

A DISPLACEMENT IN THE TEXT OF THE *CRATYLUS*

IN this paper I argue that the stretch of dialogue from 385 b 2–d 1 (Burnet's lineation) in the *Cratylus* does not belong where it is found in the MSS. (and consequently in our published texts), but fits rather between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6. I suggest further that at any rate my negative thesis receives some measure of support from the fragments of Proclus' commentary on the dialogue.

THE NEGATIVE THESIS

I defend my negative thesis, that the passage 385 b 2–d 1 should be removed from the context in which it stands at present, in the following way. I suppose the lines excised, and show what a coherent piece of dialogue is thus restored to us. Then I show what difficulties ensue if we put them back and read the *textus receptus*.

At 384 c 9–e 2 Hermogenes has given a succinct account of his contractual theory of the correctness of names. At 385 a 1 Socrates begins his attempt to shake Hermogenes' confidence in the theory. His first move is to pick on an ambiguity in Hermogenes' mode of expression and to get him to agree that the proposition $\delta \alpha \nu \dots \kappa \alpha \lambda \eta \tau \iota \varsigma \epsilon \kappa \alpha \sigma \tau \omicron \nu, \tau \omicron \upsilon \theta' \epsilon \kappa \acute{\alpha} \sigma \tau \omega \delta \nu \omicron \mu \alpha$ is true not only when $\tau \iota \varsigma$ takes the value $\pi \acute{o} \lambda \iota \varsigma$ (which was clearly the value Hermogenes originally intended), but also for the value $\iota \delta \iota \acute{\omega} \tau \eta \varsigma$ (385 a 1–5). Hermogenes has been trapped, and now Socrates goes on to point out the consequences of his false step. He shows that, on this view, if I decide to call what most people call 'man' 'horse', one and the same object will have a public name, 'man', and also a private name, 'horse'—what, following Professor Kretzmann,¹ we may label an autonomous idiolect (385 a 6–b 1). Then (if we omit 385 b 2–d 1) he generalizes this result: 'So ($\acute{\alpha} \rho \alpha$) what *each person* says is the name for something, that is the name for each thing?' (385 d 2–3), and he presses home its implications: 'And each thing will have as many names as someone says it has, and whenever he says so?' (385 d 5–6). At this point Hermogenes, quite unembarrassed, apparently, agrees and says that he holds no other standard of correctness but that the name he imposes should be the name for him, the name Socrates imposes the name for Socrates (385 d 7–9). Having failed to impress Hermogenes with the unpalatability of the consequences of his position (so interpreted), Socrates turns to question what he evidently sees as a possible reason for wanting to hold the position (on that construction of it) in the first place (385 e 4 ff.).

The easy sequence of thought just outlined is violently interrupted by the passage 385 b 2–d 1 in its traditional position. These lines seem quite irrelevant here. Briefly, the argument they contain runs thus: there are true statements and false statements; if a statement is true, all its parts must be true; the smallest part of a sentence is a name; so in a true statement any name will be true, in a false statement any name will be false; so it is possible to say a true and a false name, if it is possible to say a true and a false statement. It is

¹ N. Kretzmann, 'Plato on the Correctness of Names', *Amer. Phil. Q.* viii (1971), 127.

not the least bit clear what bearing this argument has on Hermogenes' thesis, however that thesis is interpreted. Commentators¹ take it that it is intended as an argument *against* that thesis. But they are forced to recognize that as such it is an argument whose conclusion is never reached. And it is not easy to see how a conclusion damaging to Hermogenes *could* plausibly be constructed. Mr. Robinson says:²

We seem to be expected to think that the view that there is a natural correctness of names follows from the view that names are true or false. In other words, the natural rightness of a name is its being true, and its natural wrongness is its being false.

If that is what Plato has in mind, not only would his truncated argument be most unconvincing, but it would harmonize very ill with his treatment of the rightness and wrongness of names in the main body of the dialogue. For if we take a true name to be a name which on a given occasion of its use succeeds in referring to the thing it is supposed to be used to refer to, and a false name correspondingly, as it seems we should, then plainly the fact of truth and falsity in names does not show that we must regard some *particular* authority—be it 'nature' or anything else—as legitimatizing the way in which names are supposed to be used. Still less can truth *constitute* such authority: only if there is some antecedent authority can the notion of truth find purchase at all. Furthermore, throughout most of the dialogue Plato pursues his investigations into the nature of that authority (or as he puts it, into the source of correctness in names) without introducing the notions of truth or falsity at all. Professor Kretzmann, it is true, directs our attention to a passage where Plato *does* bring in truth and falsity in this connection:³

The aim of this truncated argument [viz. 385 b 2 ff.] is obscured by the introduction at 385 d of the notion of the number of names for a thing at a given time. . . . Perhaps the discussion in 431 b–c presents the intended line of this argument more fully.

But it seems very doubtful whether this later passage can help us with the earlier. Here Cratylus has been maintaining both that all names are correctly given and the more radical view (which is not represented by him or Socrates as entailing or entailed by the former view) that it is not possible to speak falsely by misusing a name, i.e. by using a name to refer to something it is not supposed to refer to (429 b–430 a). Socrates gets Cratylus to admit that if, as he holds, a name's correctness lies in a natural relation with the thing it is correctly applied to, there must be room for the notion of a name's being incorrect, since it is possible for a name to be applied to something with which it fails to stand in the appropriate relation; and in that case there must also be room for the notion of a name's being false as well as true (430 a–431 c). Now certainly questions of truth and of correctness are here treated together. But it is the mere *fact* that a name is correctly applied to one thing, incorrectly to another, which is the condition of the possibility of a name's being true or false, not the explanation of this fact by the theory of natural appropriateness accepted by Cratylus. In so far as Socrates' argument is made to depend on

¹ So e.g. R. Robinson, 'A Criticism of Plato's *Cratylus*', *Essays in Greek Philosophy* (Oxford, 1969), 123 (reprinted from *Phil.* *Rev.* lxx [1956]); Kretzmann, loc. cit.

² Loc. cit.

³ Op. cit. 127 n. 4.

the acceptance of this explanation it is merely *ad hominem* against Cratylus. And this must surely be recognized by Plato, since at the end of the day, as Kretzmann stresses, Socrates rejects Cratylus' theory and adopts a contractual view of the matter.¹ So it is unlikely that he would ever have been made to complete his truncated argument with the contention that the possibility of true and false names depends on a natural appropriateness of name to thing.

I do not want to suggest that no account of how the 'truncated' argument might be continued in such a way as to embarrass Hermogenes could possibly be worked out. It would presumably be possible to construct a Wittgensteinian argument against autonomous idiolects which included the observation that truth and falsity could have no role in such a language game. But it is obvious enough that, even had Plato been sympathetic to that sort of philosophical move, he has not here presented us with the materials for such an argument.

In any case, supposing that a plausible ending to the argument could be supplied, there would remain a small but damning piece of evidence against the case for thinking 385 b 2-d 1 correctly situated in the text as it now is. At 385 d 2-3, as we saw, Socrates asks: 'So (*ἄρα*) what *each person* says is the name for something, that is the name for each thing?' If 385 b 2-d 1 is in its right place, what is Socrates supposing to license this conclusion? It can hardly be Hermogenes' answer to his previous point: 'So it is possible to speak a false and a true name, if also a false and true statement?' (385 c 16-17). And in fact one can find nothing which could possibly support Socrates' conclusion unless one goes back all the way to 385 a 6-b 1, i.e. to just that passage which, according to my proposal, immediately precedes it.²

THE POSITIVE THESIS

In arguing that lines 385 b 2-d 1 should be inserted between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6 I shall adopt a reverse strategy. I shall first attempt to sow seeds of doubt about the passage 387 b 8-d 9 in the reader's mind; then I shall show how the causes of unease are removed by the introduction of 385 b 2-d 1 after 387 c 5.

Socrates has been arguing that since things have an objective nature of their own, not changing according to the variable presentations with which human beings are visited, it follows that our actions, too, as real things, must be carried out not just according to our own wishes and opinions, but in a way appropriate to the nature of the activity in question. Thus surgery and cauterizing have to be conducted not on the basis of any and every view, but on that of the right view—the one which specifies the means and the manner appropriate for operating on a given part of the body or with a given instrument (386 d 8-387 b 7). In the passage with which we are concerned Socrates applies this general thesis about human actions first to speaking, then to naming. He begins by obtaining Hermogenes' agreement to the proposition that to speak is to perform an action (387 b 8-10). Then he asks him whether, in the light of their conclusions so far, correct speaking is speaking in any way it seems fit to anyone to speak, or whether the successful speaker will adopt the means and the manner which are natural for speaking and for a thing's being spoken,

¹ See especially 435 a 5-d 1, with Kretzmann, *op. cit.* 137-8. Cf. also Robinson, *op. cit.* 121-2.

² As was pointed out by G. J. de Vries, 'Notes on some passages of the *Cratylus*', *Mnemosyne* iv. 8 (1955), 292.

or else go wrong and achieve nothing (387b 11–c 4). Hermogenes, sensibly and consistently, takes the latter option (387 c 5).

Now at this point, given the traditional text, Socrates makes first a rather obscure speech, then two puzzling ones. Turning to the topic which is, of course, his intended destination, he says:

Οὐκοῦν τοῦ λέγειν μῶριον τὸ ὀνομάζειν; ὀνομάζοντες γάρ που λέγουσι τοὺς λόγους (387 c 6–7).¹

To this Hermogenes responds enthusiastically: Πάνυ γε (387 c 8). There seem to be at least two distinct claims which Socrates might be putting forward here: (a) Speaking is a complex action, one ingredient of which is naming (i.e. using names), since it is by using names as building blocks that people speak sentences.² (b) Naming (i.e. the activity of assigning names to things) is one species of speaking, since when people name they speak sentences. It has been suggested that Plato in the *Cratylus* 'fails to realize the difference between establishing a name and using a name'.³ But he could hardly have failed to distinguish between propositions (a) and (b). Which, then, did he intend? Without the help which (as we shall see) 385 b 2–d 1 gives, it is very difficult to be sure. Considering the two propositions just in themselves, one would, I think, incline to suppose that (a) is more likely to represent Plato's meaning. For (b) requires a more technical sense of μῶριον than (a), and it would imply a sort of interest in types of speech act which is quite foreign to Plato, whereas (a) would presuppose little more than that interest in the composition of sentences which we find at 385 b 2–d 1 and later in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. If we turn to the succeeding stretch of dialogue (387 e 10–388 c 8), it is clear from the analogy drawn there between 'shuttling' (κερκίζειν) and naming (ὀνομάζειν) that Socrates means by 'naming' 'using a name' (the actual expression 'using a name' is introduced as an elucidation of 'naming' at 388 c 5–7, and Socrates goes on to raise the question (388 d 9–10): 'Who hands down to us the names we use?'). But this sequel would fit naturally after either (a) or (b), since (b) need not imply that names are not used in naming, but might specify one particular type of use of names: that employed when we instruct others (e.g. children) in the names things have. (Of course, (b) taken by itself *could* refer to the *establishing* of names for things—but that would be inappropriate in the context.)⁴ Socrates' suggestion at 388 b 10 ff. that in

¹ I follow Stallbaum, Meridier, etc., in reading ὀνομάζοντες BW in preference to Burnet's unhappy compromise between this reading and καὶ διονομάζοντες T. The reading of T is to be rejected because of its un-Platonic καὶ . . . γάρ and because of the inappropriateness of the *variatio* introduced by the compound verb. I would suppose that a subtle scribe glossed ὀνομάζοντες above the line by καὶ διονομάζοντες indicating that interpretation (b) of Socrates' suggestion (on which see below) was to be understood, and that at a later stage the gloss displaced the true reading. (But for another explanation see Stallbaum *ad loc.*) As at *Polit.* 263 d 5 διονομάζειν would have the force 'to assign names' (Jowett's translation).

² With this interpretation of Socrates'

suggestion, 'name' would presumably be being used in a generic sense, so as to include adjectives and verbs as well as nouns. This is also the use in question, one supposes, at 385 c 8, where the name is said to be the smallest part of the sentence (in contrast to phrases and clauses, no doubt). As Kretzmann says, 'his [sc. Plato's] examples of *onomata* are mainly names, proper and common, but he does introduce adjectives (433 e) and infinitives (414 a–b) as well' (op. cit. 126, n. 1). Cf. also Robinson, 'The Theory of Names in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Essays in Greek Philosophy*, 100–3 (reprinted from *Rev. Int. Philos.* 1955).

³ Robinson, op. cit. 135.

⁴ Kretzmann believes that at 387 c 6–10 the ambiguity in ὀνομάζειν as between

naming we teach each other and distinguish things according to their natures tends to support the idea that (b)—construed in the way I have just advocated—is what Socrates has in mind by his remark at 387 c 6–7. But it would not be strange if he had used the verb ‘name’ in the generic way demanded by (a) at 387 c 6–7, but when turning to consider the function of names as tools (388 a 8 ff.) came to treat naming as using names for one specific (and no doubt, to Plato’s way of thinking, fundamental) purpose, viz. teaching people how different names apply to different sorts of thing.

Socrates’ next speech runs as follows:

Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸ ὀνομάζειν πράξις τίς ἐστιν, εἴπερ καὶ τὸ λέγειν πράξις τις ᾗν περὶ τὰ πράγματα; (387 c 9–10).

What is odd about this question is the use of the imperfect ᾗν in the protasis. One naturally supposes that this is the memory-jogging imperfect: ‘Naming is an action since (if you remember) speaking was an action exercised with respect to things.’ But surely Hermogenes cannot be so forgetful as to need reminding about something he had agreed to only three short speeches back (387 b 8–9). Similarly odd is the use of the aorist in Socrates’ next question:

Αἱ δὲ πράξεις ἐφάνησαν ἡμῖν οὐ πρὸς ἡμᾶς οὔσαι, ἀλλ’ αὐτῶν τινα ἰδίαν φύσιν ἔχουσαι; (387 d 1–2).

There can be no doubt that *this* is a memory-jogging past tense. But, again, while the general point Socrates here makes was first propounded as far back as 387 a 1–2, we have been given two cases exemplifying the point at 387 a 2–b 5, and only three speeches back (at 387 b 11–c 4) Socrates suggested that speaking exemplified it, too.

If we now insert lines 385 b 2–d 1 between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6, our difficulties about the course of the argument at 387 c 6–d 3 simply dissolve. These lines occupy sufficient space to justify the introduction of the memory-jogging past tenses at 387 c 10, d 1. And the ambiguity is removed from Socrates’ speech at 387 c 6–7. For naming can be a part of speaking only in the sense in which a name is part of a sentence (cf. 385 c 1–9). Thus interpretation (a) of 387 c 6–7 is vindicated.

What is more, Socrates is thus provided with a much more compelling argument for the conclusion he wishes to establish, that if speaking is an action which one can do correctly or incorrectly, so must naming be. No longer will he rely simply on the thought, abstrusely phrased, that in the act of speaking a sentence one will be bound to say a name. He will have won Hermogenes’ agreement to the suggestions that a true statement must consist of true parts, a false statement of false, the smallest of which are names; and that it is possible to say a false and a true name. These, the conclusions he actually *does* reach at 385 b 2–d 1, contribute just the premisses he needs in order to offer 387 c 6–7 as a result following easily from something already established, rather than as an intuitively obvious truth. For given that names are parts of sentences, and that it is possible to say a false and a true name just as it is possible to say a true and a false statement, saying a name must be part of saying a statement

imposing and using a name ‘seems to affect the argument’ (op. cit. 128 n. 5). Robinson thinks it unclear which of these senses (if not

both) is in question (op. cit. 124). But Socrates does not begin to think about the making of names until 388 c 9 ff.

(and to say a name in the context of a statement is naturally taken to be equivalent to naming).

Against this proposal to insert 385 b 2-d 1 between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6 it may be objected that it gives rise to an unnatural reading of the lines, inasmuch as their main point, the proof that names can be true or false, is treated as less important than the claim made in the course of that proof about names being parts of sentences. The objection misfires. For it assumes as true what need not be true at all, that Socrates, according to the proposal, is content with a fairly modest degree of similarity between naming and speaking a sentence in offering his claim that naming is a constituent action of speaking a sentence: modest to the extent that he will require nothing in the way of truth or falsity in naming, but simply that a name be a said part of a sentence. But it may rather be the case—I would suggest that it *is* the case—that Socrates wishes to insist that saying a sentence and saying a name are *strictly comparable* actions, proven to be so by their both being concerned with truth and falsity (thus defending himself in advance against the objection: saying a name is not itself an action, only part of an action). After all, why should he want to force the category of truth and falsity on names in the first place unless he has *some* ulterior motive of the kind I am suggesting, i.e. unless he has some special reason for wanting it to appear that names are more like sentences than one would have thought? That it is the motive of proving saying a sentence and saying a name strictly comparable may even receive some support from the way the argument that names can be true or false proceeds in its details. For throughout that argument Socrates is concerned to sustain interest in the *saying* of sentences and of names. Thus at 385 c 10 he says: 'So the name which belongs to the true statement is said?' before he remarks on its truth (385 c 12). And his conclusion at 385 c 16-17 is phrased in this way: 'So it is possible to say a false and a true name, since also a false and a true statement.'

I do not want to maintain that the features of the argument of 385 b 2-d 1 to which I have been drawing attention in the last paragraph can *only* be explained by placing the lines in a context like that at 387 b 8-d 9. But it is a merit of the proposal to put them between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6 that something which certainly needs explaining is explained.

THE TESTIMONY OF PROCLUS

The case for thinking that Proclus did not read lines 385 b 2-d 1 at the place in the dialogue assigned to them in the MSS. is based on nothing more than an *argumentum ex silentio*, but as such arguments go it is not a bad one. Its most doubtful feature is, not surprisingly, the premiss on which it rests: the assumption that, had Proclus read 385 b 2-d 1 at the point in the text where it is presently situated, he would very likely have taken it as a truncated argument against Hermogenes, just as Robinson and Kretzmann do. But although this assumption cannot be proved, it is in itself plausible, and it receives some support from the way Proclus handles the argument at 385 a 1-b 1, where Socrates points out that, given the 'autonomous idiolect' interpretation of Hermogenes' position, it will follow that one and the same object could have a quite different private name from its public one. For although as it stands (even with the continuation at 385 d 2-6) Socrates here does nothing more than present to Hermogenes some considerations which might be expected to discomfort him, Proclus is keen to turn them into an explicit argument

against Hermogenes, filling in details of his own invention (*in Crat.* 11. 18–23 Pasquali). So, since he interprets the whole section 385 a 1–387 d 9 as designed to refute Hermogenes' position, it is quite likely that he (like Robinson and Kretzmann) would have tried to make an argument against Hermogenes out of 385 b 2–d 1, had he read the lines at the point at which they now stand.

But it is fairly certain that he did not attempt to read 385 b 2–d 1 as an argument to that effect. No such attempt survives among the fragments, and something else he says makes it highly unlikely that he ever made one. For he informs us that Socrates refutes Hermogenes' thesis with three ἐπιχειρήματα: the first ἐντροπικόν, the second βιαστικόν, the third πειθοῦς τελεωτάτης αἴτιον (*in Crat.* 11. 15–17). Now the first of these dialectical proofs, labelled as first by Proclus, is just that piece of argumentation (385 a 1–b 1, d 2–6—although one cannot tell from his words whether Proclus read d 2–6 as the continuation of a 1–b 1 or not) which I have described as designed to discomfort Hermogenes. The other two proofs which Proclus spells out are not labelled by him 'second' and 'third' (so far as the fragmentary condition of his commentary permits us to say), but they are just two and they do answer pretty well to the descriptions of them given at 11. 16–17. The second is what Proclus calls 'the proof against Protagoras' (i.e. 385 e 4–386 d 2), which he summarizes thus:

εἰ οἷα φαίνεται ἐκάστω τὰ πράγματα, τοιαῦτά εἰσιν, οὐκ ἔσονται οἱ μὲν φρόνιμοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἱ δὲ ἄφρονες· ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐ τὸ δεύτερον· οὐδ' ἄρα τὸ πρῶτον (*in Crat.* 12. 24–7).

This proof is, of course, a proof against Hermogenes, too, inasmuch as he allows that he has been tempted by Protagorean relativism (386 a 5–7), a subject which Socrates has evidently raised because he suspects it may lie behind Hermogenes' position on correctness of names. Proclus is right to think it a more knock-down sort of argument than the attempt to unsettle Hermogenes at 385 a 1–b 1. The third proof Proclus describes (and reduces to a series of seven *modus ponens* arguments) is the long argument which begins at 386 d 3 and is not concluded until 387 d 9 (*in Crat.* 15. 1–26). The length and positive character of this argument are sufficient to explain Proclus' original description of the third proof as 'perfectly persuasive'.

There is no room, then, in Proclus' table of arguments against Hermogenes for the 'truncated argument' at 385 b 2–d 1. So inasmuch as the treatment of those lines in their present position as such an argument is reasonable and natural, Proclus' silence is an indication that they did not occupy such a position in his text.

But Proclus certainly read 385 b 2–d 1 *somewhere in his text* (cf. *in Crat.* 11. 30–12. 23). And there is one straw in the wind which may perhaps indicate that he read the lines at the point in the text where I propose that they should be inserted. At 14. 10 ff. Proclus raises an ἀπορία prompted by Socrates' speech at 387 c 6–7:

Οὐκοῦν τοῦ λέγειν μῶριον τὸ ὀνομάζειν; ὀνομάζοντες γάρ που λέγουσι τοὺς λόγους.

He takes these words as at any rate having the appearance of committing Socrates to the suggestion that naming is saying. And the difficulty he considers runs thus: if a name is not a sentence, naming will not be saying (*in Crat.* 14. 10–12). Now it need not be so, of course, but it could be that the

difficulty presented itself to Proclus with particular force just because Socrates had immediately before (at 385 b 2–d 1, transposed to a gap between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6) insisted on the distinction between the sentence and the name which is its part.

Yet it must be allowed that two things speak (although faintly) against this supposition. First, in offering his third solution to the *ἀπορία* just mentioned, Proclus points out that the verb ‘to say’ can be used in two ways—of a whole utterance or of any meaningful sound. And he notes that we tell people to ‘say their names’ for us (*in Crat.* 14. 23–30). It is perhaps mildly surprising that Proclus, if he read 385 b 2–d 1 in the new place I propose, failed to remark that Plato himself uses the expression ‘say a name’ in just this context (385 c 7–8, 10, 16). Secondly, Proclus makes no mention of the substance of 385 b 2–d 1 in his report of the ‘perfectly persuasive’ argument at 386 d 3–387 d 9 (*in Crat.* 15. 1–26). This need not be *fatal* to the supposition entertained in the last paragraph, for 385 b 2–d 1 does not supply any premiss which he needs for his reconstruction of the proof. But taken together, these two points are enough to force at least an agnostic answer to the question: ‘Did Proclus read 385 b 2–d 1 between 387 c 5 and 387 c 6?’

CONCLUSION

I conclude that there is a strong case for reading 385 b 2–d 1 in the place I suggest. But it then becomes a puzzle to say how the lines could ever have been wrongly inserted in their traditional place. I suppose one would have to imagine that at some early stage in the transmission of the text an interrupted or sorely distracted scribe, searching for his place again after the diverting incident, found a point where the discussion was again of speaking or saying as an action, and mistakenly thought it followed the piece of dialogue he had been transcribing just before the incident. Realizing his mistake, he will have added the intervening lines in the margin, but they will have been incorporated into the text at the wrong point by a later scribe. It may seem a point too distant for comfort. But since the omitted passage is so long, it would be not unlikely that the distracted scribe would begin repairing his error right at the top of the left-hand page; and if the proper place for the passage had been towards the bottom of the right-hand page, it would not be surprising if it were later inserted some way back, before the first line proper of the left-hand page.