Classical Quarterly **36** (i) 124–150 (1986) *Printed in Great Britain*

PUTTING THE *CRATYLUS* IN ITS PLACE

The *Cratylus* begins with a paradox; it ends with a paradox; and it has a paradox in between. But this disturbing characteristic of the dialogue has been overshadowed, not to say ignored, in the literature.[1] For commentators have seen it as their task to discover exactly what theory of language Plato himself, despite his declared perplexity, intends to adopt as he rejects the alternatives of Hermogenes and Cratylus. A common view, then, has been to suppose that the ἀπορίαι of the dialogue are mere camouflage for the hidden dogma, whatever that may be. A favoured candidate, of course, has been the theory of transcendent forms, in some preliminary version. As a consequence, the dialogue has often been seen as a precursor to the great metaphysical works of Plato's middle period such as the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*.[2]

Not so, I shall argue. My case is that this dialogue centres upon a series of paradoxes which are both powerful and unsettling. Their final effect is to attack the theory of forms, not to defend it. They are, I suggest, genuine proposals of philosophical difficulty, rather than mere artifice to disguise an idealist truth.[3] As such, they belong, and may clearly be seen to belong, with works of the critical period which subject the theory of forms to scrutiny. Thus the ἀπορίαι of the *Cratylus* have their counterparts in the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. I propose, then, that the dialogue was written during the late, critical period of Plato's philosophical activity.

The *Cratylus* may be divided into three parts: the discussion with Hermogenes (383–391); the etymologies (391–421); and the debate with Cratylus (421–440). The function of the etymologies is obscure and, as far as this paper is concerned, will remain so. The first and last sections of the dialogue, however, are more accessible. They represent a counterpoised treatment of two theories of naming: Hermogenes' view that naming is done by agreement or contract (συνθήκη) is offset against Cratylus' view that naming follows the nature of the named. Thus the dialogue is obviously antithetical. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals a deeper structure which exploits a sequence of antitheses, a series of paradoxes, and the effect of ἀπορία.

The two theories of naming in the dialogue represent relativism, on Hermogenes' part, and realism, from Cratylus – as we shall see. This contrast invokes another distinction, more fundamental than the initial hypotheses, between the names and the

[1] E.g. G. Fine, 'Plato on naming', *PhQ* 27 (1977), 289–301; G. Anagnostopoulos, 'Plato's *Cratylus*: the two theories of the correctness of names', *Rev. Met.* 25 (1971–2), 690–736; R. J. Ketchum, 'Names, forms and conventionalism: *Cratylus* 383–395', *Phron.* 24 (1979), 133–47; N. Kretzmann, 'Plato on the correctness of names', *APhQ* 8 (1971), 126–38; M. Schofield, 'The dénouement of the *Cratylus*' in *Language and Logos*, ed. Schofield/Nussbaum (Cambridge, 1982), 61–81. Contrast the line taken by J. Gosling, however, *Plato* (London, 1973), 200, who characterises the arguments as 'polemical'.

[2] C. H. Kahn, 'Language and ontology in the *Cratylus*' in *Exegesis and Argument*, ed. Lee/Mourelatos/Rorty (Assen, 1973), 152–76 and R. H. Weingartner, *The Unity of the Platonic Dialogue* (Indianapolis, 1973), 15–43 both suggest that the middle-period theory of forms is anticipated in the *Cratylus*. The general view appears to have been that the dialogue is early: e.g. W. K. C. Guthrie, *Socrates* (Cambridge, 1971), 122 suggests that it is Socratic. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), 4 says that the date of the dialogue is 'open to serious doubt', but tends towards a pre-*Republic* date, following Von Arnim, Raeder and others. We may compare I. M. Crombie's compromise, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines* (London, 1963), ii. 376. Ryle, however, *Plato's Progress* (Cambridge, 1966), 2, assumes that it belongs with other critical dialogues.

[3] Cf. e.g. Weingartner, op. cit. 38.

named, between the nominal and the real, between minds and things external to minds in the natural world. This contrast, implicit throughout the confrontation between Hermogenes and Cratylus, generates a further antithesis after the defeat of Cratylus, namely the distinction, among things (πράγματα), between the flux-ridden things of the phenomenal world, and the fixed, eternal forms. So we have a complex structure. There is a superordinate contrast between names and things. Subsumed under that there is, on the one hand, the distinction between relativist and realist accounts of names and, on the other, the antithesis of changing physical objects and permanent forms.

The dialogue develops by considering each of these subordinate classes in turn, subjecting each to the question whether, in their different ways, they give us access to truth and knowledge. At each stage, as I shall argue, the separate theories of naming and the separate types of entity are denied any claim to cognitive utility. But, since each stage is related to its predecessor by means of antitheses which are seen as exclusive and exhaustive, this results in a closed dilemmatic structure, thus:

	Names		*vs.*		Things	
	‖				‖	
Relativist impasse	*vs.*	*Realist* impasse		*Flux* impasse	*vs.*	*Forms* impasse

At each stage, the argument employs more detailed aporetic argument – *reductio ad absurdum*, self-refutation and dilemma – so that the overall effect is of a genuine, compelling ἀπορία, whose structure, since it is not open-ended, commands further reflection. In particular, we demand to know whether the original antitheses are well formed. Or does there lie, between relativism and realism, some alternative account of truth? The *Sophist* will claim there does. And is there, between flux and the fixity of forms, some other type of entity which allows for cognition? The *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* suggest that there is. So here the challenge of the *Cratylus* fits readily into the later period.

The move from one section of argument to the next is prompted, in each case, by the onset of paradox.[4] There are, then, a set of paradoxes which run through the dialogue, and dominate its aporetic structure. They are:

I. 'Hermogenes' is not Hermogenes' name (383b)
II. Falsehood (contradiction) is impossible (385a–436e)
III. Coming to know is impossible (437a–440e).

The first of these provokes, and attacks, the two theories of naming; but then each, in turn, is seen to generate the second, the denial of falsehood, whose paradoxical status is carefully explained. In retreat, Socrates turns to the things, τὰ πράγματα, and, as a consequence, falls foul of the third paradox, that coming to know is impossible. And that, of course, appearing as it does at the end of a highly informative stretch of argument, has the appearance of self-refutation. The ἀπορία is complete. Its development, moreover, shows how the question 'What is a name?', prompted by the first paradox, is only the surface theme of the work, subordinate to 'What is truth?' (paradox II) and 'How can we know?' (paradox III). These latter questions, appearing in tandem as they do, are characteristic of the critical works.

My purpose, then, is to show how the structure of the dialogue works. I shall claim,

[4] I have further argued, in 'Paradox in Plato's *Phaedrus*', *PCPS*, n.s. 28 (1982), 64–76, that the *Phaedrus* proposes paradox-mongering as a serious procedure for inquiry, which is then carried on into later dialogues in practice. In what follows, I attempt to show that the *Cratylus* is a case in point.

firstly, that this developed structure is to be discerned in the *Cratylus*. Secondly, the arguments of the dialogue culminate in a closed structure of dilemma, and so present a complete ἀπορία which is neither an artifice, nor disingenuous, but rather a statement of genuine metaphysical difficulties about the nature of being, truth and knowledge. Thirdly, overall and in detail, this shows the affinity of the *Cratylus* with the dialogues traditionally described as critical – the *Parmenides*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*. It follows that with them the *Cratylus* finds its place.

I. '"*Hermogenes*" *is not Hermogenes' name*'

This paradox is introduced right at the beginning of the dialogue (383b) before the argument has got under way; and Hermogenes is represented as outraged at Cratylus' refusal to grant him his own name. The proposition, psychologically telling as it is, does not appear in its overtly paradoxical form anywhere in the dialogue; but it reappears as a puzzle attached to Cratylus' account of naming at 429b–c, and is then parodied in the example at 429e, that 'Hermogenes' is not Cratylus' name either – it may be nobody's. Its literary function, therefore, is to connect the two parts of the dialogue; and it gives the hint that Cratylus' theory of names will be found to be ridiculous or outrageous.

Suppose that indeed 'Hermogenes' is not Hermogenes' name. So to mention Hermogenes I cannot use 'Hermogenes'. But I can mention Hermogenes. Then 'I mention Hermogenes' is true. So 'Hermogenes', used in that proposition, has a direct, transparent relation to Hermogenes. So when I mention Hermogenes in order to deny that 'Hermogenes' is his name, I use 'Hermogenes' at the same time as I repudiate that use. Here lies the paradox.

A shallow reading of the paradox shows that the theory of names adopted by Cratylus sees names as equivalent to accurate descriptions; so that since Hermogenes is not in fact born of Hermes, but of Hipponicus, the description does not fit him, and should not be applied to him at all. However, a deeper reading of the paradox will show how it encapsulates the problems that run throughout the dialogue. '"Hermogenes" is not Hermogenes' name' is paradoxical because it is self-contradictory – a fact which the formulation in the dialogue does not bring out. It is also paradoxical because, in contrast to '"Hermogenes" is Cratylus' name', we all believe that Hermogenes is indeed the name of the son of Hipponicus. So we might expect that any sensible theory of naming should account for the truism '"Hermogenes" is Hermogenes' name'.

Accordingly, Hermogenes – plaintive at Cratylus' dismissal of his name – looks for an account of naming that will recover his name for him. So he proposes that naming is done by agreement or convention. Some controversy surrounds the exact specification of Hermogenes' thesis.[5] Certainly, it is not conventionalism in any moderate sense, although it is associated (e.g. 384d) with the catch-term νόμος in contrast to Cratylus' φύσις approach. Rather, Hermogenes espouses an extreme theory whereby 'whatever anyone posits as the name for something, that is its correct name' (384d2–3). Since this is a generalisable principle, and any utterance can be characterised as naming, it turns out that all utterances, private to the utterer, are correct namings. For Hermogenes, therefore, there is no distinction to be drawn between the establishment of a name and its use, since any occasion of naming counts as both.[6] And it follows that all naming is correct, coming as it does directly *from the mind of the namer*.

[5] Cf. above, n. 1.

[6] This, and its parallel for Cratylus, is observed by B. A. O. Williams, 'Cratylus' theory of names and its refutation' in *Language and Logos*, 83–94.

So Hermogenes recovers his name at a price. By making all names true of their nominata, he renders true also the proposition '"Hermogenes" is Cratylus' name' – which common belief supposes to be false. So Hermogenes' response to the paradox about his own name is to widen his account of true names to let in all comers, however absurd. Cratylus, by contrast, has an illiberal approach to what counts as a proper name. He agrees that 'Hermogenes' is not his own name. Then in order to support the view that 'Hermogenes' is not Hermogenes' name, he rules out as meaningless all names that do not state the essence of the nominatum. Like Hermogenes, then, he denies falsehood, by arguing that 'Hermogenes' is not, at least in the present state of the evidence, a name at all.

So Cratylus sees the direction of the naming process the other way round from Hermogenes. For him, the name comes naturally *from the nominatum* – the causal link is the reverse of that in Hermogenes' theory. Thus Cratylus believes that any name is either correct or not a name at all (cf. 429bff.). So, like Hermogenes, he is committed to the idea that there are only correct names, although for him this requires the ruling out of some utterances as mere babble, whereas Hermogenes' principle is more generous. And, like Hermogenes, he does not allow any distinction between use and christening, since either is explained exhaustively by the link between the world and the word.

In the *Cratylus*, as the etymologies (393aff.) extensively show, names stand in for descriptions. So the two theories of naming can stand in for any account of the sense of propositions; and hence there is no distinction to be made between true names and true sentences (385bff.).[7] Consequently, these accounts of naming are equivalent, in the first place, to theories of meaning – 'what is it to name?' is the same as 'what is it to have meaning?'. But then, since for Hermogenes and Cratylus all naming is correct naming, 'what is it to have meaning?' is the same thing for them as 'what is it to be true?'. So any meaningful name, on either theory, is *ipso facto* true. This much is established for each thesis separately at 385b and 387b; and at 429d (although Hermogenes rejects the denial of falsehood, so that the man is dissociated from the thesis). So both theories of naming entail the impossibility of falsehood.

II. *The impossibility of falsehood*

1

Here the arguments of the *Cratylus* fall into line with arguments to be found in the *Euthydemus*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.

The difference between Hermogenes and Cratylus may be characterised by the νόμος / φύσις antithesis, a dualism famous from sophistic argument of the fifth century.[8] The νόμος-merchant sees truth as being relative to the minds of men – so Hermogenes advocates the privacy of language (385a), and Protagoras urges 'Man is the measure of all things' (cf. *Theaet.* 151eff.; 154a etc.). The φύσις-character, on the other hand, sees truth as emanating from the world, and independent of the minds of men. Cratylus is just such a realist (wherefore the final discussion of the real is launched in 'his' half of the dialogue, since it tells against him, and not against a relativist). So too is the sophist who offers a realist account of truth and infers from it the impossibility of falsehood (*Euthyd.* 283ff.; *Sophist* 236eff. and *passim*).

[7] Though cf. Schofield 'A displacement in the text of the *Cratylus*', *CQ* 22 (1972), 246–53, on this passage and its place in the argument. My own interpretation requires that 385b–c is in the right place in the text.

[8] Cf. e.g. Democritus, DK 68B8; *Gorgias* 483ff.; Ar. *Soph. El.* 173a; and a passage rich in epistemological overtones, Pindar *Ol.* 2.83ff. I am grateful for the last reference to Penny Wilson.

The *Euthydemus* mounts an argument to show the impossibility of falsehood; and derives the impossibility of contradiction therefrom. The argument there is based upon a realist hypothesis; but it is underdeveloped. To find a comprehensive treatment of the realist denial of falsehood, we must look to the *Sophist*, which offers three counterarguments: (i) a self-refutation (238d ff.); (ii) an argument from the parity of truth and falsehood (243c); and (iii) the complaint that without both dialectic will disappear (252b). These counter a series of possible relations between truth and meaning: semantic atomism (the elements of a proposition refer one by one to elements in the world) (237c–d); the correspondence of whole propositions to whole states of affairs (238a–c); and the *οἰκεῖος λόγος*, the view that each state of affairs has *just one* proposition corresoponding to it (251e). I shall argue that the *Cratylus* contains the same elements.

The relativist theory of truth is the province of the *Theaetetus*, where Protagoras' 'man is the measure' doctrine is explored and exploded because it entails the denial of falsehood. Here the counterarguments are two – (i) the insistence that the thesis denies the possibility of expertise (161e etc.) and (ii) a self-refutation (e.g. 171a). Protagoras' doctrine is associated also with the 'secret doctrine' of Heraclitean flux, which is also reduced to absurdity (181–3). The complex structure of argument of the *Theaetetus* is paralleled in the *Cratylus*.

So I shall argue that the two separate attacks on the impossibility of falsehood in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* are conjoined in the *Cratylus*, where relativism and realism are played off against each other. The two theories are introduced as exhausting the possibile responses to the paradox about Hermogenes' name. In so doing, both theories face the objection that they render falsehood impossible. So, starting from an antithesis and ending with a pair of *reductiones ad absurdum*, Plato produces a dilemma about names. To anticipate, his response to the dilemma, at least as far as the *Cratylus* is concerned (and *vide Euthyd.* 278b), is not to find some third account of naming, but to turn instead to the things, *τὰ πράγματα*, the named (438). This move generates, as I shall finally argue, a culminating *ἀπορία*.

It is clear enough that the accounts of naming are seen by Plato to be both paradoxical and dilemmatically arranged. So the shift from the consideration of relativism to the attack on realism is clearly marked (428c–d). Here Socrates reintroduces his butt, Euthyphro, and claims once again that he may be inspired; but warns us against his sudden knowledgeability, and its deceptive nature. We must, he says, look backwards and forwards at the same time (428d7).[9] This quotation from Homer (e.g. *Il.* 1.343) resounds. As an interpretative instruction, of course, it bids us to look at the dialogue as a whole, both the arguments that have gone and those that are to come; and to bear in mind their continuity. Yet, looking backwards and forwards *at the same time* is Euthydeman, and impossible – we are warned of paradox and *ἀπορία*, which, on the interpretation I am offering, the dialogue gives us, with a vengeance.

2

Relativism à la Hermogenes is attacked at *Crat.* 385b–387a. Once Hermogenes has stated his position, he is brought to concede (385b) that both truth and falsehood exist;

[9] L.S.J. explain *πρόσσω καὶ ὀπίσσω* in terms of the future (behind us, and so inscrutable) and the past; but there seems no reason not to prefer a more literal interpretation here, with the phrase out of context.

and falsehood is defined as saying what is (the case, thus and so)[10] as it is not (cf. also *Theaet.* 188d, *Soph.* 236e). Then he is asked to agree that propositions as a whole are true or false and their parts are true or false piecemeal. So a name, a part of a proposition, can be false. This preliminary move, then, commits Hermogenes to the possibility of falsehood without compromising his relativist stance. Subsequently he is brought to contradict himself when he agrees that his relativism entails the denial of falsehood.

At 385d–e Hermogenes asserts that truth is relative – not relative to some society (as in some mild conventionalism) but relative to and private to individuals.[11] This is hailed by Socrates as equivalent to Protagoras' account of truth in 'Man is the measure', that 'as things appear to me so they are to me; and likewise for you' (386a). After Hermogenes concedes that there are good men and bad, wise men and stupid, the refutation comes at 386c2–d1:

(A) 'If Protagoras spoke the truth, and this is the very truth, that as things seem to each, so also they are (for him) [the qualifier supplied from d1], then is it possible that some of us are wise, some foolish?

No.

(B) And these things, indeed, as I think, seem completely so to you, on the grounds that there is wisdom and stupidity, that it is completely impossible that Protagoras speaks the truth. For on the grounds of his truth one would be not at all wiser than another, if what seems to each were true for him'.

(i) Expertise. The underlying logic of this passage appears to be a simple *modus tollens* argument: if Protagoras is right, there is no wisdom; but there is wisdom; therefore Protagoras is not right. Hermogenes has agreed that there are wise men and ignorant; so he must agree that some will have privileged access to the truth. But this is inconsistent with the view that truth is as it appears privately (385e5) to each man, which gives no-one an edge when it comes to truth, or wisdom (cf. *Theaet.* 161d–170b).

(ii) Truth. The *modus tollens* reasoning is certainly present here; but the argument is more subtle than that, and exploits the *modus tollens* argument not only directly, but indirectly as well. For it provides the basis upon which Protagoras may be reduced to self-refutation.

The passage quoted above is highly wrought. It appears within a discussion of truth (385a ff.) and reiterates the terms 'true' and 'truth' throughout. At (A) the complex Protagorean formula for truth is presented. Then at (B) a case of the first part of the formula ('these things... seem completely so to you' c6) is used to attack a case of the second part ('It is completely impossible that Protagoras speaks the truth' c7). The verbal and formulaic echoes instruct us, I suggest, to interpret beyond the simple manoeuvres of the *modus tollens*.

The critical work is done at (B). Here Socrates makes three crucial points. First he sets up a dispute, a direct dialectical confrontation, between Protagoras and Hermogenes (for by this stage Hermogenes has been dissociated from the relativism which he originally proposed). Secondly he presents the dispute as justified on both sides ('on the grounds that there is wisdom and stupidity', c7; 'on the grounds of his truth' c8, where 'his truth' is significantly ambiguous between Protagoras' book, whose title was 'Truth', cf. *Theaet.* 171c; Protagoras' theory of truth; and 'the truth itself', cf. c3). And thirdly, he makes it clear that the dispute is about Protagoras' thesis

[10] We can, I take it, avoid needless Eleatic pitfalls here by insisting that 'is' is incomplete, equivalent to 'is F'. Cf. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being' in *Plato II*, ed. Vlastos (New York, 1971), 223–67.

[11] It is, I take it, important to except these individuals from flux. Cf. below, pp. 138ff.

itself – that is that this theory of truth is subject to debate, *and to justification.* This is emphasised by the contrast between the grounds for denying Protagoras' thesis (that there is wisdom and stupidity) and the grounds for denying the possibility of wisdom (his truth). That is, the position of each party in this dispute consists, not in mere assertion, but in the justification of what they say.

However, what justification could Protagoras adduce for his theory of truth? The conclusion that there are no experts, to which he is committed as a crowning professional absurdity, is justified by the theory of truth. This suggests that all his opinions, relative as they must be, are justified by the theory of truth. Consequently the theory of truth itself must be held as some primary thesis (whether relative itself or not), held *a priori.* Indeed, any attempt to ground it otherwise would result in the concession of some non-relative truth. Hence, Hermogenes is able to attack Protagoras at the heart of his theory, on the grounds that there is wisdom. Protagoras, on the other hand, is allowed only an indirect defence, that of conceding any absurdity, just so long as he maintains the primary truth.

Now it is, of course, a puzzle whether this primary truth can be formulated in terms of itself, that is, with sufficient obeisance to the relativism it propounds, or whether, *a priori* as it is, it demands absolute status.[12] But furthermore, the *debate* that is in progress in the *Cratylus* raises a further difficulty, namely how could Hermogenes, or anybody, become convinced of the thesis in the absence of any justification? From Hermogenes' point of view, the *modus tollens* argument, which invokes the common-sense premiss that there are experts, is sufficient to justify at least preliminary opposition to Protagoras' doctrine. What has Protagoras to offer in reply? Since, for him, everything is subordinated to the theory of truth itself, then that is what he must offer. But then the theory of truth, as the opening clause of (B) makes abundantly clear, does not counter Hermogenes' position; it justifies it. If Protagoras is right (whether relatively or absolutely), then Hermogenes is right (relative to Hermogenes). In debate, therefore, Hermogenes, supported by his opponent, is justifed also by the data of common sense (that is, the possibility of expertise) in denying the position of his opponent. So, when it comes to persuasion, the sheer indiscriminateness of the Protagorean thesis renders it impossible to justify in the face of any reasons on the part of the opponent.

The *Theaetetus* contains a parallel stretch of argument which explicitly points to the self-refuting nature of Protagoras' theory of truth. Socrates argues (170e7–171c3) thus:

'What follows for Protagoras? Surely it's necessary that if he himself does not think that man is the measure, and if the majority does not think so either, then this truth he has written will be the truth for no-one? Whereas if he thought it so, but the majority does not agree, then, you know, firstly as much as more people disagree than agree, so much will it be false rather than true....

Secondly there's this exquisite consequence. He concedes to be true the opinion of those who disagree with him about his own opinion, when he agrees that everyone believes the truth....

So he admits his own opinion to be false, if he agrees that the opinion of those who disagree with him is true...

But the others will not admit that they are wrong...

So in what he writes he admits that this view of theirs is true also...

Therefore his opinion is disputed on all sides, beginning with Protagoras himself;

[12] Cf. Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and self-refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*', *PhR* 85 (1976).

or rather it is agreed by him to be false. For whenever Protagoras concedes that his opponent speaks the truth, then he himself agrees that neither a dog nor any man is a measure of even one thing, if he has not come to know it.'

Here the dialectical situation is that Protagoras finds himself out on a limb, the only person committed to his doctrine. *Everyone else*, the hypothesis runs, thinks that Protagoras is mistaken; and the argument is designed to show that Protagoras himself agrees with his opponents, with the result that no-one believes in his doctrine at all. For the opponents argue that Protagoras is wrong and they are right; and Protagoras agrees that they are right. As in the *Cratylus*, then, the position is that Protagoras concedes the (relative) truth of everyone's opinion, while the opponents are insistent that their opinion is right in contradistinction to Protagoras' own.

The interpretation of this argument is controversial. Some have argued that Plato debases Protagoras' subtle relativism into a crude subjectivism which is readily seen to be self-refuting.[13] Others have suggested that the relativist position is maintained, but must stop short of relativism by taking a solipsist stance.[14] Burnyeat has suggested that any case of disagreement with Protagoras' thesis is in fact a counter-example to the thesis, since relativism makes equivalent a person's experience and the totality of their truth: 'what it means for the Measure doctrine to be false for someone is that he is not a Protagorean measure' (p. 188). This is supported by the reference to 'measures' at 171c. So, any opposition to Protagoras refutes him.

At this juncture, comparison with the *Cratylus* passage is revealing. Both passages have the same net result: an unresolved dispute between some opponent who asserts the Protagorean thesis to be false, and Protagoras himself, who both asserts his thesis to be true (for him) and its negation to be true (for his opponent). The passages differ in three areas. Firstly, the emphasis of the *Theaetetus* is on the question of knowledge, whereas the *Cratylus* concerns itself more closely with an account of truth. Secondly, the *Theaetetus* represents both parties as lined up against each other merely in the opposition of their opinions; and contains, notably, no account of how the opponents might be thought to *justify* their opposition. The *Cratylus*, by contrast, explicitly points to the asymmetry of the justification of those opposed opinions. Thirdly, the *Theaetetus* assumes the existence of some opposition, hopelessly over-generalised at that; whereas the *Cratylus* presents a single opponent whose opposition is created in the course of the argument. These three points of difference are, I suggest, connected.

To take the last one first, it is unnecessary for the *Theaetetus* to rely on numerical advantage for the argument to go through. Protagoras' thesis is itself generalised: he argues that for *everyone* truth is relative to them. If so, a single counter-example is all that is needed – a multitude decreases the plausibility. But even so, the refutation must depend upon the acceptability of the hypothesis that there is even one opponent of Protagoras. Why should there be such a one? The answer is supplied by the *Cratylus*, where the opponent is given direct, argued grounds for his opposition (the *modus tollens* argument). It then transpires that the justification for Protagoras' thesis is as effective for justifying its denial by the opponent (relative to himself). So Protagoras' truth justifies anything – which is why, for Protagoras, everything is true (for each). The opponent disagrees: he claims that his opinion is true (not relatively) and Protagoras' is false. But thus he implies a thesis no less general than Protagoras' own – that there is such a thing as falsehood. This direct counter to his own thesis Protagoras is powerless to deny, precisely because his doctrine warrants the truth

[13] Cf. remarks by Burnyeat, 'Protagoras and self-refutation in later Greek philosophy', *PhR* 84 (1975).

[14] E. N. Lee, 'Hoist with his own petard' in *Exegesis and Argument*, 225–61.

(albeit relative) of any opinion whatever. Hence, of course, the significance of discussing Protagoras in a debate about truth, as at *Cratylus* 385aff.

Finally, it is the issue of justification that then lands Protagoras with a self-refutation (of Burnyeat's dialectical type). The debate between Hermogenes and Protagoras takes place by producing justifications for the opinions of the involved parties. However, to justify an opinion is to give grounds for asserting that one to be true *as opposed to its negation*; it is on these discriminatory issues that persuasion takes place. Now Protagoras' job, and his objective in the present debate (subject to the imagery of the passage), is to persuade others of the truth of his thesis. This objective runs into three difficulties, made impassable by the thesis itself. Firstly – Burnyeat's point – it risks the charge that the thesis itself is presented as an absolute truth (public, not private: cf. *Crat.* 385e), and is thus a counter-example to itself. Secondly, if everything is true, as the thesis implies, then any thesis is true, and asserting *this* one is neither here nor there. Thirdly, and for similar reasons, *justifying* this thesis is impossible, if the thesis allows the justification of *any* thesis; for justification, the weapon of persuasion, is a discriminator. When a statement is justified, its contradictory will, *eo ipso*, fail to be justified. But Protagoras' truth justifies itself, *and anything else*; so that there are no *grounds* for being persuaded of it at all (compare *Theaet.* 178e). So when Protagoras is forced, not merely to assert his thesis, as in the *Theaetetus*, but to justify it, then solipsism is no help to him. The *Theaetetus* self-refutation may indeed work as Burnyeat suggests; but the *Cratylus* forces Protagoras into the public arena by asking for justification: and so the self-refutation goes through with ease and simplicity.

The discussion of Protagoras is followed up in the *Cratylus* by the ontological oddities of Euthydemus. Euthydemus holds (386d) that 'everything is likewise (disposed) to everyone[15] at the same time and always'. This is a claim about the nature of things. As such it is to be distinguished from Protagoras' view, which focuses upon epistemological considerations, and tells us, rather, about the nature of what we know or believe. Euthydemus is not a relativist – he claims that real things really are totally indeterminate. Against this position the expertise argument is invoked again. Then Socrates gives the counter-example to total indeterminacy – that some things do have some fixed essence of their own (for example, our own actions). This move heralds the discussion of realism.

Euthydemus' position is one of the total synchronic indeterminacy of things. As such, it is different from Heraclitus' secret doctrine (*Theaet.* 152dff.), which is diachronic, and thus weaker (see below). When it comes to the effect of such a thesis on the truth, however, they are as bad as each other, since both synchronic and diachronic indeterminacy affect the possibility of truth, if truth is seen to have anything to do with the state of affairs out there in the world. The *Cratylus* is quite clear, as the *Theaetetus* is not, that the epistemological doctrine of Protagoras should be distinguished from the ontological mess of Euthydemus, even although the consequences are the same (386d8ff.). For the Protagorean thesis is indifferent between agnosticism about the state of the world, and the claim that the world really is indeterminate. In the *Theaetetus*, Protagoras brings the secret doctrine (real indeterminacy) with him just because he is in that context saddled, not merely with a theory

[15] 'Everyone' or 'in every respect' – this text is as ambiguous as *Phaedo* 74b8; but I take it that the point is clear enough. Although the Greek of 386d4 would allow the translation 'anything is likewise to everyone', which would imply total stability, it must mean 'everything considered altogether is likewise to everyone' – total indeterminacy. For the sequel (d5–6) glosses: 'virtue and vice are likewise to everyone always' and is decisive for total indeterminacy. In my discussion of this passage below, p. 140, I shall find it convenient to symbolise this as a universal quantification over contradictory predicates, even though the gloss gives us contradictory subjects with the same predicate.

of truth, but with the defence of Theaetetus' theory of knowledge; and that precludes an agnostic stance towards the world. The *Cratylus*, however, is innocent – so far – of a theory of knowledge, since the theories of naming concern truth, not knowledge. As a consequence, Protagoras and Euthydemus may be distinguished within the argument. And thus the *Cratylus* complements, rather than being replaced by, the arguments of the *Theaetetus* against a relativist account of truth.

3

Realism is represented by Cratylus' naturalist hypothesis about names. Socrates inclines towards naturalism in the face of the difficulties confronting Protagoras and Euthydemus. So the idea is canvassed that names reveal the truth about the nominata by imitating their nature (423a). This is then developed into a hypothesis that primary names (with a little help from flux) correspond to the things, one to one and many (names or things? see below) (424e5). From these elements names, verbs and sentences[16] are composed. This proposal then generates a great deal of irony and scepticism (425d ff.),[17] which marks Cratylus' entry as interlocutor.

The argument against Cratylus' thesis commences at 428e; and its initial stages confront him with the dangers of denying falsehood (up to 433a). It is established by 429c that Cratylus rejects the expertise argument – that is, he denies that there are expert namegivers, and that names are made/applied correctly *or otherwise*; all names, if names, are correct. Thus 'Hermogenes' is not Hermogenes' name at all, since it fails to describe his nature; if it is a name, it is the name of something else whose nature it does describe. So, to call Hermogenes 'Hermogenes' is not false, but meaningless (cf. 430a). In short, when someone speaks, they say whatever they say; when someone fails to say what is they say nothing at all. So all successful statements are true; anything else mere babble. This formula is to be found in the Binder/Liesenborghs fragment of Prodicus,[18] and it is the sophistic position attacked in the *Sophist*.

Socrates gives the example of someone saying to Cratylus 'Greetings Athenian, Hermogenes son of Smicrion' (presumably the 'wrong' factor here is just 'Hermogenes', but the error is compounded by the fact that Cratylus claims that 'Hermogenes' is not even Hermogenes' name), and asks whether the whole statement is wrong or the parts. This is the distinction between semantic atomism and propositional holism (cf. the puzzles of *Soph.* 237ff.: are sentences false because some part fails to refer, or because they fail to refer altogether? Cratylus rejects both, arguing that the sentence is vain and empty – meaningless, not false. He can do this if his account of meaning is purely referential (either atomistically or holistically) and his account of truth, likewise, one of correspondence; then truth and meaning collapse into each other, and the only alternative to truth remains meaninglessness, not falsehood.

Socrates' first objection to this position runs from 430a–431b. Suppose someone muddles the pictures of two people, and reverses them; then the attribution of each picture to the wrong person will be incorrect, *the opposite* of (430c6) a correct attribution.[19] Thus any correct distribution has as its converse an incorrect one

[16] Complex enough for the *Sophist*; cf. Fine, op. cit.

[17] Where do the primary names come from? The gods? 'Ware god's eye view; cf. below. Barbarians? 'Ware 'barbarian souls'; cf. Heraclitus fr. 107 (DK).

[18] G. Binder and L. Liesenborghs 'Eine Zuweisung der Sentenz (οὐκ ἔστιν ἀντιλέγειν) an Prodikos von Keos' in *Sophistik*, ed. Classen (Darmstadt, 1976), 452–64.

[19] Cf. *Theaet.* 191a ff., the wax tablet. I suspect a strong connexion between the *Cratylus* and the *Philebus* (39a ff.) here.

(430d4–7); and likewise, true has as its converse[20] false, so if names can be correctly distributed, and this is telling the truth, their converse must be telling a falsehood. Cratylus resists the analogy with the attribution of likeness (430e1) but in so doing he misses the point of Socrates' objection. Socrates is not merely pressing an analogy: he is arguing that Cratylus is abusing 'correct' by denying its contrary in the context of naming. For 'correct' only *makes sense* in comparison to 'incorrect'; and 'true' is only meaningful in relation to 'false'. So to say 'everything is true' – a proposition to which Cratylus' account of naming is committed – is to botch the polar structure of 'true' versus 'false': there is no truth without falsehood.

Consider Plato's attitude, in the middle period, to pairs of polar opposites – 'large' and 'small', 'beautiful' and 'ugly'. In passages like *Rep.* 478, he appears to be committed to the view that these pairs are *explanatorily* deficient. That is, to understand these pairs, we must have recourse to a *non-polar* term or entity (cf. *Phaedo* 96–106) which will explain and resolve the puzzles inherent in the original pair. Thus pairs of properties, corresponding to pairs of predicates, are explained by (have as their *αἰτίαι*) *single* resolved forms (cf. *Parmenides* 130b).[21] So middle-period doctrine resists the idea that the polar structure of such pairs might itself be useful when it comes to understanding, and rejects such a possibility as essentially paradoxical (whence, of course, it drags us towards the (non-polar) truth, *Rep.* 524).

The present argument in the *Cratylus* clearly does not share such a view. On the contrary, it presents polar opposition as fundamental to the meaning of terms. Nor is it alone. Several passages in later dialogues display similar favour towards polarity – *Theaet.* 158b–d, for example, offers a Heraclitean analysis of asleep/awake, mad/sane. The first signs of a serious approach to the problem occur in various discussions of *relations*. In the *Phaedo* relations such as 'larger than' are resolved into the non-polar form (e.g. 74b; 102d ff.). But the *Theaetetus* (152d ff., picked up in the materialists' criterion of existence at *Soph.* 247e), the *Philebus* (24d ff.) and the *Politicus* (283d ff.) all suggest that relations are crucially relative. The *Theaetetus*' account of perception focuses upon the idea that qualities are relative to the perceiver (156d ff.) and so attempts to reduce *all* properties to relations. The *Philebus* more subtly distinguishes between the indeterminacy of polar pairs (warmer/colder etc. 24d) and the determinacy of non-polar terms (equal, double – contrast *Phil.* 25e with the conflations of *Phaedo* 97a ff.) and appears to improve on the *Theaetetus* by suggesting a classificatory difference between the determinate and the indeterminate, on the one hand, and the actual objects of the real world on the other (cf. *κατὰ φύσιν* of particular pleasures and pains at 31c3).[22] This is followed up by *Politicus* 283e 'The greater must not be *said* to be naturally greater than anything but the smaller', where once again

[20] Thus at 430d6 the *καί* is inferential, on this reading – equivalent to *ἄρα*.

[21] Echoed, I suggest, at *Phil.* 15a ff. Once again, I hedge my bets on dating, though I suspect the traditional late dating of the *Philebus* is correct. But cf. R. Waterfield, 'The place of the *Philebus* in Plato's dialogues', *Phronesis* 25 (1980), 270–305.

[22] But n.b. the controversies noted by J. Gosling, *Plato: Philebus* (Oxford, 1975), 185–206. For the view I suggest, it is crucial to observe two points: (a) that the only ontological commitment made in the passage is to the mixed class, composite of *πέρας* and *ἄπειρον* (*vide* the intrusion of *φύσις* at 25c11, the introduction of the composite; *γενέσεις* at 25e4, cf. 7–8; 26c7 etc.). (b) This is in contrast to the *explanatory* claim made for the *πέρας*/*ἄπειρον* pair. Reading back from the emphasis on explanation at 26e ff., we may conclude that material-sounding terminology (*ἐν τοῖς οὖσι*, 26c6; *ἐκ* 26d8; *ἀπεργάζεσθαι*, 25e–26a etc.) can in fact be cashed formally, as explanatory factors, not constitutive elements. If, then, we give due emphasis to Plato's interest in explanation, which need not require him to be any more profligate, ontologically, than Aristotle, then the formal aspect of the *Philebus* passage fits well with my present argument about Plato's discussion of meaning.

the polar pair may not be real objects, but formal constructs.[23] So the critical period suggests that polarity is an essential factor in meaning.

Truth and falsehood intrude on this scheme once truth-value is introduced as a quality (*Theaet.* 158e; cf. *Soph.* 262e, *Phil.* 37c and [Aristotle] *M.X.G.* 980a17 on the sophistic denial of falsehood). That truth-value is seen as a polar quality is made quite clear in the *Sophist* argument against the impossibility of falsehood. If the sophist denies falsehood, he denies truth along with it, suggests the E.S. For the true and the false (being and not-being) are on a par – understand one, and you understand both; lose your grip on one, and you lose the other to boot (243c2–5; 250e5–8; 257b9–c8). All these passages urge that polarity is crucial to *understanding* the pair; and it is this grasp of explanation that Socrates accuses Cratylus of getting wrong.

The polarity argument of *Crat.* 430c–d, therefore, is a direct attack upon the feasibility of denying falsehood. It has a further dimension when it appears as an attack upon a *realist* account of truth and meaning. Cratylus and his kind rely upon correspondence between the real object and some proposition to make the proposition both meaningful and true. So correspondence is a one-to-one correspondence. When, however, the meaning of a term is derived, not merely from its *referent*, but also from its relation to some other *term* (namely, its opposite), then realism is no longer the proper explanation of meaning, even if truth is still a matter of fit with the real. Consequently the polarity argument urges the realist to differentiate between truth and meaning; and in so doing he must abandon (or can be protected against) the paradox of falsehood.

Next (431eff.) Socrates gets a half-hearted Cratylus to concede that in naming, as in other skills, there can be good and bad exponents of the art – that is, that there can be experts. But this (cf. 386a, Cratylus' reluctance at 429b; *Theaet.* 179b; *Soph.* 252b) is lethal to the denial of falsehood; and Cratylus returns to his own defence.

Play has been made already (cf. e.g. 431b–c) with the distinction between the parts of a sentence and the sentence as a whole; and the argument so far would be effective against either an atomist or a holist account of truth and meaning. However, Cratylus now (432a) attempts to resuscitate his view by considering the elemental, primary names, and the relation between them and their nominata. For here, he claims, the relation is such as to allow for no errors. A complex may have some parts added or subtracted and thus generate falsehood; but not so for the primary relation between elements and elemental nominata. Any mistakes there, and the name is 'immediately different' (432a3) – as with number, where the figure must be an exact fit to the objects, or not fit at all.

But now Cratylus, with his restricted view of propriety in naming, lands in as much hot water as submerged Hermogenes. For he is committed to the idea that the only correct names are those which encapsulate the essence of the nominatum. If each thing has just one essence, it will have either just one name, or a set of synonyms as its name.

[23] Waterfield, op. cit., suggests that the *Philebus* conflates the polar approach to relations with the idea that relations are prone to excess (cf. 52c); whereas the *Politicus* differentiates the two. The latter passage does indeed make the requisite distinction. However, there is more: the *Politicus* distinguishes between the polar notion *in speech* (283d11) and excess *in words and deeds* (283e4). The latter, like the excessive pleasures of the *Philebus*, are certainly real – entities or events. The former, however, is a formal point, that when we say 'larger' we imply 'than some smaller', which tells us not only about the composition of the world, but about our conceptual structure. If Waterfield's early dating of the *Philebus* is rejected, we may see in the *Politicus* passage support for the view that the *Philebus* also contains this formal argument, that some *terms* are to be understood only in relation to a polar structure. This polarity, not some *real* indeterminacy, is their flux (*Phil.* 24d).

But this rules out both any accidental predication and any essential predication that fails to state the complete essence. So the name will fit the named exactly and – if the name resembles the named – the two will be identical, so that either there are two originals, or the name collapses into the named. At that, there is no naming at all.

Cratylus' extreme view of the nature of naming here has affinities with the account of predication put forward by the late-learners at *Sophist* 251e.[24] They allow only one sort of proposition: 'man is man' or 'the good is (the) good'; and refuse to concede any but a one-to-one relation between words and things. From their position the denial of falsehood follows; as does the denial of any conversational variety whatever – a topic, once said, is exhausted. And this is seen as absurd. Cratylus now denies the one/many relation between words and things (asserted at 424e)[25] and insists, like the late-learners, on some one-to-one relation (the *οἰκεῖος λόγος*). But Socrates shows that this forces him not only into the denial of falsehood, but into the more extreme position, that no naming can take place at all, since the primary names have become swallowed up into the natural things. Thus Cratylus' theory of naming will be no theory at all. Cratylus gives in (432d10). As Socrates points out, the denial of falsehood together with the assertion of a naturalist account of naming compels Cratylus to contradict himself (433b4–5).

Thereafer (433b–436e) Socrates performs the converse move on Cratylus to that he adopted against Hermogenes (387aff.), by getting him to concede that names must be conventional (to some degree) so that we must guard against their deceiving us as we come to find things out. This, effectively, is the *coup de grâce* against the realist account of names. For now deception and falsehood are seen to be possible; this, paradoxically perhaps, renders inquiry possible, and thence dialectic.

So the *Cratylus* mounts three arguments against the realist position. The first, the polarity argument, revolving round the antithesis between true and false, is equivalent to the *Sophist*'s second counter-argument, the parity assumption.[26] The second, which also invokes the strange *οἰκεῖος λόγος* position of the *Sophist*'s late-learners, is the same as the *Sophist*'s claim that the realist theory is self-refuting because it is unutterable; while the third gives us the further complaint that realism destroys dialectic, also found in the *Sophist*. As far as the *Cratylus* is concerned, Socrates restricts himself to the attack on realism, and the implication that, at least, truth and meaning must be distinguished to solve the difficulty. It remains for the *Sophist* to come to grips with the mechanisms of such a distinction.

III. *Coming to know is impossible*

1

By *Cratylus* 436, deadlock has been reached, since all the participants have conceded that there must be some connection between naming and teaching (communication); but they are unable to see how the names might perform that task. It is decided, therefore, to turn to the named, the things in the world, *τὰ πράγματα*. And these, according to the hypothesis of 411, are in flux. Then we are introduced to Socrates' dream (439c).[27]

[24] Some irony, perhaps, in Socrates' remark about 'coming to the truth later than we should have done' (433b1)?

[25] Cf. above, p. 133; presumably 'many' will be predicates, although the realist late-learners must also deny a plurality of *properties* to any one thing.

[26] Cf. G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato on Not-Being' in Vlastos, *Plato I* (New York, 1971), 223–67.

[27] Cf. M. F. Burnyeat, 'The material and sources of Plato's dream', *Phronesis* 15 (1970), 101–22, on dream imagery in Plato. It is important to notice that a dream could reveal an important truth; but equally it could postulate a false view of the world – that this hypothesis of the Forms is Socrates' dream does not vouch for his commitment to it.

The traditional interpretation[28] construes this as a daydream. Socrates argues, on this view, that forms are not in flux; that what is in flux is unknowable; and consequently that we must concede the existence of forms. So the joint hypothesis of extreme flux (439c) and the forms (439d) is exploded by the absurdity of supposing the forms to be in flux (439d–440a). If they were, they would be indeterminate; they are not indeterminate, so they are not in flux. Therefore they exist.

This is a bad argument if it is indeed designed to show that forms exist, for two reasons. Firstly, Socrates must be arguing from the impossibility of flux (things can neither be known nor be individuals, 439e1) to the necessity of forms. For the inference to be persuasive (a) the flux doctrine must be initially plausible and (b) there must be no *tertium quid* between flux and the forms. But (a) the flux doctrine is first presented in the ironical context of the etymologies (411) and then, though it is dropped in the arguments with Cratylus, reintroduced under suspicion at 437c. 439c2 makes it clear that the doctrine has but hypothetical status; and so it is a weak basis for the final argument. Moreover (b) the doubts about flux that are hinted at earlier make the ruling out of some *tertium quid* – such as changeable but not flux-ridden particulars – highly dubious. So the inference from flux to forms is faulty.

Secondly, Socrates appears to be advancing an argument about the different character of flux and the forms. Flux is totally changing; forms are, *ex hypothesi*, totally stable (439d5). So it would be absurd to characterise forms by flux. True enough; but then to infer the existence of forms from their incompatibility with flux is a mere *petitio principii*: the absurdity is clearly built into the premisses, so the argument can either be taken to show anything at all, or it cannot proceed constructively.

The argument is not impressive; but the text allows it – the traditional view can be read into the passage, and Plato is certainly not proof against fallacy. However, the passage may be read differently, to produce an argument that is neither incomplete nor trivially fallacious. What is more, this alternative reading echoes other arguments in other dialogues – dialogues of the critical period. The following is a schematised version of the argument, on this alternative reading.

The hypothesis

(A) 1. (We think that) there are such things as the beautiful itself, etc. (they are *ὄντα*, 439c8).
2. Particulars seem to be in flux (439d4, cf. c2).[29]
3. The particular beautiful is different from the beautiful itself.
4. The beautiful itself is always such as it is (439d5).

[28] Cf. e.g. J. V. Luce, 'The theory of ideas in the *Cratylus*', *Phronesis* 10 (1965), 21–36.

[29] The text is tricky here; so is its interpretation. Burnet transmits: *αὐτὸ τοίνυν ἐκεῖνο σκεψώμεθα, μὴ εἰ πρόσωπόν τί ἐστιν καλὸν ἤ τι τῶν τοιούτων, καὶ δοκεῖ ταῦτα πάντα ῥεῖν· ἀλλ' αὐτό, φῶμεν, τὸ καλὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον ἀεί ἐστιν οἷόν ἐστιν;* The grammar is awkward. Luce, op. cit. 33, wishes to delete *καὶ . . . ῥεῖν*, and with it any reference to flux; so also Schanz. We do, however, have the flux hypothesis already on offer, 411 and 439c, so such a deletion is of little effect. Stallbaum and Méridier interpret the clause as a further hypothetical – that is (a) suppose there are particulars and (b) suppose them to be in flux. Jowett goes for epexegesis: suppose there are particulars – to be a particular is to be flux-ridden. Given my strictures against finding some 'real' Platonic doctrine lurking in the puzzles, either of the last two possibilities will do for the final argument to go through, using as its premiss the *complex hypothesis* that forms and particulars in flux are the (only) two sets of things that exist. Thus the final argument is based on the antithesis between completely stable entities and totally flux-ridden entities. So the conclusion, rather than ignoring the *tertium quid* of modified flux, might be seen to point to it, on the collapse of the original antithesis.

The ontological argument

(B) 5. For if it[30] always changes, we should not be able to say correctly[31] that it is now this, now that, for as we speak it changes (439d8–11).

6. So it is never thus or something, for if it were, then it would not be changing (439e1–3).[32]

(C) 7. If something is always[33] the same, it never changes or moves, stepping out of its own form (439e3–5).

8. But then it[34] would never become[35] known by anyone (439e7).

9. For at the approach of the knower[36] it would become different and so something else, so that it would not be known what sort of something, or how disposed, it is; there is no knowing what is indeterminate[37] (440a1–4).

The epistemological argument

10. There will not be knowledge if everything is in flux (440a6–7).

(D) 11. If the knowledge itself does not change from being knowledge it will persist always and always be knowledge (440a7–9).

12. If there is always a knower and so there is the known, and there is the beautiful itself etc., these are completely unlike flux (440b4–c1).[38]

(E) 13. For if knowledge changes from being knowledge into something other than knowledge, it will not be knowledge; if it always changes, it will always cease to be knowledge (440a9–b4).

[30] 'It' refers back to some form, postulated at d5. 5 is inferred from 4 (αὐτό at d8); but the nature of the inference is extraordinarily obscure. Socrates' procedure, however, appears to be to suppose that some entity (*not* a particular, because they are already hypothesised as flux-ridden) can be such as to sustain total stability, partial stability/partial change (cf. 439e2), or total flux. He then explores the cognitive reliability of such an entity. 'It' here, then, could equally be understood as 'something', provided we recognise that this 'something' *could* be totally stable; on the hypothesis, this could only be a form.

[31] The dialogue has explored the denial of falsehood, and the denial of dialectic that follows from that (438aff.). Saying something correctly, then, is directly connected to knowing or understanding it. So the move from 'saying correctly' to 'knowing' which the argument makes so readily is warranted by the dialogue as a whole. Consequently step 7 may be understood as a separate strand in the argument, not a further supplement.

[32] Cf. *Theaet.* 183a–b.

[33] Socrates moves swiftly but clearly from 'if it ever is the same, at that time it does not change' (e2) to 'if it always stays the same, it never changes'. The possibility of partial stability – the *tertium quid* – is thus mentioned but not explored. The argument is operating, then, on the explicit disjunction of total stability and total flux.

[34] Here the subject is taken readily from the preceding sentence, and not – as others take it – from the one before that. The object in question is now characterised as totally stable (e3), and as such it is argued to be unknowable. οὐδέ at e7 is then to be read as intensified – 'not even' – or as answering δέ at e3. ἀλλὰ μήν at 37 corresponds, not to πῶς ἄν at e1, but to πῶς ἄν at e4, thus making sure of the connexion between e3–5 and e7.

[35] The verb used here is the aorist passive, implying being acted upon towards an end, rather than being in a completed state. Cf. J. Lyons, *Structural Semantics* (Cambridge, 1963), 112ff.

[36] The genitive absolute here could, as the traditionalists aver, simply have temporal significance: the object is always different, *whenever* the knower comes along. However, the causal inference I suggest – *since* the knower comes along, the object becomes different – is supported by the ἅμα of e7, since the simultaneity of knower coming along and the change in the object seems to be significant. There is nothing in the text, moreover, to rule out such a reading.

[37] This, of course, reminds us of the section on Euthydemus; cf. above, pp. 132f., below, p. 140.

[38] Here, for the sake of clarifying my reading of the argument, I have reordered the steps. In the text 11 is followed by 13, then 14 and finally 12. I expand below how I suppose these moves to develop an epistemological dilemma.

14. So there will be no one who comes to know, and nothing that comes to[39] be known.

If the argument is construed in this way, Plato presents us with a dualist hypothesis (A), of particulars in flux, on the one hand, and totally stable forms, on the other. Thereafter the contrast between total flux and total stability is treated as exclusive and exhaustive. Then the properties of flux and stability are severally attributed to some entity (some form, since particulars are only in flux); and it is shown how either alternative results in absurdity. Thus the paired arguments against the hypothesis take the form of dilemma; the first dilemma focuses, as I shall argue, upon ontological considerations, the second is epistemological. The conclusion, if we suppose that stability and change are exclusive and exhaustive, is that we can never *come to know* anything.[40]

Now this conclusion is absurd. For if it is true, then we have come to know *that*, even under Socratic conditions,[41] since we have grounds for believing it true, some basis for our understanding of the conclusion. In short, the dialogue implies the sceptical paradox 'I know that I know nothing', in vicious form. And this concluding ἀπορία is rendered crueller still by the paradox that precedes it, namely the attack upon the possibility of falsehood. The impasse at the end of the dialogue benefits from this cumulative effect.

2

The hypothesis (*A*) contains two apparently familiar propositions: firstly that the particulars of the phenomenal world are in flux; and secondly that they differ from their eponymous forms. How closely does this hypothesis correspond to standard middle-period Platonic doctrine?

(a) *Flux*. Aristotle notoriously tells us that Plato developed his theory of forms as a response to the Heraclitean theory of flux (e.g. *Met.* 987a32ff.); and the present passage appears to support such an interpretation of Plato's middle-period metaphysics. However, Irwin and others[42] have recently argued – persuasively – that in the *loci classici* of *Phaedo* 74ff. and *Rep.* 478ff. Plato is not worried by the total flux of *Theaetetus* 153ff., but rather at a loss to explain how particulars, which are characterised by compresent opposites, can be cognitively stable. That is to say, although Plato alludes to the fact that change over time, and generation and destruction, may affect the knowability of particulars (cf. e.g. *Rep.* 485b), it is the synchronic problem of compresent opposites that exercises him. Cognitive unreliability, then, not substantial flux, is his difficulty.[43] Thus at *Rep.* 523 the comparison of these

[39] The change of tense – future in 13, present in 14 – emphasises the fact that *coming to know* is what is at stake here.

[40] The tense variations noticed above make it quite clear that the problem concerns *coming to know* – cf. discussion of the god's eye view, below; and compare the recollection solution at *Meno* 85d.

[41] Cf. M. F. Burnyeat, 'Socrates and the jury: paradoxes in Plato's distinction between knowledge and true belief', *PAS* (Supplement) 1980, 173–91.

[42] T. H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *PhQ* 27 (1977), 1–17; A. Nehamas, 'Predication and Forms of opposites in the Phaedo', *Rev. Met.* 26 (1972–3), 471–91 and 'Plato on the imperfection of the sensible world', *APhQ* 12 (1975), 105–17; W. R. Jordan, *Plato's Arguments for the Forms* (*Cambridge Philological Society Supplement*, 1983).

[43] Thus Plato need not, to get his own arguments going, be committed to substantial flux. It remains true, however, that substantial flux, conversely, implies cognitive unreliability, as *Theaet.* 181–3 makes clear. So the compresence of opposites is a weaker problem than substantial flux.

fingers is provoking not because the fingers themselves are subject to constant change, but because they remain the same, while admitting contradictory properties; we are puzzled, and dragged towards the truth.

The *Cratylus*, however, discusses flux, but entirely omits to mention the compresence of opposites. Two doctrines related to flux appear in two different contexts in the dialogue: firstly at 386d–e, as the thesis of Euthydemus; and secondly from 411 and thereafter to our present passage, as the thesis of the ancients.[44]

Euthydemus proposes that: 'Everything is likewise to everyone at the same time and always' (386d4). This thesis is differentiated from the epistemological relativism of Protagoras: 'each thing is private to each person' (386d9). Euthydemus advocates, not the privacy of judgement, but total indeterminacy based on ontological, not epistemological considerations. He does not argue that we do not know whether anything is determinate; but that things are actually indeterminate, a proposition whose counter-example is that some thing is determinately such-and-such.[45]

This is the synchronic antecedent of a diachronic theory of total flux: (x is a variable ranging over particulars) (t is a variable ranging over times)

$$\text{Euthydemus} = (x)(Fx \supset -Fx \,.\, -Fx \supset Fx)$$
$$\text{Total flux} = (x)(t)(Fx \text{ at } t \supset -Fx \text{ at } t+1)$$

Euthydemus violates the law of non-contradiction; the exponent of total flux – the Heraclitus of *Theaet.* 181–3 – is not committed to a contradiction, although he runs into other serious logical difficulties, as the *Theaetetus* reveals. Neither Euthydemus nor Heraclitus deals with the compresence of opposites, which is neither contradictory nor logically vicious:

(r is a variable ranging over respects in virtue of which a property is held)

$$(x)\ (\exists r_1)(\exists r_2)(r_1 \neq r_2 \,.\, Fx \text{ in } r_1 \,.\, -Fx \text{ in } r_2)$$

This too admits a diachronic variant – since time is an instance of a respect – but does not entail it:

$$(x)(\exists t_1)(\exists t_2)\ (t_1 \neq t_2 \,.\, Fx \text{ at } t_1 \,.\, -Fx \text{ at } t_2)$$

The former of these two schemata tells us that all particulars are subject to the compresence of opposites; the latter that all particulars are subject to change (that is, changeable, not necessarily changing). Plato would concede both, in the *Phaedo* or the *Republic*; but (as the schemata make clear) he is not thus committed to any serious indeterminacy apart from cognitive unreliability.

The thesis of the ancients looks like the diachronic version, total flux: 'It seems to them that things are carried around and are in flux (φέρεσθαι) in every way. Indeed they explain this not by citing some internal condition of their own as the cause of this belief, but by claiming that things themselves naturally are like this, that none of them is stable or firm (βέβαιος), but they flow and are carried and are full of all flux and generation' (411b8–c5). Here the chronological aspect is vital; so this is a different theory from Euthydemus'. The ancients' theory of natural flux is still under consideration in the final argument (cf. 439c).

It is characteristic, then, of both Euthydemus' indeterminacy and the ancients' flux that they are naturalist, as the 411 passage stresses. That is, any indeterminacy or any change is a real one, in the objects themselves, not merely in the eye or the mind of

[44] This is a common enough device in Plato – cf. e.g. *Phil.* 16c; 30d; 43a; but it is impossible to tell whether, in any of these contexts, the ancients are cited with approval or otherwise.

[45] For example, our own actions, 387aff.; cf. below, n. 49.

the beholder. As such the theories are clearly and explicitly (cf. 386d, 411c) marked off from the two relativist theses on offer: Hermogenes' 'conventionalism' and Protagoras' 'Man is the measure' doctrine. Thus, indeed, these flux theories savour of Plato's middle-period view (compare the naturalism of *Symp.* 211), but as the schemata above make clear, both Euthydemus and the ancients are too strong for the stomach of the *Phaedo*.

The *Timaeus*, however, is another matter. Here the flux of the physical world is contrasted with the permanence of the intelligible (28a ff.); and flux is deduced from the antapodosis of the elements (48e ff.). Here, then, the diachronic factor is stressed; and this gives rise to the tripartite ontology. There are the παραδείγματα, and there is the physical world, composed of the indeterminate receptacle and the shifting images of the παραδείγματα. The receptacle is totally characterless; and so (by the excluded middle) it is equivalent to the contradictions of Euthydemus' world (*Crat.* 386). The images, on the other hand, have character, but no stability, so that they may only be described as a 'such', never a 'this'. They, then, are subject to flux – we should compare *Crat.* 439d–e and Heraclitus' secret doctrine at *Theaet.* 152.[46]

Now when it comes to chronology, of course, the *Timaeus* is a movable feast: 'late-late' or 'late-middle' relative to the rest of the Platonic corpus. So it is slippery to deal with when it comes to dating other dialogues. But its discussion of flux meshes well with the *Cratylus*' bipartite distinction between synchronic indeterminacy (= the receptacle) and diachronic flux (= the images of forms). Moreover, it could be argued that the *Timaeus*' cosmology provides us with the *tertium quid* – changeable but accessible particulars – missing from the *Cratylus*' last argument. So might we conclude that the *Cratylus* moves with the *Timaeus*? Matters are not so simple.

The *Timaeus* suggests that the physical world is poised between total indeterminacy and total stability; and it proposes an epistemology to fit. For corresponding to the stability or otherwise of reality is the stability or otherwise of our epistemic states (37a ff., 51e ff.); knowledge is of the stable, belief of the changing: the world and our minds fit exactly.[47]

Two dialogues, however, pick up the terminology of fixity (βεβαιότης) and subject it to critical scrutiny. At *Phaedrus* 275a (the book-paradox) Plato writes – in a book – that books, which appear to be fixed and always to say the same thing, in fact roll around; they are unreliable. I have argued elsewhere[48] that this paradox is rich in its implications for Plato's dialectical method in works subsequent to the *Phaedrus*; it is important not least because it attacks the apparently secure correspondence between words and the world (cf. also *Theaet.* 180a).

The *Cratylus* performs the same function. Euthydemus' thesis has been rejected on the grounds that there is some determinacy, βέβαιος οὐσία (386e1) in the world (as we may see by introspection into our own actions).[49] It is then replaced by the milder,

[46] *Theaet.* 152d5 can be read as a problem of compresence; *vide* J. McDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1973), *ad loc.* However, the tense here is future, as opposed to the present tense of *Phaedo* 74b8; and, crucially, the problem is then explained by means of a theory of change – the theory of perception – which implies a diachronic problem.

[47] With the *Timaeus* we may compare the *Philebus*, which contrasts the fixity of the monads (15b) with the indeterminacy of particulars, and gives us a two-tier epistemology to match (62a). Beware the 'indeterminacy' of the *Philebus*, however – the particulars of 15b appear to be only numerically indeterminate; while the ἄπειρον of 24d is in flux, indeed, but perhaps only because it covers any polar spectrum, rather than describing some set of indeterminate real objects. *Philebus* 24d will be revisited below. On dating, cf. here R. Waterfield, 'The place of the *Philebus* in Plato's Dialogues', *Phronesis* 25 (1980), 270–305.

[48] 'Paradox in Plato's *Phaedrus*'.

[49] The argument about function, 387d ff., is generally construed as a teleological account of

diachronic thesis of the ancients, which in its turn appears to be equivalent to the Heraclitean thesis of *Theaet.* 152d2ff.[50] Neither, as we have seen, is equivalent to Plato's view in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*. In the *Cratylus*, moreover, the *Timaeus* view of correspondence between cognition and the world is seriously attacked, to the extent that when the final argument discloses the unknowability of unstable flux-ridden objects, the attempt to come at the world from its names has already collapsed. That is, no ready correspondence can be found between names (descriptions) and things; indeed, the names fail to give us direct information about the things just because they do *not* fit.

The flux of the *Timaeus* is present in the *Cratylus*; but it is under attack. For the *Cratylus* brings into question the fixity of names; the fixity of things; and the security of the correspondence between the two. The theme of βεβαιότης therefore marks the puzzles of *Phaedrus* and *Cratylus* off from the dogmatism of the *Timaeus*, which is in turn different in its approach to the nature of particulars from the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. The dating of the *Timaeus* is not of direct concern to this paper.[51] The characteristics remarked on here are consistent with either a 'late-middle' *or* a 'late-late' dating. Thus, either Plato wrote the *Timaeus* first, and then came to see that its epistemology was too sanguine; or he proposed the *Timaeus* epistemology and ontology as a compromise to answer the puzzles of the *Cratylus*. Either way, the connexion between the *Cratylus* and the classic doctrines of the middle period is rendered suspect. And its scepticism is to be associated with the critical approaches of the *Phaedrus* and the *Theaetetus*.

(b) *The forms.* It is traditional that some theory of forms makes two appearances in the *Cratylus*:[52] firstly at 389bff. in the shuttle analogy; and secondly, introduced without argument in the hypothesis of the last argument (as such, of course, the procedure is unexceptionable). Both passages are attenuated: do they present separable, transcendent forms? The forms are ever changeless (439d5), and so, presumably, eternal (411c5 implies that destruction counts as a change). They could, then, be separate and mind-independent, like the forms of *Phaedo* 78. Or they could be mind-dependent. But if they are dependent on the minds of men, they must be changeless by continuity in the minds of men; and that would endanger the constancy of their changelessness and associate them too closely with the objects of change and decay (cf. 411c5). So, they could be ideas in the mind of god and thus secure eternal changelessness. The argument that follows attacks both independent changeless forms and ideas in the mind of god, as we shall see. Consequently, any thesis about changeless universals, including Plato's own, is under fire.

3

The ontological argument (B and C)

The ontological argument presents a dilemma upon the antithesis of flux and the forms. B, the first arm, argues that if an object is in flux, then it is too unstable to count as an individual at all; consequently, we may infer, such an object is not an object. The second arm, C, prevents us from retreating from the first by postulating stable entities such as forms. For such entities, if they become known, change; so they cease to be

naming. It is, however, clearly associated with the claim that things have some fixed nature; and would provide us with *direct, personal* evidence for that without recourse to empirical data which are external to us, and so question-begging, on Euthydemus' thesis.

[50] That the *Theaet.* is not making a relativist point here is made clear by the naturalist arguments to support the secret doctrine at 153a–d.

[51] Although cf. n. 67 below on stylometric considerations.

[52] Cf. above, nn. 1–2.

characterised by total stability, and become instead members of the complementary set, flux-ridden objects – and these, as **B** has shown, fail to qualify as objects at all.

So the function of this dilemma is to attack the ontological status of the objects offered by the hypothesis, whether they be totally changing, or totally stable. The two arms are asymmetrical inasmuch as **B** presupposes that the objects of flux are constantly changing irrespective of whether they become known, while C argues that it is the approach of the knower that makes the objects of knowledge subject to change. The dilemma is effective only if two premisses are granted – firstly that the antithesis between flux and the forms is exhaustive, and secondly that becoming known constitutes a *real* change for the object of knowledge.

This second assumption calls to mind, whether pre-emptively or not, the discussion of γίγνεσθαι at *Theaet.* 154. But the argument's affinities lie most clearly with the battle of the giants (*Soph.* 246e–249e), where the materialists confront the idealists.[53] Each party takes an uncompromising stand and declares that the entities they admit are all the entities possible, and the only entities possible.

First the materialists are induced to concede that merely having body is not a necessary condition for existence. For, if it were, the existence of souls and of properties of value would be excluded, which would be absurd (cf. *Theaet.* 155e). So the Eleatic Stranger (E.S.) and the materialists agree on a criterion for existing – the power to do or to suffer (247e); that is, all and only agents and patients are entities.

The idealists, however, dispute this criterion. Their position is outlined at 248a7–15:

(i) Being and becoming are distinct.
(ii) We are related to becoming by our senses.
(iii) We are related to being through reason in our soul.
(iv) Becoming is changeable (ἄλλοτε ἄλλως).
(v) Being is always the same.[54]

Clearly these idealists bear some resemblance to the Socrates of the *Cratylus*. They differ inasmuch as the idealists do not offer, *ab initio*, a thesis of flux; whereas the Socrates of the *Cratylus* does. The idealists give a diachronic version of the compresence of opposites at (iv):

$$(x)\ (\exists t)(Fx \text{ at } t\,.\ -Fx \text{ at } t+1)$$

which, as we have seen, is a variant of the compresence of opposites of *Phaedo* 74 etc. And the correspondence urged here between the phenomenal world and our senses, on the one hand, and the ideal world and reason, on the other, echoes *Rep.* 478 directly (cf. *Tim.* 51e). So perhaps these 'friends of the forms' stand for classic Platonism.

The E.S. first tries to bring 'being related' (κοινωνεῖν) at (ii) and (iii) into line with action and passion, the criteria of existence already proposed. But the idealists resist (248c) and the E.S. resorts to argument. The structure of the passage that follows (248d–249d) is a dilemmatic treatment of the being/becoming antithesis. First the connexion between reason and being is attacked at two points[55] (248d–e; 249a–b); and then, on the other horn, any connexion between reason and becoming, the phenomenal world, is repudiated. Then the apparent impossibility of reason is shown to be (self-evidently) absurd (249c), and an ironical compromise is reached (249d).

The arguments against being:

I. 1. Soul knows, being is known (= the idealists' (iii)).

[53] Cf. G. E. L. Owen, 'Plato & Parmenides on the timeless present' in *The Presocratics*, ed. Mourelatos (New York, 1974), 290.

[54] Lofty or *divine* (σεμνόν) immobility – cf. *Phdr.* 275d6, an ironical term? Cf. below on the god's eye view.

[55] The connective at 248e6 indicates a break between two arguments.

2. If knowing is acting, being known must be being acted upon.

3. Being, inasmuch as it is known, will be acted upon, *and thus moved* (248d–e).[56]

This conclusion is thought to contradict the idealists' (v) (248e4). The idealists resist this move too, denying, even before it is made, that knowing and being known have anything to do with action and passion. The denial is phrased in pseudo-technical language (d5) from b5; but the argument which is then ironically (cf. μανθάνω, 'I see, so...' at d10) deployed against someone who would not make the denial turns out to commit the idealists to the absurdity that *knowing* is not ποιεῖν τι – 'doing something'. This flies in the face of the common-sense assumptions about what a δύναμις is (247d–e); and knowledge, traditionally in Plato (cf. *Rep.* 477), is a δύναμις. So argument I only *appears* to miss the mark: its ironical context makes clear that it does not.

II. 1. Mind must be present to being.

2. If mind, then life.

3. If life, then soul.

4. If mind, life and soul, then motion.

5. So, if being is immovable, there is no mind for anyone about anything (249a–b).

II clearly differs from I in the nature of its conclusion – I points to an ontological absurdity, II to an epistemological one. Are they otherwise the same? II.1 is ambiguous between 'being is thought about' and 'being thinks'. The former would bring II into line with I.3, but II would then collapse at 4 → 5. For II.1 would on this interpretation allow the distinction between minds and what is thought by minds. The argument (II.2–4) has shown that minds move, while what is thought, *ex hypothesi*, does not; it shows, then, that there is a difference between moving minds and the unmoving object of thought. The conclusion will only follow if it is insisted that minds and what is thought must both have the same characteristics – either both mobile or both immobile. This is to favour the latter interpretation, 'being thinks'. But what warrant for that? II needs further analysis of *mind* – its epistemological support will be forthcoming below, where I shall argue that it is bolstered by the final argument of the *Cratylus*, and an argument in the *Parmenides*.

The argument against becoming:

III. If everything is in flux, there is no mind about anything (249b8).

Here, as in I, ontological considerations force us to concede the impossibility of thinking. Disregarding II *pro tem.*, I and III form a dilemma upon the antithesis of the total stability of idealism (such as the classical theory of Forms) and total flux. That is, the position of the idealists has shifted from the beginning of the argument – it is now identical with the hypothesis of Socrates at *Cratylus* 439c–d. And, like Socrates, the idealists find themselves in the absurd position of denying thought or knowledge altogether – absurd because, of course, there is thinking (249c6 ff.).

So the E.S. proposes a compromise – we should have our cake and eat it (249d3) and insist that being is both moved and unmoved. Let not the irony of the bland compromise pass unnoticed. The *Sophist* develops from this point into a discussion of the formal relations between terms such as 'being', 'motion', 'rest', 'same' and 'different' – μέγιστα γένη of 254 ff. But these terms are tricky because they appear to be contradictory, and even more puzzling when they appear instantiated in the same object (like the fingers of *Rep.* 523). In the middle period, Plato proposed an escape route for the puzzles of the compresence of opposites in his theory of forms, absolute, cognitively reliable terms, free from the dangers of contradiction. But now these

[56] Cf. here G. Vlastos, 'Am ambiguity in the *Sophist*: Appendix I' in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973), 309–17 on the enthymemes here.

entities, reliable though they may be, turn out to be cognitively inaccessible, according to the present dilemma. The only way to make them accessible, it ironically appears, is to characterise them by motion and rest, and to embroil them in the compresence of opposites.

So the *Sophist* develops the same dilemma as the *Cratylus*, albeit in attenuated form. Both dialogues focus on the problem of coming to know (cf. γενόμενον at *Soph.* 249c3) as it affects the flux/forms dichotomy. Even on the assumption of correspondence between minds and the world, the dichotomy is not, of course, exhaustive; since it allows for – or even demands – some third type of moderately stable entity in between. That granted, are these good arguments against flux and the forms as objects of cognition?

Flux: *Cratylus* B; *Sophist* III. This argument against the knowability of objects in flux is well developed at *Theaet.* 181–3. If the objects in the world are constantly changing, both in place and in all qualities, they can never be stable in any respect which might individualise them. But then if talk is referential, it must have individuals to refer to; and in the world of flux there are none. So the world of flux precludes reference; so that it itself defies mention. Thus the theory of flux is unspeakable, and so self-refuting (*Theaet.* 183b4).

As it stands, the argument is plausible. But the *Theaetetus*' formulation of it, which is clearly echoed at *Crat.* 439d, less clearly at *Soph.* 249b, makes clear how extreme the theory of flux must be to run the risk of self-refutation: any theory of flux which allowed constant locomotion without constant qualitative change – Epicurus' atomism, for example – would survive.[57] So the vital lesson to be learned is that we need proper criteria of identity over time for a good account of reference: such criteria need not, of course, commit us to the total fixity of the objects thus defined.

Forms: *Cratylus* C; *Sophist* I. What grounds does Plato have for asserting that becoming thought is a change for the changeless objects of thought? Could the idealists counter, perhaps, that although the form of the beautiful is changeless in respect of being beautiful, it may change in other respects? That is, while beautiful is a special property of the form, and special properties are changeless[58] (or, in a parallel argument, non-compresent), the generic[59] properties of the forms might be subject to change (or compresence). Plato himself would not, in the middle period, countenance such a compromise; thus *Phaedo* 78d: 'The equal itself, the beautiful itself...each is always what it is, being singleformed (μονοειδές) itself by itself, having the same character in the same respects, and never in any respect or any way admits any change...'.

Or, the idealists could plead equivocation by the E.S. on 'change'. Any change is a 'Cambridge' change which records the switch of truth value of a proposition without implying any alteration of the things mentioned in the proposition.[60] Some changes, however, are also 'real' changes, genuine alterations in the thing in question. Becoming thought (or becoming known) seems to be a Cambridge change only, and so innocuous to the thought (or known) object. So the argument collapses.

[57] So, of course, would a modified version of the *Theaetetus*' theory of perception which insisted only on numerical non-identity between one event of perceiving and the next; Plato's silent assimilation of locomotion and qualitative change in both *Soph.* and *Crat.* is rendered suspect by *Theaet.* 181c–d.

[58] Cf. Vlastos, op. cit.; Owen, 'Dialectic and eristic in the treatment of the Forms' in *Aristotle on Dialectic*, ed. Owen (Oxford, 1968), 103–25; D. Keyt, 'Plato's paradox that the immutable is unknowable', *PhQ* 19 (1969), 1–14.

[59] Cf. Keyt, 'The mad craftsman of Plato's *Timaeus*', *PhR* 81 (1971).

[60] Cf. P. Geach, *God and the Soul*, 71ff.

This defence might be supported by the puzzles about becoming at *Theaet.* 154. Socrates is arguing that perceptual qualities are natural neither to the perceived object nor the perceiver, on their own, but come into being as the result of the relation between perceiver and perceived; that is, perceptual qualities are essentially relational.[61] Otherwise, Socrates claims, when someone (else) came along to an object, or when something that had already come into contact with it changed in some way,[62] the object itself would, while suffering nothing, become different (154b3 ff.). This view is rejected as absurd. Moreover, it appears to rest on ignoring the distinction between real and Cambridge change. For it conflates relational changes (or differences) – such as six being larger than two but then smaller than ten – and real changes – growth or decay. The point of this may just be to treat all change as relational; but the puzzles could be designed to differentiate between Cambridge and real change.[63] Then any later work would be in a position to exploit the distinction; and both the *Sophist* and the *Cratylus*, were it later, could be seen to have the theory of forms up their sleeves.

Even so, will the Cambridge/real distinction let the idealists off the hook? 'Becoming thought' is not always a Cambridge change. If what is thought (some idea) is mind-dependent, then becoming thought is becoming dependent on some mind; so becoming thought is a very real change for the idea. If ideas are mind-dependent in the sense of being in the mind of god, then they do not *become* thought (by god) at all, at least in Plato's view (more below); so the distinction is irrelevant. If, on the other hand, what is thought is mind-independent, as a separate Platonic form is, then perhaps 'becoming thought' is Cantabrigian for it.

Two different arguments suggest themselves to me in support of the view that the Platonic forms are really changed when they become thought, so that the ontological argument is telling against the middle-period theory.

Firstly, suppose we construe the *Theaetetus* argument, not as a resolution of the real/Cambridge issue, but as an attack upon it. That is, the *Theaetetus* may be arguing that the distinction between Cambridge and real change is hard to grasp. Why should this be so? In the middle period, Plato presents moral values as the *real* (*natural*) properties of the objects which are valued: values, that is, are facts, not due to the perspective of the valuer (cf. *Symp.* 211). Alcibiades and Charmides are beautiful in themselves, irrespective of whether we appreciate them. This objectivist view of aesthetic and moral (cf. *Grg.* 474ff.) properties is controversial, but comprehensible. Plato extends it, however, to cover relations also (cf. his treatment of φίλος, which is both a relation and a value, *Lysis* 215ff.). Thus for one stick to be equal to another entails that the first is equal in itself, albeit in some other relation it is also unequal. So relational terms stand for real properties, actual characteristics of the relata (*Phd.* 74): it is this clash of real properties that makes the middle-sized finger so provoking (*Rep.* 523). Plato's moral intellectualism pushes him, I suppose, towards naturalism: grant it for values, and there might appear good reason to assert it for relations. But if these properties are natural, any change in some object's relation to some other object must be real, not bogus. So Plato, in the middle period at least, might well deny the Cambridge/real distinction: so this defence is not available to his idealists.

Secondly, the *Sophist* argument suggests the following. If becoming known is entering into a relation (albeit via a Cambridge change), is entering into a relation

[61] Whether or not Plato actually believes this account of perception, it should be distinguished from his middle-period view where the properties of phenomenal objects, albeit compresent with their opposites, are seen as natural to the object (cf. *Symp.* 211 etc.).

[62] Cf. R. Hackforth, 'Notes on Plato's *Theaetetus*', *Mnemosyne* (1957), 130.

[63] Cf. McDowell, *ad loc.*

legitimate for a form? One of the central arguments for the theory of forms is the de-relativising argument[64] – that relations ('equal') and relative terms ('beautiful') are cognitively unreliable, so that we must have some absolute to apply to for cognitive reliability. But then, if being in some relation is a mark of unreliability, forms must not be in or, worse still, come into any relations, for that would vitiate their cognitive status. Now perhaps being absolute is a requirement only of the special, and not the generic properties of forms, so that this argument exploits a difference of level. But remember that relations are condemned *simpliciter*; if the forms are in any relation, it must be explained by some other form, and so on.[65] So being related (to knowers) impairs the property of forms that they should be 'themselves by themselves'. So the Cambridge change solution will not do, for Plato.

So the ontological dilemma expounded in the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist* may be effective against its hypothesis, starkly dichotomous as it is. It deals with the problem of knowledge/thought from the realist end. Plato's argument is designed to attack any item in a world composed exclusively of flux-ridden particulars and forms. In the first case, the particulars are not even individuals. In the second, the cognitive reliability that characterises the forms is also lethal to them. For when they come into some cognitive relation, they are relativised, and thus, firstly, fail to solve the problem for which they were postulated and, secondly, themselves become liable to collapse into flux. So, as an ontology, the hypothesis fails.

4

The epistemological argument (*Cratylus* D and E)

The hypothesis fails, likewise, to supply an answer to the problems of epistemology. For it does not permit, as the epistemological argument shows, any cognition at all.

The epistemological argument is also a dilemma on the disjunction of flux and the total stability of the known. E, the flux arm, is the epistemological counterpart of B. B showed that nothing in flux could be said to be an individual, so that it could not be known or even mentioned in any way. E caps this by showing that if so, any knowledge of anything in flux would itself come under the sway of flux and be no more knowledge than not (440b2).

The other arm, D, shows on the other hand that any case of stable knowledge would be a counter-example to flux. But flux and stability are exclusive and exhaustive (compare the inference from partial to total stability at 439e2–3; the assumption that any change implies all change at 440b1–3; and the disjunction between flux and stability urged at 440b7). So any counter-example to flux pushes us into the arms of total stability at 440b4. Then the temporal adverbs that dominated the first stretch of the argument (e.g. ἀεί of flux at 439d8 poised against ἀεί of the permanence of the objects of knowledge at 439e3) generate an argument against stability that balances E, and parallels C in the ontological section.

For D suggests that if what is known is changeless, what knows it must be changeless also (hence the emphatic position of the temporal adverb ἀεί (440a9; b5) and the implication, from the use of the antithetical μέν... δέ...(449b4–5), that the knower and the known stand and fall together). It will follow that there is no *coming* to know. This arm gets its punch from the insistence throughout the dialogue as a whole that we are nevertheless engaged upon a process of coming to know (cf. the approach of the person about to know at 440a1; the suggestion that we might learn something

[64] Cf. Nehamas, op. cit.

[65] The Second T.M.A., *Parmenides* 134, could be construed thus.

from τὰ πράγματα at 439a ff.; and the Meno's paradox effect of the puzzle about the primary names at 426a). Compare *Parm.* 133b–134e and *Soph.* 248e–249b (Argument II above): I call this the *god's eye view.*

Parm. 133–4 is notoriously part of the attack upon the middle-period theory of separated forms. Here the idealist, Plato himself, turns out to be committed to the view that the forms are totally separate from our world, related among themselves, but not to us; while their homonyms in this world are related to each other, and not to the forms (133c–d). But then an instance of this principle must be knowledge (compare *Cratylus* E). So knowledge itself will be of the forms, while our knowledge will be of our world. Consequently (134b) the forms are inaccessible to us and unknowable by us. The only person who can have knowledge itself must be god. But then god will not have knowledge of our affairs, since the world of forms and our world are totally disjunct. God, then, would be lacking in some knowledge, namely knowledge of our world.

This argument turns on the idealist premisses advanced in the *Cratylus* and the *Sophist*. Morever, if we take the *Parmenides* and the *Cratylus* arguments together, they support the obscure *Sophist* II. Why should god know the forms? God is not a form (cf. *Timaeus* 37d ff.). So the analogy that Parmenides offers between mastership and slavery (two *forms* which are related) will not cover the case of god and the forms in general. Nor are the forms in the mind of god, dependent on his mind, since the premiss of the entire argument is that forms are separate independent entities (130b). Now *Parmenides* 134c10 suggests that the mind of god is akin to the forms in its precision. The *Cratylus* argument suggests a further affinity – that god and the forms are on a par in respect of eternity. But then *Crat.* 440a presents, as I have argued, the eternal knower as an absurdity: if all knowledge is eternal, there can be no coming to know. The *Parmenides*' attack on the god's eye view makes a similar point. So if a philosopher postulates that any knowledge is eternal, and correlated with the eternal forms, he is no further forward with the problem of knowledge *as far as it concerns us* (that includes the problem of coming to know). Consequently, his postulate is both profligate of entities, and useless. The god's eye view, therefore, just because it is god's, eternal and inaccessible, is of no help in epistemology.

Suppose we read the *Sophist*'s argument II in this light (hence σεμνὸν καὶ ἅγιον 249a1–2). II.1 'mind is present to being' is, as I suggested, ambiguous between 'being is thought about' and 'being thinks'. Now that ambiguity develops some significance. The argument clearly concludes that since being is aseptic, but minds move, they are fundamentally incompatible and cannot be related. So either being is moved – in which case stability no longer characterises it – or minds are stable. The latter would be true if mind and being were on a par: that is, if the universe of being thinks. So knowledge is stable and permanent because it belongs to a permanent knower (god). Thus the ambiguity of the premisses allows for ambivalence in the conclusions, and generates the god's eye view.

So the idealists' disjunction between the different types of entity – being and becoming – provokes in the *Sophist*, as it does in both the *Parmenides* and the *Cratylus*, a parallel disjunction between types of cognition. The *Cratylus*, in all-or-nothing mood, says we can know not at all, or always; the *Parmenides* says we can know this world, god can know the forms; and the *Sophist* presses the incompatibility of mortal cognition and the idealist hypothesis. If being is known by some mind, that mind will either be mobile and incompatible with being, or immobile, and no help to us. Thus these three epistemological arguments come together in putting forward the god's eye view as a corollary of the theory of forms; and in three

complementary ways they show the god's eye view to be absurd. This was not a universal attitude in the ancient world, or within the Platonic corpus itelf. Heraclitus is famous for offering us the ratio child : man : : man : god; and it is generally supposed that his suggestion is that there is a god to have a view (DK 22B79; 102).[66] Plato himself invokes divine figures from time to time – the best example, of course, is the demiurge in the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* proposes a creator of the world, and bridges the gap between being and becoming with not a hint that the relationship might prove hazardous; Timaeus insists, without a qualm, upon the difference between the knowledge that god has of the παραιδείγματα, and the mere εἰκὸς μῦθος to which we have access. We are led up the same garden path at *Crat.* 389b and 401a and might expect Socratic irony. But the *Cratylus* has a sting in its tail, that the god's eye view is redundant.

The *Cratylus*, then, fits with the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* in attacking idealism for its commitment to the god's eye view (cf. also *Theaet.* 162c). And it is consonant with this approach that the name-giver of the *Cratylus* is no forerunner of the philosopher-kings. On the contrary, not only is he subject to the judgement of the name-user, that is the dialectician, but also his very position (a νομοθέτης) is etymologically connected to the conventionalism which Socrates attacks in Hermogenes' thesis. Thus the general scepticism of the dialogue – compare the clearly whimsical approach to the etymologies of the names of divine entities, 397c–408d, ironically commented upon by Socrates throughout, cf. e.g. 399a5, 'I run the risk, if I'm not careful, of becoming, even today, wiser than I ought' – leads up to the final attack upon the god's eye view (cf. also the irony of 424c). And that attack is complementary to the ontological dilemma, which proposes that even were knowledge possible, the knowable is unknowable. As a consequence, the close of the dialogue is left not, as all the commentators suppose, with a valiant flying of the theory of forms in the face of the dangers of flux, but with a puzzle whose solution requires, at the very least, the sophisticated metaphysical enquiries of the *Sophist*. The argument demands, firstly, an examination of the proper criteria of identity (cf. also *Theaet.* 181): an attempt on this is made, I suggest, at *Sophist* 243–50, and at *Philebus* 22ff. Secondly, it raises, once again, the problem of knowledge first canvassed by the *Meno* (80ff.): even if we can explain what knowledge is (as the *Theaetetus* fails to do), we still must explain how we *come to know*. That, presumably, requires an analysis of the business of dialectic. That task, prompted by the difficulties of *Sophist* 248 and *Cratylus* 439–40, is what *Sophist* 251 undertakes, with not inconsiderable success.

Conclusion

By *Cratylus* 436e the structure of the argument against both Hermogenes and Cratylus is complete and carefully counterpoised. 'Look forward and backward'. 385b–387a, where Hermogenes is attacked for denying falsehood, matches 428e–432e, where Cratylus is attacked on the same grounds. Then 386e–391b, where realism/naturalism is developed in the face of Hermogenes' defeat, parallels 433a–436e, where Cratylus is induced to concede relativism. But the truly paradoxical nature of this argument now becomes clear. For the conclusion of each line of attack pushes us into the arms of its alternate; the next argument then reduces that to absurdity – and we find ourselves upon the horns of a dilemma. Worse still, suppose we set up a further antithesis, already present in the distinction between relativism and realism, between

[66] Perhaps reflection on Plato's critical approach to the god's eye view might give us pause about Heraclitus: cf. Burnyeat, 'Reading Heraclitus', *N.Y. Rev. Books*, 1982.

words and the world. Finding naming to let us down, we retreat to considering the world, and how it might give up its information directly (cf. 439a). But then we are caught by a further dilemma, when it becomes clear that neither the phenomenal world, under the description of flux, nor the Platonic ideal world, will allow us to have any knowledge. If so, we can never find anything out, and dialectic is destroyed (cf. *Soph.* 252b and *Parm.* 135c). But that is self-refuting – hence the final ἀπορία at 440c: 'It is not sensible for a man with νοῦς to turn himself and his soul to names, and to entrust himself and his soul to names, or to have confidence in them and those who posit them, to assert that they know something and to recognise about himself and the things that are that they are not healthy at all, but everything flows like a pot...perhaps so, but perhaps not....'

So the *Cratylus* is aporetic – like so many other Platonic dialogues. The nature of the ἀπορίαι advanced here, however, resists inclusion with the puzzles of either the early or the middle period. Rather these dilemmas represent a carefully architected metaphysical inquiry. The *Sophist*, the *Theaetetus* and the *Parmenides* each confront several of the questions raised by the *Cratylus*, and repeat or foreshadow arguments that appear there. The *Cratylus* is distinguished, however, by the comprehensiveness of its dilemmas about being, truth and knowledge. The use of antithesis to set up a sequence of arguments, and the dilemmatic presentation of ἀπορία ensure, first of all, the closure of the entire structure. Further, where the arguments themselves appear persuasive, we are forced to reconsider the original antitheses. The paradoxes of the *Cratylus* ask whether there is anything between flux and total stability; they ask whether truth, and falsehood, are possible; and they simultaneously challenge and assert the viability of dialectic. In the sheer generality of the question it asks, the *Cratylus* must be aligned with the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*; in detail, as I have argued, these three dialogues, along with the *Parmenides*, contain common arguments to a remarkable degree. So these dialogues are complementary in the questions they ask; and the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus* should be aligned for the assertions of ignorance which they finally make. This points to the conclusion (consistent, *mirabile dictu*, with stylometric considerations)[67] that these two dialogues should be grouped together, before the *Sophist*. The *Cratylus* is a late work of Plato.*

New Hall, Cambridge MARY MARGARET MACKENZIE

[67] Cf. the figures for the avoidance of hiatus used by Cherniss in 'The relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's later dialogues' (in *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, ed. Allen [London, 1965], 344ff.). Here the group which includes *Phaedrus*, *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* is strikingly different, in its failure to avoid hiatus, from *Timaeus*, *Sophist*, *Philebus* and *Politicus*. This is not, of course, to concede that stylometric considerations are or can be decisive in the dating of Platonic dialogues. After all, here we have a highly literate author, who may well achieve some of his effect by the deliberate echoing of the style of an earlier work. We cannot, that is, make any definite or plausible claims about where his development is unconscious and where he employs conscious allusions. It follows from this that the stylometric tests, which purport to examine unconscious development, beg the entire question of the method of Platonic composition.

* Parts of this paper were delivered at the Oxford meeting of the Southern Association for Ancient Philosophy in 1983. I profited greatly from the discussion that followed; and I should like to thank members of that audience, and also Jonathan Lear, Malcolm Schofield, and R. W. Sharples, for their helpful comments.