218.
[158] G.E. Moore, "Wittgenstein's Lectures in 1930 – 1933," in *Philosophical Occasions*, edited Klagge and Nordmann (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 70.
[159] Alice Ambrose, *Wittgenstein's Lectures 1932 – 1935* (New York: Prometheus, 2001), 65.
[160] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 146, Page 497.
[161] Michael Forster, *Wittgenstein on the Arbitrariness of Grammar* (Princeton: PUP, 2004), 66.

3.3: Wittgenstein's Conception of Grammar

Albeit having used the word grammar in abundance during this chapter, I have not as yet really clarified Wittgenstein's conception of it. How did he conceive of grammar precisely? It is of importance to notice that Wittgenstein's conception of grammar is not ordinary: "When he talks of grammar it has nothing to do with what grammarians are properly concerned with."[162] For Wittgenstein 'grammar consists of rules for the use of symbols in natural languages'[163]. In Wittgenstein's own words: "Die grammatischen Regeln bestimmen [...] die Bedeutung."[164] The rules of grammar are constituting the meaning of phrases, of components of language. Consequently, grammar is for Wittgenstein not what a child learns at school; it is not the *accusativus cum infinitivo* of Latin. When Wittgenstein considers e.g. 'the grammar of the word 'thinking'[165], he considers the rules for the use of the word. Grammar is therefore in some sense similar to the rules of chess or the rules of a game of tennis. The rules constitute the meaning of the components of the game, such as words and sentences.[166]

3.4: The Harmony between Language and Reality

If meaning is use and grammar is in an important degree arbitrary, then how should the relation between language and the world be seen? It seems evident to the ordinary user of language that our language makes contact with the world surrounding it. When 'wir von Bäumen, Farben, Schnee und Blumen Reden'[167], then we are under the impression that our words are in connection with the world. What is the precise nature of this connection, i.e. the connection between 'the stream of speech'[168], which 'flows from the soul in vocal utterance through the mouth'[169] and the world? In what manner are language and the world related precisely? Wittgenstein himself wrote:

> *"Wie alles Metaphysische ist die Harmonie zwischen Gedanken und Wirklichkeit in der Grammatik der Sprache aufzufinden."[170]*

The harmony between a thought, or a proposition, and reality or the world is, according to Wittgenstein, to be observed in the grammar of language.

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[162] Maurice O. Connor Drury, "Dublin Lecture", 3.
[163] G.P. Baker and P.M.S Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning: An Analytical Commentary to the Philosophical Investigations, Volume 1 – Part 2*, second edition, revised by P.M.S. Hacker (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2009), 46.
[164] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Grammatik*, § 133, Page 184.
[165] Norman Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1986), 15.
[166] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 65 – 69, Page 276 – 279.
[167] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Über Wahrheit und Luge in Außermoralischen Sinne", 313.
[168] Plato, *Timaeus*, translation R.G. Bury (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1929), 75e, Page 199.
[169] Plato, *Sophist,* translation Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press,1921), 263e, Page 441.
[170] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, § 55, Page 280.

This seems to lead Wittgenstein to the position that language is prior to the world: language is autonomous, viz. not made necessary by the world, and is the source, due to its grammar, of the harmony between a thought or a proposition and that world. Language contains in it its own source of the harmony with reality. This interpretation of Wittgenstein has been contested by David Pears, who is of the opinion that Wittgenstein gives priority neither to language, nor the world outside it.[171] According to Pears, Wittgenstein believes that there is a partnership between language and the world in which neither of them is the dominant factor. Wittgenstein was, Pears believes, not a prey to the temptation 'to suppose that in this partnership between language and the world, one of the two must be dominant in all transactions'[172]. So this partnership is a remarkably balanced one.

There are some clues in Wittgenstein which support this supposition of Pears. Wittgenstein states for example: "Die Sprache ist ein Instrument. Ihre Begriffe sind Instrumente."[173] He adds to this remark that it is wrong to believe 'es könne keinen großen Unterschied machen, welche Begriffe wir verwenden'[174]. How should this be read? David Pears writes: "One of Wittgenstein's favourite ideas is that language is an instrument of measurement."[175] Language has, in its role of instrument, to measure the world and therefore not all concepts are equally good. Our concepts are not necessitated by the world, but they do need to measure the world to a certain degree in order to exist, function and to continue their existence.

A complication for Pears' reading is that Wittgenstein is so insistent upon the autonomy and arbitrariness of grammar and more generally language as such. A good example of the rather unrestricted degree in which Wittgenstein ascribes autonomy to language is to be seen here:

> *"Wenn man jemanden fragt „wie weißt du, daß die Worte dieser Beschreibung wiedergeben, was du siehst", so konnte er etwa antworten „ich meine das mit diesen Worten". Aber was ist dieses das, wenn es nicht wieder artikuliert, also schon Sprache ist? Also ist „ich meine das" gar keine Antwort. Die Antwort ist eine Erklärung der Bedeutung der Worte."[176]*

The correctness of a description is inherent to our language for Wittgenstein. It needs also to be said that Wittgenstein claims in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen* that were we to lose for example the concept red, we would no longer have the possibility of distinguishing red objects in reality.[177]

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[171] David Pears, *The False Prison*, Vol. 2, 460 – 501.
[172] David Pears, *The False Prison*, Vol. 2, 461.
[173] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 159, Page 569.
[174] Ibidem.
[175] David Pears, *The False Prison,* Vol. 2, 436.
[176] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, 142.
[177] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 57, Page 272 – 273.

So language is for Wittgenstein prior to the world: were we to lose the concept of red, we would no longer have the possibility of perceiving red things. This priority of language over reality also becomes apparent in Wittgenstein's emphasis on forms of life. In Wittgenstein, the world loses its role as arbiter over the correctness of our concepts and our use of those concepts. Justification and correctness become internal to language, to grammar, and to the things which are intertwined with language, viz. human activities, forms of life. The shift from the world to forms of life makes this clear: our 'Sprachspiele' are not interconnected primarily with the world as such, but rather with our forms of life. Wittgenstein does explicitly not claim that our 'Sprachspiele' have the world or reality as their foundation.[178]

3.5: Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that Wittgenstein believes language to be closely connected to other human activities. Language is incorporated in human life and can therefore not be seen as something independent of it. Hence the meaning of signs is bound up with use, i.e. with the fact that those signs are used by human beings and acquire meaning by being used. Thus Wittgenstein writes that knowledge of the meaning of a word can only follow from learning the use of that word. Words are not intrinsically meaningful. One would be in the same darkness as Dante is at the beginning of his *La Divinia Comedia* if one were to try to derive the meaning of a word from that word itself. A word by itself could give no clue as to its application.

That words are used in practices, in 'Sprachspiele' and 'Lebensformen' makes the meaning of words not very strict. Words do not carry with them a 'Dunstkreis' which is their meaning. Thus words can have rather variable applications. The variable nature of the meaning of our words causes Wittgenstein's rejection of definitions. We can easily use our concepts without having strict definitions of them. Besides his philosophical renunciation of definitions, we have also met with Wittgenstein's idea of the arbitrariness of grammar: our grammar, i.e. the rules which determine the use of words, is not made necessary or correct by the world. The correctness of grammar is internal. Grammar is arbitrary in relation to the world.

This arbitrariness is intertwined with the autonomy of grammar. Grammar is not only arbitrary, but also autonomous. It cannot be justified by reality and it cannot be said to be founded upon that reality. And thus the harmony between language and reality is a matter of language. That harmony is a harmony of grammar. The world is not entirely ignored and is needed for the existence of language, but language is prior for Wittgenstein. This can also be observed in his use of forms of life. Forms of life have become grounding in his later conception of language. The world has accordingly in Wittgenstein lost its supposed role as foundation or arbiter of our language.

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[178] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Das Blaue Buch*, 121.

Chapter 4 Wittgenstein on Rule-Following and Linguistic Normativity

*"There can be no such thing as meaning anything by any word.
Each new application [of a word] we make is a leap in the
dark."[179]*

What entitles me to use a word in a particular manner? And where can I look for certainty and correctness concerning that use? Wittgenstein's emphasis on the autonomy and arbitrariness of grammar has brought those questions into existence. If the world gave our grammar correct- or incorrectness, then the proper use of words would simply be derived from reality. We would then have to look to 'the fixed rails of reality'[180] in order to discover how a certain word is to be used correctly. But if reality cannot be the foundation of the proper use of words, that would mean that we ought to seek elsewhere for 'linguistic normativity'[181]. But can we truly find a reliable standard of correctness if the world does not render our grammar correct or incorrect?

Saul Kripke believes that Wittgenstein has led us into considerable darkness concerning the existence of such a standard of correctness and hence regarding the correct use of words and the application of rules related to those words. Wittgenstein has created a form of 'scepticism'[182], Kripke holds, which is not limited to words, but is extended to for example mathematical propositions as well. In following mathematical rules, such as in trying give an answer to 68+57, we do not possess certainty.[183] We cannot even be certain that our future use coincides with our previous use. Perhaps what we believed to be '+' had the meaning of '-' in the past or vice versa.[184]

There is, in Kripke's sceptical interpretation, no certain guide for our correct use of words or rules. Neither past use, nor reality can produce such certainty, which seems most desirable. If there is no certainty, it seems that we have to despair concerning the use of our words and rules. The solution Wittgenstein provides, Kripke believes, is sceptical in nature, but nevertheless removes our possible despair. Kripke writes: "We have to see under what circumstances attributions of meaning are made and what role these attributions play in our lives."[185] The correct use of words and rules is determined and insured by our 'agreement'[186]. Consequently, our 'forms of life' and the agreement therein make the sceptical darkness disappear.

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[179] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 55.
[180] David Pears, *The False Prison*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 59.
[181] David Pears, *Paradox and Platitude in Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, 20.
[182] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 60.
[183] Ibidem, 7 – 8.
[184] Ibidem, 21.
[185] Ibidem, 86.
[186] Ibidem, 96.

4.1: Wittgenstein on Rule-Following

> *"Wenn ich der Regel folge, wähle ich nicht. Ich folge der Regel blind."*[187]

Let us move to Wittgenstein himself, who claims that when a human being follows a rule, he does so blindly. Following a rule is not a particularly conscious process or a process in which choice plays a role. So a man who is, as in Kripke's example, doing mathematics and is confronted with a sum like 2+2, will almost blindly, if he knows mathematical rules, fill in 4. It is quite similar to what is said in Plato's *Meno* about the road to Larissa: it is possible to take the correct road to Larissa without possessing or using genuine conscious knowledge of that road.[188] In Wittgenstein's conception of rules, the road would have been followed blindly, without either choice or consciousness. A rule is a road which we take without choice or knowledge.

Hence Wittgenstein defines a rule as follows: "Die Regel ist eine Art vorgezeichneter Route; ein vorgezeichneter Weg."[189] A rule is a road we have to follow, a road which is determined in advance. Wittgenstein compares it to 'ein Weg in einem Garten'[190] or 'die vorgezeichneten Felder auf einem Schachbrett'[191]. When walking through a garden one almost instinctively or blindly takes, provided one is not in the possession of an extremely anarchic nature, the path which has been created there. The comparison with the path in a garden suggests that rules are man-made, are creations of man. Accordingly, Crispin Wright remarks on Wittgenstein's notion of rules: "It is [...] agreement which sustains all rules and rule-governed institutions."[192]

Rule-following is essentially 'eine Praxis'[193]. The practice sustains the rule and makes it possible. Wittgenstein writes:

> *"Es kann nicht ein einziges Mal nur ein Mensch einer Regel gefolgt sein. Es kann nicht ein einziges Mal nur eine Mitteilung gemacht, ein Befehl gegeben, oder verstanden worden sein, etc. – Einer Regel folgen, eine Mitteilung machen, einen Befehl geben, eine Schachpartie spielen sind Gepflogenheiten (Gebrauche, Institutionen)."*[194]

A rule is an institution, a custom which is created and kept in existence by human beings. So human agreement, as stressed by Kripke, is of major importance in Wittgenstein's conception of what it means to follow a rule. The custom must guarantee the persistence of the rule and our use of it.

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[187] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 219, Page 352.
[188] Plato, *Meno*, translation Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924), 97a, Page 359.
[189] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, 190.
[190] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript*, 191.
[191] Ibidem.
[192] Crispin Wright, *Rails to Infinity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 188.
[193] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 202, Page 345 .
[194] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 199, Page 344.

Is there any scepticism to be perceived in Wittgenstein's account of rule-following? It is quite peculiar that Kripke has derived his sceptical interpretation of Wittgenstein from a passage in which Wittgenstein explicitly rejects such scepticism.[195] In general, Wittgenstein's remarks on following a rule and on the correct application of words are not very sceptical in nature. He appears to find scepticism towards the meaning of words somewhat artificial. He remarks: "Wer keiner Tatsache gewiß ist, der kann auch des Sinnen seiner Worte nicht gewiß sein."[196] And the latter, i.e. not being certain concerning the meaning and thus the application of words, is a state in which for Wittgenstein even a hardened sceptic cannot claim to be.

More importantly, Wittgenstein thinks that the learning of rules and especially of the application of rules necessitates certainty and not doubt or sceptical darkness. He connects the following of a rule with 'Abrichtung'[197] and believes that the child who undergoes such a process is not in the position to show doubt: "Das Kind lernt, indem es dem Erwachsenen glaubt. Der Zweifel kommt nach dem Glauben."[198] The possibility of a child to doubt presupposes a particular certainty and Wittgenstein underlines that the child who is learning the application of a word cannot at first doubt and will not have any ground for doing so. A child who is learning a particular rule from a teacher can learn and follow the rule at first without any doubt, and were it to doubt, that would be considered strange and almost impossible.[199]

4.2: Rule-following in Isolation

Kripke's sceptical approach to Wittgenstein's account of rule-following thus is not in accordance with Wittgenstein's own approach to the subject. But we have not as yet paid attention to all the elements of Kripke's account. One component which has been somewhat neglected is Kripke's insistence upon agreement and hence upon Wittgenstein's idea of a 'Praxis'. Kripke asks an important question in relation to Wittgenstein's concept of a 'Praxis':

> *"Does this mean that Robinson Crusoe, isolated on an island, cannot be said to follow any rules, no matter what he does?"[200]*

Can Robinson Crusoe, whilst living in isolation, have a practice and therefore follow a rule? More broadly put: is the word 'practice' identical to community, or can a practice of rule-following exist in isolation? So can a child, such as imagined by Montaigne[201], who grows up isolated, provided that this is possible, develop a practice of rule-following entirely on its own?

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[195] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 201, Page 345.
[196] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit*, § 114, Page 144.
[197] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015) § 33, Page 335.
[198] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit*, § 160, Page 153.
[199] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit*, § 314 – 315, Page 181.
[200] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language,* 110.
[201] Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, transl. Van Pinxteren (Amsterdam: Athenaeum, 2012) 550.

This is an important question, for it brings us to the heart of Wittgenstein's conception of linguistic correctness. It raises the question: is linguistic correctness entirely a matter of human communities, of social practices? If rule-following in isolation is inconceivable, then Wittgenstein seems to have a predominantly social account of linguistic normativity: agreement determines entirely whether rules and the words whose use these rules govern can exist and can be followed. This is the interpretation of Wittgenstein's account of rule-following which Norman Malcolm defends. He believes that for Wittgenstein rule-following is 'essentially social'[202], i.e. cannot occur in isolation, such as in the case of Montaigne's fictitious child.

Hence Robinson Crusoe for example only had the capacity of following certain rules as a result of the fact that he had learned those rules in the community in which he lived before his 'misfortune'[203] befell him. Thus Malcolm maintains 'that the concept of following a rule implies the concept of a community of rule-followers'[204]. Malcolm extends this community view of rules to language in general and writes 'that a language can exist only if there is agreement between persons in their application of the language'[205]. Malcolm's reading of Wittgenstein and most notably Wittgenstein's account of rule-following is therefore essentially social. Not merely the rules of language, but also language itself is a community based founded entity.

Malcolm has met with opposition from Gordon Baker and Peter Hacker, who claim that 'it is mistaken that Wittgenstein held that the term 'Praxis' signifies a social practice, and it is clear that he was willing to speak of an individual's practice of using a word in according with a rule'[206]. The same is defended by Colin McGinn, who rejects a 'community interpretation'[207] of Wittgenstein's account of rule-following. According to McGinn, our natural inclinations determine our rule-following in Wittgenstein's sense and hence the following of rules can take place in completely isolation as well.[208] Two problems confront this reading of Wittgenstein:

1. Wittgenstein is preoccupied with the learning of a rule, with 'Abrichtung'[209], which seems not to be an isolated process;
2. Wittgenstein constantly emphasizes the importance of 'Übereinstimmung'[210], which he sees as necessary for language.

[202] Norman Malcolm, "Wittgenstein on Language and Rules," in *Philosophy*, Vol. 64, No. 247 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 23.
[203] Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, edited John Rosetti (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 89.
[204] Norman Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden*, 144.
[205] Norman Malcolm, *Nothing is Hidden*, 173.
[206] Baker and Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Rules, Grammar and Necessity*, 151.
[207] Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning: An Interpretation and Evaluation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1984), 91.
[208] Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning*, 86.
[209] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*, § 33, Page 335.
[210] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 242, Page 356.

Neither training nor agreement are activities of an isolated nature. The training of a rule mostly requires two persons. The same is true of agreement in the use of rules. Is it therefore impossible according to Wittgenstein that an isolated human being gives himself rules? That seems to be the case: rule-following requires processes which do not generally occur in isolation. But can there genuinely be no agreement, nor training in isolation? One can perhaps say that an individual can teach himself rules and agree on them. Is it not possible for a human being to do such a thing based on natural inclinations and without a social practice or a social process of teaching?

That may be, but it is remarkable that Wittgenstein uses, in one of his explicit descriptions of rules in the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*[211], examples which are in need of at least two persons: giving an order, making a statement, playing a game of chess. And the first example of a rule in that same book consists of 'two men working with building stones'[212]. There seems to be no isolation envisaged here. Furthermore, Wittgenstein's notion of teaching is intertwined with the presence of more than one person. That idea is connected with the possibility of human beings 'sich zu einer solchen Reaktion [...] abrichten [zu] lassen'[213]. Rules are the products of training, which is not done by the individual himself but by a teacher, another human being. So rules need to be incorporated in 'communal practices'.[214]

But, it must be admitted, Wittgenstein also writes:

> *Ein Mensch kann sich selbst ermutigen, sich selbst befehlen, gehorchen, tadeln, bestrafen, eine Frage vorlegen und auf sie antworten. Man könnte sich also auch Menschen denken, die nur monologisch sprachen. Ihre Tätigkeiten mit Selbstgesprächen begleiteten."*[215]

However, he here does not state that such a human being has taught those rules to himself. Moreover, Wittgenstein remarks that the possibility of recognizing that the isolated man has rules follows from the 'Verkehr der Menschen'[216]. Wittgenstein formulates his opinion in the following manner:

> *"Das Wort Übereinstimmung und das Wort Regel sind miteinander verwandt, sie sind Vettern. Das Phänomen des Übereinstimmens und des Handelns nach einer Regel hangen zusammen."*[217]

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[211] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 199, Page 344.
[212] Rush Rhees, "Wittgenstein's Builders," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society*, Vol. 60 (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 1959), 177.
[213] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*, § 80, Page 208.
[214] John McDowell, "Wittgenstein on Following a Rule," in *Synthese*, Vol.58, No.3 (New York: Springer, 1984), 343.
[215] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 243, Page 356.
[216] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*, § 41, Page 344.
[217] Ibidem.

Agreement is needed for the existence and following of a rule. Thus Wittgenstein's view of a practice, which is necessary for rule-following and for the meaningfulness of words[218], cannot but be given a social reading:

> *"Was wir, in einer komplizierten Umgebung einer Regel folgen nennen, würden wir, wenn es isoliert dastünde, gewiß nicht so nennen."*[219]

Consequently, a rule could not even be called a rule in isolation. This is also Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein:

> *"If we are thinking of Crusoe following rules, we are taking him into our community and applying our criteria for rule following to him. The falsity of the private model need not mean that a physically isolated individual cannot be said to follow rules; rather that an individual, considered in isolation (whether or not he is physically isolated) cannot be said to do so."*[220]

4.3: Conclusion

In this chapter, it has become clear that Kripke's ascription of scepticism to Wittgenstein cannot be called justified. It is true that Wittgenstein makes it impossible for members of the human species to rely on the world for the correctness of their use of words and their rule-following, but that does not make Wittgenstein a philosopher who subscribed to some form of scepticism. Wittgenstein's idea that even a hardened sceptic could not doubt the meaning of his words and their application show how little inclined he was to scepticism concerning linguistic normativity. The blindness of the process of rule-following makes it apparent that he is not sceptical: the blindness is not a problem, in the same way that it is not a problem for a squirrel that he lacks a justification for his providing provision for the winter.[221]

Wittgenstein is furthermore not sceptical towards the process of learning and applying a rule. He is even of the opinion that it would be rather odd if a child were to doubt the words of the teacher or show unwillingness to follow the rules it is being taught. This emphasis on the learning of rules, on 'Abrichtung', makes it clear that for Wittgenstein the practice of rule-following is not isolated. The example of the builders already shows this. A rule can be followed in isolation, but only if there is a practice as a background; a practice which makes it possible to judge that a rule is followed. We cannot make that judgement without knowing what a rule is and how such a rule needs to be followed. A practice is needed to make us say: that man, for example an isolated individual like Robison Crusoe, is following a rule. Rule-following is essentially a communal or social practice.

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[218] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 224, Page 352.
[219] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Grundlagen der Mathematik*, § 33, Page 335.
[220] Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, 110.
[221] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Über Gewißheit*, § 287, Page 176.

Chapter 5   Plato and Wittgenstein: Linguistic Correctness

5.1.: Linguistic Correctness: The Necessity of our Concepts

We have distinguished two forms of linguistic correctness at the beginning of this enquiry. The second of those is concerned with the correctness of language in relation to the world. Is language made correct or necessary by the world? And can it hence be an entrance to the world? Regarding this form of linguistic correctness, the views of Plato and Wittgenstein are remarkably similar. Plato denies in the *Cratylus* both a naturalist account of linguistic correctness and the possibility of acquiring knowledge of the Forms through the study of language. Language is neither made necessary by nature or the world, nor is it the source of knowledge of that nature, that world. Wittgenstein's opinion is the same: our concepts are not necessitated by the world and neither is the grammar governing those concepts.

There is one difference: Wittgenstein is less preoccupied with epistemology than Plato is. The idea which is of central importance in the *Cratylus*, viz. whether it can be said that knowledge is to be obtained from words, is less prominent in Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein denies that our words are correct by nature, i.e. are necessary in relation to the world, but he does not do so with epistemological purposes: the rejection of natural correctness is not bound up with a theory of true realities, of Forms, such as is found in Plato. It is remarkable that Plato in the *Cratylus* shifts from the initial subject of language, of the correctness of *onomata* to epistemology, to knowledge of the things. The culmination of the dialogue is epistemological, although this is, as has been stated, not enough ground for seeing the entire work as such.

Nevertheless, Plato and Wittgenstein can thus be considered philosophical allies on the subject of the necessity or natural correctness of our language. As Plato wrote: what we human beings now call round might have been called straight and vice versa. Nothing in nature or the world determines our use of a particular word. Hence Plato's insistence on knowledge at the end of the *Cratylus*, and his etymological pursuit as an instrument for showing how words cannot be sources of knowledge, since they are attached to the things from a belief in flux and can be considered corrupted. Words are not a bridge to the things, but we need to seek for knowledge of those things themselves, viz. the Forms. Accordingly, Plato's answer to Nietzsche's question whether words are the correct expression of realities is negative. Wittgenstein here remains silent, for he has, contrary to Plato, no real metaphysical aims, such as the defence of a theory of Forms and an elaborate epistemology:

> *"Wir fuhren die Wörter von ihrer metaphysischen, wieder auf ihre alltägliche Verwendung zurück."*[222]

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[222] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 116, Page 300.

5.2: The Absence of Linguistic Necessity and Use

Although Plato and Wittgenstein agree on the absence of necessity in our language, they treat the consequences of this idea for our first form of linguistic correctness, i.e. correctness of use, differently. Plato moves towards a form of conventionalism in the final part of the *Cratylus* and that is it. Wittgenstein, however, is employed with the possibility of the correct use of language. He asks himself: how can we use a word correctly and follow a rule, which is related to such a word, correctly? This is connected with the absence of linguistic necessity: if we cannot point to the world for the correct application of a word and for the rules attached to those words, then we need a different source for this sort of linguistic correctness. Wittgenstein finds such a source in the language-games we play and the forms of life of which those language-games and we human beings are part.

For Plato, this is less problematic. He has Socrates demonstrate near the end of the *Cratylus* that we can understand all sorts of words, regardless of the degree to which they are like things. Such understanding, which he ascribes to convention and custom, is not considered a difficulty in the *Cratylus*. The question of how it is possible that one human being understands the word uttered by another human being is not raised in the *Cratylus*, and conventional correctness is not something about which Plato expresses wonder here. Wittgenstein's emphasis on rule-following, teaching and the notion of use shows that in his philosophical activity things are different: he is genuinely trying to find out how correct use can take place.

So Wittgenstein's treatment of correctness is wider than Plato's: Plato rejects any natural correctness of words and then makes room for a conventionalist approach to these words, the practical side of which, viz. the role of use, is not further investigated in the *Cratylus*. Accordingly, he is more occupied with the second form of linguistic correctness we have described, namely the form concerning the correctness of language in relation to the world, then with the first, i.e. with the correctness of use. But it should be noted that what Socrates develops in the last part of the *Cratylus* amounts to, as Rachel Barney has perceived[223], a criterion of understanding: words are understood due to custom and convention and not due to their resemblance to nature or reality. Plato is consequently not completely silent on the subject with which the later Wittgenstein is so preoccupied: he makes Socrates state a criterion of understanding. However, among all the theories brought forward in the *Cratylus*, this criterion is the least elaborated of all theories. Socrates quickly takes the discussion to the subject of knowledge and does not continue inquiring into his novel conventionalist approach to language and linguistic correctness. Knowledge here takes priority over linguistic correctness.

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[223] Rachel Barney, "Plato on Conventionalism," in *Phronesis*, Vol. 42, No.2 (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 155.

5.3.: Linguistic Correctness and Custom

Both Plato and Wittgenstein stress the role of custom and convention in the correctness of our language and the correct use and understanding of words. Their insistence on this role of custom and convention is however quite different: Wittgenstein holds language to be tightly interwoven with all other human activities, custom and so on, whereas Plato has less attention for everyday human activities. The idea, as described by Dummett, that in Wittgenstein's view language cannot be separated from human life and human activities or practices is not to be found in Plato's *Cratylus*. The conventional correctness of linguistic utterances, as endorsed at the end of the dialogue, is theoretical in nature: the real practical component and link with human life as such and human activities is here absent. Language is not something which for Plato is conditioned by our forms of life.

It needs to be stated that Wittgenstein's idea of the autonomy and arbitrariness of language and grammar concerning the world and nature is combined with a dependence upon language-games and forms of life. There is in Wittgenstein no complete autonomy of language in the sense that language is not dependent upon something, such as our forms of life. Plato on the contrary appears to maintain that autonomy somewhat in the *Cratylus*. He derives language from its necessity, i.e. its natural correctness, but does not give it such an explicit foundation as Wittgenstein does. He goes no further than to write that linguistic correctness is a product of custom and convention; not of nature. Here again we perceive that in Plato the correct use of words is of less central importance than for Wittgenstein.

Plato does not investigate whether we can use a word or apply a rule of e.g. grammar in isolation. The whole notion of rule-following, which is particularly Wittgensteinian, is absent from Plato's *Cratylus*. So when we conceive of Plato and Wittgenstein as philosophers who both maintained that linguistic correctness is not a matter of nature, but of custom, then we do not hold that their views are the same. Although they agree on the first form of linguistic correctness we have distinguished, namely that correct use is a matter of custom, they do not hold similar conceptions as to what this is.

Wittgenstein has a far more profound view on how language is incorporated in our lives. This can be seen in the fact that he starts his *Philosophische Untersuchungen* with the following two examples:

1. The example of a man going to the grocery shop.[224]
2. The example of two builders working together.[225]

Such examples of language being interwoven with our lives are not to be found in the *Cratylus*. The everyday use of language is not Plato's subject.

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[224] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 1, Page 238.
[225] Ibidem, § 2, Page 238.

5.4: Meaning as Use

Wittgenstein started his *Das Blaue Buch* with asking:

"Was ist die Bedeutung eines Wortes?"[226]

We have seen that his answer to this question is: use. Meaning is use. It is important to note that what Plato does in the *Cratylus* is not developing an answer to the question what the meaning of a word is. Plato considers linguistic correctness, but not meaning. His emphasis on custom and convention in the final part of the dialogue is intertwined with a notion of understanding, i.e. of what it is to understand a word, but not with a notion of meaning as such. Plato's *Cratylus* appears not to defend the same view on meaning as Wittgenstein does. It represents a remarkably similar view on linguistic correctness, but not necessarily on meaning. Is Plato then still defending a contrary view on meaning, as Wittgenstein believed him to be?

The answer is negative. Though Plato is not occupied with answering the question of what the meaning of a word is, as Wittgenstein is, his rejection of natural linguistic correctness is related to meaning. If a word or name is not made correct by nature or the world, then the meaning of such a word cannot be placed in a relation between nature and the world. And the quotation, to which Wittgenstein refers, from the *Theaetetus* in which it is said, according to Wittgenstein, that a name refers to a simple object does not imply a different conception of meaning, since that theory of Plato's, mostly referred to as 'Socrates' Dream'[227], is refuted.[228] Furthermore, that Dream is incorporated in an epistemological enquiry and not in a linguistic one. It is therefore, as Myles Burnyeat has remarked[229], unlikely that Plato there had similar linguistic priorities as Wittgenstein in his later work.

Consequently, the absence of a conception of meaning in the *Cratylus* does not make Plato and Wittgenstein here opponents either. Correctness and meaning are closely related. And Plato's rejection of natural correctness or necessity in our language shows him to be in agreement with Wittgenstein. Moreover, what Plato writes in his *Seventh Letter* shows this clearly:

"None of the objects has any fixed name, nor is there anything
to prevent forms which are now called 'round' from being called
'straight', and the 'straight' [from being called] 'round'; and
men will find the names no less firmly fixed when they have
shifted them and apply them in an opposite sense."[230]

The meaning of 'round' and 'straight' is determined by custom, use.

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[226] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Das Blaue Buch*, 15.
[227] Myles Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 134.
[228] Plato, *Theaetetus*, 206a, Page 102.
[229] Myles Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*, 164.
[230] Plato, *Seventh Letter*, transl. R.G. Bury (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1929), 343b, P.537.

5.5:   Plato and Wittgenstein: Understanding and Definitions

We have established in the first chapter that Wittgenstein was not in agreement with the search Socrates conducts in many of Plato's dialogues for definitions. This is an important difference between Wittgenstein and Plato which the *Cratylus* has in some sense not put in a different light. Although the *Cratylus* is not a classical search for definitions – by which I mean: Socrates asks 'What is X?' and the interlocutor provides answers which are successively refuted – there still is a belief in definitions to be found in it. Socrates defines a name for example as a vocal imitation of a thing, or as an instrument by which to separate things according to their natures. Definitions do play a major role in Socrates' enquiry in the *Cratylus.*

But the criterion of understanding Socrates brings forward here is not one in which it is said: understanding a word amounts to being capable of giving a definition. Socrates says to Cratylus:

> *"If you recognize my meaning when I speak, that is an indication given to you by me."*[231]

Such understanding or indication is not brought about by possessing definitions. Socrates remarks:

> *"Custom, not likeness, is the principle of indication [or of understanding]."*[232]

Understanding is a sort of recognition, as Socrates says in the first passage quoted, which occurs during speech, and such recognition depends on custom. Accordingly, that Cratylus can understand *sklêrotês*, such as mentioned by Socrates in an example[233], is neither the result of nature, nor of having the capacity of giving a definition. So Socrates develops a criterion of understanding in the *Cratylus* along the same lines as Wittgenstein's. Of course, this does not contradict the thesis that in many of Plato's dialogues understanding is conceived of as having the capacity to give definitions. The example Wittgenstein quotes from the *Charmides* is striking: he who speaks Greek must be able to define *sōphrosýnē*, Socrates suggests there.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Socrates displays sensitivity to the idea of understanding as responding in a particular manner to a linguistic utterance. Cratylus recognizes the Greek for hardness and can hence respond to it in a certain way, which is determined by custom and convention. The Wittgensteinian theme of meaning as use, such as the use of hardness, is therefore not entirely absent from Plato's dialogue. Socrates' refutes Cratylus' naturalism partly with an appeal to a Wittgensteinian idea of meaning and understanding as intertwined with use and action.

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[231] Plato, *Cratylus*, 435a, Page 173.
[232] Plato, *Cratylus*, 435b, Page 173.
[233] Plato, *Cratylus*, 434C, Page 171.

Conclusion

The central question of this enquiry was: how should the relation between Plato's view of linguistic correctness and that of Wittgenstein be conceived of? It has become clear in the first chapter that Wittgenstein saw his relation with Plato as a relation of differences. Plato was connected, for Wittgenstein, to his early philosophy and to the Augustinian conception of language, both of which Wittgenstein now rejected. This had implications for linguistic correctness as well: Plato was viewed by Wittgenstein as a representative of the idea that words are related to the world and from there acquire meaning and correctness. A name is connected to a simple object in reality and that is the meaning of the name and therefore also the ground for its correctness.

However, in our interpretation of the *Cratylus* in the second chapter we have seen that Plato's view of language is far more a conventionalist view than one in which language is made correct or necessitated by the world. Plato is sceptical towards the idea that we can obtain knowledge from the study of words. Accordingly, words are not standing in a relation of natural correctness with the world: the correctness of *onomata* is not a matter of nature or the world, such as Cratylus defended, but a matter of convention, which was also to be Aristotle's opinion. The long etymology section is in line with this: etymology cannot bring us knowledge of the realities or Forms, since it only shows how words have got twisted and were given to things from a belief in flux. Thus the source of knowledge is not our language.

The third chapter has taught us that for Wittgenstein linguistic correctness, i.e. our grammar and the meaning and of our words, is not a matter of reality, but of use and custom. Language is again not made correct by the world, though it has internal correctness only. The harmony between language and reality is essentially a harmony of language. And the correctness in grammar is not brought about by the world: that correctness belongs to grammar itself. Wittgenstein here gives language priority over the world: language and the human activities, forms of life to which that language is attached cause correctness and not reality. In this sense, our grammar and language are arbitrary. But it need be stated: that arbitrariness ends where our language-games begin. In those language-games grammar is not arbitrary in that it is without real justification.

The result of the fourth chapter was that for Wittgenstein the use of words and the rules governing the use of those words is not a ground for scepticism. Wittgenstein deprived the world of its role as arbiter of our language, but did not thereby make our language problematic. The scepticism Kripke claimed to have spotted in Wittgenstein is not there. Wittgenstein on the contrary believes that rules are and can be followed blindly. We follow a rule without consciousness or choice. Just as in Plato's *Meno* a road is correctly taken without knowledge or consciousness, so in Wittgenstein's view we follow rules without consciousness or choice.

So linguistically correct behaviour, viz. the following of rules, is brought about blindly. It follows from teaching and agreement between human beings. An isolated individual could therefore in the strictest sense not be said to follow a rule. Linguistic correctness or rule-following is based upon human 'Übereinstimmung' and the possibility of teaching. Robinson Crusoe can follow rules due to the fact that he participated in a rule-following community before he was struck with misfortune. Accordingly, Wittgenstein carries, as the third and fourth chapter have made clear, linguistic correctness from the world to human activities, human practices, forms of life, communal practices and so forth. Linguistic correctness and rule-following become matters of custom and not of external necessity.

In our fifth and final chapter we have become conscious of the similarities between Plato and Wittgenstein and hence of the fact that our central question should be answered by stressing those similarities. The relation between Plato and Wittgenstein on the subject of linguistic correctness is essentially a relation of agreement. Language is not necessitated by the world, by nature, but receives its correctness from custom and convention. That Cratylus can understand Socrates when they speak of *sklêrotês* is caused by custom and convention, not by likeness of this word with an object in reality or a particular essence. Words are correct by convention, not by reference to the world or the Forms, which need to be known, according to Plato, by themselves and not through the meticulous study of language.

So Plato and Wittgenstein agree on the two forms of linguistic correctness we distinguished in the introduction:

1. Language is not made correct by nature or the world (Augustine's idea of words as signs);
2. Correct use is a matter of custom and convention (Augustine's idea that words exist so that we may use them).

Of course, there are also differences. Plato is more epistemologically orientated, i.e. he is more occupied with trying to find out whether language can be a source of knowledge. His conception of the first form of linguistic correctness is epistemological, whereas Wittgenstein's lacks that epistemological component. Wittgenstein only maintains that language is not made necessary by the world, but not that language can or cannot be a source of knowledge of the things. On the other hand, Wittgenstein has a more elaborate notion of the relation between correct use and our human life and activities. Plato states that custom and convention are important, but does not further develop that idea in the *Cratylus*. Wittgenstein's sophisticated ideas of rule-following, language-games and forms of life are not present in Plato. Plato does not raise the question of how meaning is possible. He connects linguistic correctness to convention, to custom and that is it. But in general Plato's views converge with Wittgenstein's: our language is not made correct by nature and correct use is a matter of custom and convention. Linguistic correctness, in the two senses we have distinguished in this enquiry, is for both a matter of human customs.

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