enhancing the erotic implications of φαῖνε θαυμ[α]στὸν δέμας. 1 Or take 11.14–23, where the victor, the ‘stunning’ son of Phaiscus (παῖς θαητ[ο]ν Φαΐσκου, 14), recipient of the beneficent gaze of Apollo, to whose victory Helios himself is an eye-witness, is presented as the object of the audience’s visual attention and admiration. There is much in these two passages alone that suggests how easy it would be to go beyond the narrow confines of A.’s project.

Douglas Cairns


A. himself gives a succinct account in his Preface (p.xiii) of the project undertaken in this book. It is to be a running commentary on the Cratylus, Plato’s treatment of what makes a language (or at any rate its «names» – any words «whose function is not primarily syntactic»; p.1) a language, and it will be organized according to a template reminiscent of the well-known Cornford model: ‘chunks of text’ are quoted in English translation, and then supplied with philosophical comment, in A.’s case in the Anglo-American tradition of analysis. As with Cornford and Hackforth, there is also ‘along the way’ quite a lot of philosophical discussion of «many matters of textual criticism and interpretation» – where A. is in fact often at his most penetrating. And as with Cornford’s treatment of the early divisions of the sophist in the Sophist, so A. offers only selective translation of the long section of the Cratylus (394e–421c) devoted to etymologies of ‘secondary’ names: these constitute nearly half the entire dialogue, although they are the subject of only one – albeit the longest and to my mind the best – of A.’s nine chapters.

An excellent Introduction discusses the subject and structure of the Cratylus, and what we know or can reasonably infer about Cratylus and Hermogenes (Socrates’ two interlocutors), and particularly about their philosophical commitments. It concludes with crisp verdicts on the dialogue’s dramatic date (after 422/1 BC, since Hipponicus, father to Callias and Hermogenes, is dead), and relative date (designed to be read after the Phaedo but before the Theaetetus: «and that’s that», p.21); and with the briefest of notes on the MSS. Chapter 1 deals with Cratylus’ initial naturalist position on the ‘correctness of names’, Chapter 2 with Hermogenes’ conventionalism. The next six chapters consider Socrates’ articulation of naturalism (Ch.3), his introduction of etymology as what the natural correctness of names consists in (Ch.4), the exposition of etymologies of ‘secondary’ names (Ch.5), the ensuing treatment of the primary names of which secondary names are ultimately constituted (Ch.6), Socrates’ critique of Cratylus’ defence of the naturalist theory when he resumes as interlocutor (Ch.7), and what A. sees as the final refutation of naturalism and defence of conventionalism (Ch.8). The book ends with a consideration of the dialogue’s

1 The victory is in the pentathlon – the event felt to develop the most beautiful physique (Arist. Rhet. 1361b10–11).
M. Schofield: Ademollo, The Cratylus of Plato

490

final section on flux and forms (Ch. 9). There follow two appendices on textual matters. There is a bibliography and a first-rate set of indexes, enabling effective identification of topics and passages discussed.

The first thing to say is that anyone interested in the Cratylus will want to have this book by them, for all its rather inflated bulk, when working on the dialogue. It contains a huge amount of learned and thoughtful discussion of the material, most of which I cannot even indicate in this review. The author has a clear, acute, and argumentative mind, though as I shall be suggesting his judgment is rather variable. He has absorbed a considerable body of scholarship on the Cratylus, frequently signalling his debts and his sometimes robustly enunciated resistance to the work of others (this reviewer included). With very few lapses, he writes good idiomatic English (except in some clunky bits of translation). Presentation by Cambridge University Press is exemplary.

The news that Ch. 8 explains how at the last naturalism is refuted and conventionalism defended gives the game away for those wanting to know A.’s overall interpretative posture – but without disclosing the distinctive twist he gives to this not uncommon way of reading the dialogue. To begin with, A. is unusual in seeing clear writing on the wall for naturalism as early as 387b–c, barely half a page into Socrates’ exposition of the theory. Here Socrates asks: ‘If one speaks as it is natural to speak of the objects, and for them to be spoken of, and with that which is natural, then one’ll achieve something and speak, otherwise one’ll make a mistake and get nothing done?’ A. canvasses different options as to what Socrates is proposing, and decides the likeliest is that on Socrates’ view, to speak of a thing as is natural is to describe it as it really is – to say something true of it. This looks as though it adds up to maintaining that according to linguistic naturalism it is impossible to speak falsely. But in that case, A. says, ‘We must suppose that here Plato is deliberately making Socrates hold a mistaken view, which he will later make him reject’ (p.102). Indeed, ‘Plato exploits the dialogue form to invite his readers to engage actively in the discussion’ … He means us to criticize Socrates’ claims on speaking as we have just done (p.102–3). A. will go further: the conclusions of the arguments for naturalism at 387a–390c are ‘designed to admit of a reinterpretation which would make them compatible with conventionalism’ (p.424).

By 400b–401a, reinterpretation is no longer needed: naturalism has according to A. committed suicide. This is where Socrates declares himself ‘content with recovering the namegivers’ opinion rather than the truth about the gods’ – and where, although the turn towards conventionalism ‘is not emphasized’, he effectively ‘renounces showing that names convey the truth about their referents’ (p.201; cf. p.208). A similar story will be told about the difficult passage at 435b–c. Here Socrates concludes from his examination of how the word σκληρότης conveys its meaning that «convention and habit contribute something to the indication of the items thinking of which we speak», without (according to A., p.418) abandoning commitment to the view that some names at least are correct by resemblance and hence by nature. But the argument he has just deployed had in fact given adequate basis for maintaining that all names indicate their referents
by convention (p.407). A.’s hypothesis is that Plato knows perfectly well that that is so, but does not yet want Socrates to acknowledge it (p.419). Once again, he relies on us, the readers, to make our own critique of what he allows Socrates to say.

A. thus proposes that while Socrates has one agenda, Plato has another. And for much of his commentary, it looks as though Socrates is going to be seen as sticking with naturalism throughout, albeit in the final analysis a highly qualified naturalism, whereas A.’s Plato is steering the reader into questioning his every move, and appreciating that it has to be conventionalism that explains how names indicate things. A. speaks however of the «fact» that Socrates does eventually exit from the dialogue as a conventionalist (p.424). Quite why he thinks this is unclear. The issue of conventionalism is not pursued as such after 435c. What Socrates himself explicitly concludes (438e) is that (contrary to Cratylus’ view) it must be possible to acquire knowledge independently of names, i.e. of the etymological investigation of names (p.445). In his own initial articulation of a naturalistic theory he had never suggested otherwise. In fact his argument there that someone who is to create names properly needs to be supervised by a dialectician (390c–d, discussed by A. interestingly if idiosyncratically: p.138–42) already presupposes that philosophical knowledge is more fundamental than any that study of names or reflection upon them could generate.

A.’s interpretation of the naturalist theory, however, tends to collapse Socrates’ construal of it into what most commentators take to be Cratylus’ more extreme and implausible version. This is already more or less explicit in the treatment of the passage at 387b–c that I mentioned above. As we saw, the ‘mistaken’ naturalist view that false speaking is impossible, refuted by Socrates when Cratylus maintains it at 429e–431c, is according to A. what Plato probably means to represent Socrates himself as in effect embracing at the outset of his own presentation of naturalism (p.102). If A. is right, Socrates is clearly in the most frightful muddle. Is A. right? His interpretation of the 387b–c passage is surely not very likely. He himself (p.100) connects it with the stretch of argument at 385b–d where – among other things – Socrates explicitly distinguishes between true and false speaking, a distinction which chimes with the premisses from which Socrates will argue against Cratylus at 429d–431c (p.65).

Can we find another way of interpreting the claim (387b–c) that speaking as is natural will be the way to ‘achieve something and speak’ (otherwise one will ‘make a mistake and get nothing done’): one that does not flatly undermine the distinction Socrates makes at 385b–d between true and false speaking, and on which he will later insist against Cratylus? In the Sophist the Eleatic Stranger will talk similarly of a sentence ‘achieving something’ (he says τι περαίνει, rather than πλέον τι ποιήσει as here) when verbs are woven with names (Soph. 262d). A. does not think that the Cratylus anticipates the syntactic analysis of the sentence worked out in this Sophist context (p.59–62, 338–50, 372–9). But he does take Socrates to want to distinguish stating from naming (p.349), and he sees him as «out to draw a sound distinction between a sentence’s speaking of something and its being true or false», even if that distinction is drawn in the wrong way (p.374).
Why not, then, suppose that ‘achieving something’ at 387b–c is stating, rather than (as A. interprets) saying something true?

This is perhaps the right point to comment on A.’s handling of the vexed section of argument at 385b–d. Socrates has been eliciting from Hermogenes some of the implications (383a–b) of his statement of a conventionalist position on what it is that makes the names in a language correct (384c–e). According to the MSS. tradition there follows a sequence of questions on what is apparently the quite different topic of truth and falsehood of names (381b–d). This is followed in its turn by further discussion of the implications of the conventionalist thesis (383d–e). What the section on truth and falsehood is doing sandwiched between two stretches of questioning about the implications of conventionalism is something of a puzzle, discussed at some length by A. (p.62–8). But worse, the second stretch begins with the inferential particle ἄρα, ‘then’ (not translated in A.’s rendering of the Greek, though as we shall see certainly discussed by him). And it introduces a proposition that plainly does not follow from anything in the truth and falsehood section, but which could indeed be validly inferred from the stretch of argument (384e–385b) that ends at the point where the truth and falsehood section begins.

In a paper published in 1972 (Cl. Qu. 22: 246–53) I suggested that the truth and falsehood section (385b–d) must originally have belonged elsewhere in the text (though it has to be acknowledged that it is one of the least impressive pieces of philosophizing in the dialogue – one would like it not to be by Plato at all); and that it has been inserted in its present location by scribal error. The editors of the recent Oxford Classical Text (1995) accept the suggestion, as do quite a number of subsequent translators and commentators. A. rejects it, while acknowledging a problem (p.68–9). He himself flirts with the idea that ἄρα is corrupt. But that thought does not help: the proposition that ἄρα introduces needs to be derived from or explained by something or other – ἄρα is precisely the sort of connective one would expect (cf. p.73 fn.78). Although in the end A. would resort to signaling a crux (but not out of ‘desperation’) before 383d2, he seems attracted to one or other of two more positive suggestions (p.73–4):

(A) Something has dropped out between the end of the truth and falsehood section (383d1) and the proposition [P] introduced by ἄρα (‘So what each person says is a name for something, this is a name for each person?’, 383d2–3).

Against (A), however: since [P] can already be derived from what Hermogenes agrees to at 383a1–b1, this is an uneconomical hypothesis, which Ockham’s razor will dispense with.

(B) We must indeed suppose dislocation of the text, but posit transposition rather than interpolation. The passage that begins with [P] at 383d2 and continues to 385e3 perhaps belonged immediately before the truth and falsehood section, not after it, and was continuous with 383a1–b1.

The problem with (B) is that the question Socrates will go on to pursue at 385e4–386d6 (i.e. the next section of text) – the issue of Hermogenes’ stance on Protagorean relativism – is articulated in terms which pick up on the discussion at 383d2–e3 (where Hermogenes volunteers the point that different cities, too – both among the Greeks and as between barbarians and Greeks – have names of
their own for the same things), including Hermogenes’ immediately preceding talk of the private (ἰδίᾳ) at 385c1. Socrates now asks (385c4–5): ‘Do the things that are, too [sc. as well as the names], appear to you to be in this condition, that their being is private to each person?’ This line of questioning would be very abrupt – you might think intolerably abrupt – if it followed immediately upon the end of the truth and falsehood section. It is perhaps surprising that A. did not notice this drawback to (B) (nor indeed the problem with (A)).

It is time to turn to A.’s treatment of what Socrates says about naming as is natural at 387c–d (in parallel with speaking as is natural). As A. explains his line of thought, if you are to name something, you cannot name it ‘as you want’, as Hermogenes holds; you must name it in the way in which, and with the tool (i.e. the name) with which, it is natural to name that thing, otherwise you will not name it at all (p.104). A. says that this is a fallacy. This kind of move is admissible in some cases, like cutting and burning, but not in others, like speaking and naming. You can’t cut a tree with a butter knife; but you can call it ‘butter knife’ – provided you have previously made the appropriate convention» (p.105). A. then offers an alternative construal of naming as is natural, which would not yield the theory Socrates is going on to develop for the next forty or so pages of the dialogue, but would be compatible with Hermogenes’ conventionalism. The idea is that if I want to name Callias by means of a general term, I must call him ‘human’, ‘white’, ‘Athenian’, ‘wealthy’, vel sim. – in other words, I must use a term that connotes one of his properties, and so part of his ‘nature’ (p.105–6).

Three comments spring to mind, the first on the diagnosis of fallacy. So far as I can see, A. is simply begging the question. If we ask why Socrates should be regarded as committing a fallacy, the reply is simply that language is a matter of convention, not an activity like cutting or burning that is strongly constrained by nature. But whether or not naming is sufficiently like cutting and burning is precisely the point at issue. Socrates has argued that like them, it operates with its own characteristic tool; and he will go on to propose that its characteristic tool has a comparably specific function: teaching – which it can achieve only if it is so constructed as to disclose the nature of its nominatum. Socrates would therefore say that ‘butter knife’ teaches by disclosure the nature of a knife designed to cut butter, not the nature of a tree: so if you called trees ‘butter knives’, even on the basis of a predetermined convention, you would be wrong, and your name would be no name. This theory may of course be wrongheaded. But it cannot be ruled out of court by declaring that the analogy with cutting and burning is a false analogy – on the ground that it is convention that supplies the right explanation of how names work. Whether convention is all there is to it is what the debate is about.

A second comment concerns A.’s suggestion that there is a way of taking the idea that naming is constrained by nature that is compatible with conventionalism. This suggestion forms one of the planks on which A. builds his general interpretation of the arguments of 387a–390c as «designed to admit of a reinterpretation which would make them compatible with conventionalism» (p.424). But the suggestion here falls far short of an argument, let alone a convincing argument, for thinking that Plato writes about naming in a way designed to intimate a
conventionalist reinterpretation. And it is a suggestion that uses the word ‘natural’ in an extremely undemanding way, if Callias’ being wealthy can count as part of his nature – particularly when we recall that he was ultimately and notoriously reduced to penury.

Finally and most generally, it becomes hard to understand why A.’s Plato was attracted to the idea of writing about the theory of linguistic naturalism at all. On A.’s finding, the reader can readily see that even the most basic ideas of speaking and naming ‘naturally’, as Socrates understands them, are fatally and unambiguously flawed. Yet they are then developed at length by recourse to such well-established elements of Platonic philosophizing as the theory of Forms and the distinction between the craftsman and the user of a craft. Why should Plato lavish so much care on such an intellectually feeble construct?

One might have suspected that A. would have some difficulty in mustering enthusiasm for the treatment of etymology that occupies so much of the rest of the dialogue, either on his own account or on that of his readers. In fact the two chapters in which A. deals with etymology, together with the one on primary names (Ch.4–6), are perhaps the liveliest and richest in the entire book, as well as the most economically argued. Ch.4 engages with Plato’s engagement with the problem of double names in Homer, and particularly the question whether the correct name of Hector’s son is Scamandrius or Astyanax (392b–394d). The point Socrates is made to develop turns on the idea that ‘Astyanax’ and ‘Hector’ are virtual synonyms: Homer was right to call a king’s offspring a ‘king’, just as it is correct to call a lion’s offspring a ‘lion’. At work here A. identifies what he dubs the «Principle of Synonymical Generation» (p.160) – an idea, A. suggests, that Plato is simply interested in for its own sake, and for the philosophical importance he finds in it (p.178–80).

From the long Chapter 5 I found especially interesting A.’s sustained treatment of the theory of flux that many of the etymologies of secondary names are taken to presuppose. A. proposes and supports with enjoyable resourcefulness the thesis – I think novel – that the philosophical associations of the theory are to be identified principally in the atomism of Leucippus and Democritus, not (as is usually supposed) in some version of Heracliteanism (p.210–33). The chapter ends with a similarly sustained discussion of Plato’s attitude to the etymologies, which like others he reads as a doxographical encyclopedia (p.237–56). Here A. builds upon the arguments for their essential philosophical seriousness made long ago by George Grote (never wisely ignored on Plato), and more recently by David Sedley. Sedley’s talk of a «virtuoso performance» and Grote’s comparison of the etymologizing with Plato’s mythmaking are developed into an account of the way that that seriousness blends ambiguously here with «humour and detachment» more convincing (to my mind) than any other so far put forward.

Ch.6 finds Plato’s Socrates sketching the project of a «perfect» (though not necessarily universal: p.136) language, where like others before him A. is reminded of seventeenth century thinkers like Comenius and (especially) Leibniz. As so often, for A. the important thing is to see that the theory does not need to be tied to «the too ambitious task of confirming the naturalist theory of names» (p.314). Indeed the overall message of this impressive if uneven book might be
Il secondo volume di quella che si preannuncia a tutti gli effetti come una epocale edizione critica moderna del Commento al Parmenide di Proclo a cura di Concetta Luna e del compianto Alain-Philippe Segonds per l’Editore ‘Les Belles Lettres’ nella collezione ‘Budé’ [d’ora in poi ed. B.], contiene l’edizione e la traduzione in lingua francese del II libro di questo commento procliano, certamente uno dei testi più significativi del neoplatonismo tardo antico. L’edizione critica ivi proposta comprende le pp. 721.23–782.36 in base alla numerazione della edizione di Cousin.
