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Naturalism, Conventionalism and Forms of Life: Wittgenstein and the "Cratylus"

Abstract

I consider Plato's argument, in the dialogue *Cratylus*, against both of two opposed views of the "correctness of names." The first is a *conventionalist* view, according to which this relationship is arbitrary, the product of a free inaugural decision made at the moment of the first institution of names. The second is a *naturalist* view, according to which the correctness of names is initially fixed and subsequently maintained by some kind of natural assignment, rooted in the things themselves. I argue that: 1) Plato's critical challenge to both views anticipates considerations introduced by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*' consideration of rules and rule-following; 2) Understanding Plato's appeal to the "form" [*eidos*] of a thing in resolving the problems of both views helps to explicate Wittgenstein's own appeal to "forms of life" as the "given" ground of linguistic practice; and 3) We should not understand the grounding of language in form-of-life *either* as a (conventionalist) basis in the plural practices of different communities, *or* as a biological/anthropological basis in the specific nature of the human organism. Rather, it points to an autonomous dimension of form, which articulates the relationship between language and life as it relates to the possibility of truth.

1. Introduction

There are substantial and central commonalities of purpose between Plato's appeals to what he calls the idea or form [*eidos*] and the late Wittgenstein's own elliptically specified concept of (a) form of life [*Lebensform*]. For both philosophers, the appeal involves a consideration of the structure of language in relationship to the life of its speakers, and both philosophers find – in this consideration – compelling reasons to reject established and intuitively plausible pictures of this relationship in favor of more problematic structures. These structures moreover demand, for each, reference to the specific dimension that both indicate by means of the language of "form" or "forms".

In this paper, I consider Plato's argument, in the dialogue *Cratylus*, against both of two opposed views of the "correctness of names" [*orthoteta tina ton onomaton*], or the relationship between a name and what it stands for when it is successfully used. The first is a *conventionalist* view, according to which this relationship is arbitrary and the product of a free and inaugural decision made at the moment of the first institution or formation of names as such. The second is a *naturalist* view, according to which the correctness of names is both initially fixed and subsequently maintained by some form or aspect of natural order or assignment. Between the refutation of the first and the second views there is a long section in which Socrates develops speculative etymologies of various terms, most of which are verbs, by reading them as descriptions consisting of simpler names. Commentators differ about the significance of these etymologies and whether Plato intends them seriously, and I shall not discuss them here, but only note, as Socrates himself does, that the treatment of names as descriptive complexes of simpler terms requires an account of the meaning of the simplest names that is not descriptivist.

First, I argue that Plato's critical challenge to both views of simple names substantially anticipates considerations introduced by Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*' discussion of rules and rule-following. Second, I argue that understanding the appeal Plato makes to what he calls the "form" of a thing in resolving the problems of both views also can help to explicate Wittgenstein's

own positive appeal to "forms of life" as the "given" ground of life and linguistic practice. A third consequence has to do with this Wittgensteinian appeal to grounding in form of life itself. If we understand it in the way suggested by the parallel I develop here, I shall argue, we should not understand this grounding either as a basis in irreducibly plural cultures and communities, or as a biological or anthropological basis in the specific constitution of the human organism. Rather, we should see it (with Plato) as pointing to an autonomous dimension of form, in which the connection of language and life is articulated in essential relation to the possibility of truth.

Beyond noting that Wittgenstein certainly read the *Cratylus*, I do not aim to advance claims of historical or biographical influence, direct or indirect.[1] I will rather try to show that the arguments of Plato and Wittgenstein draw similar conclusions because they address a *problem* that is common to both: that of the basis of the distinction between the *correct* and *incorrect* use of referential language, as this distinction is displayed in ordinary linguistic practice. In addressing this problem, both Plato and Wittgenstein are moreover similarly motivated by their shared rejection of another picture, one which is explicit in the *Tractatus*. This is the picture of an *a priori* relationship of correspondence, given in advance of linguistic use and practice, between primitive or logically simple names and the (accordingly) maximally simple objects for which they stand. The positions taken by Hermogenes and Cratylus in the dialogue can be understood as two alternative developments of this picture, on which the connection of names and objects exhibits what Wittgenstein would call, in the *Investigations*, the "hardness of the logical must".[2] Plato rejects both variants on the basis that neither one can explain either the initial introduction or the subsequent regular maintenance of the connection between names and objects which it requires. The recommended result is that, in clarifying the possibility that

[1] Wittgenstein refers explicitly to the problem of naming as it is treated there, quoting Socrates' expression of preference for a likeness of names to objects, in the *Big Typescript (BT)*, p. 35.
[2] *PI*, sect. 437.

referential language succeeds or fails in its purposes of communication, description, and instruction, one must look elsewhere: neither to the initially given correspondence of words and things nor to the maintenance of such a correspondence by means of a linguistic practice determined as a calculus of rules, but rather to what is irreducibly *shown in* what both philosophers specify as a language's everyday *use*.

2. Plato against conventionalism

As the dialogue opens, Cratylus and Hermogenes are discussing the problem of the "correctness of names". Whereas Cratylus is holding that "…there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by nature [*phusei*]" (383a), Hermogenes cannot see that "the correctness of names is determined by anything besides convention and agreement [*syntheke kai homologia*]" (384c-d). On this conventionalist view, as Hermogenes explains it, "No name belongs to a particular thing by nature, but only because of the rules [*nome*] and usage [*ethei*] of those who establish the usage and call it by that name" (384d-e). Socrates begins by questioning Hermogenes on the details and implications of this position. Naming, like "speaking or saying" more generally, appears to be a kind of action, and as such is capable of being done rightly or wrongly (387b-c): one who calls what we now call "man" rather by the name "horse", for example (385a) appears to make a mistake involving that the name is used incorrectly. Hermogenes initially floats the extreme view that "whatever anyone decides to call a particular thing is its name" (385a), and so that in a case like this, one has rather applied a distinct "private" name to something which also maintains its ordinary "public" one, neither name being actually incorrect.[3] This is a view that Socrates associates with Protagoras and an extreme relativism on which nothing is actually

[3] Some commentary has taken it that this represents Hermogenes' considered position and is accordingly the target of Socrates' argument against conventionalism. However, for a convincing argument that Socrates should rather be seen as primarily targeting a more restrained, rule-based conventionalism, and that his critique accordingly has important implications for the question of the institution and maintenance of rules, see Barney (1997).

true or false. But Hermogenes is soon brought to agree, by means of the analogy with other actions, that (just as in the case of cutting something or burning something) the action of naming is something done well or poorly. As in these other cases, as well, the success of the action is determined by the nature of the tool used and its suitability to the specific type of task it is to carry out.

Hermogenes recognizes, and Socrates agrees, that the same work can be carried out by different names, as when Greeks and foreigners have different words for the same things (385e). How, then, should the proper work of a name in relation to its object be understood? Socrates suggests this work consists at least in part in giving "instruction" by organizing "things according to their natures;" in this sense, the proper use of names "divides being" by allocating them correctly and uniformly to the things that are (388b). Furthering the analogy of naming to the use of a particular kind of tool, in particular the one characteristically used by instructors or teachers in indicating *differences* between things by means of names, Socrates now asks how we should understand the original fabrication of the tool itself:

> *Socrates*: Good. So whose product does an instructor use when he uses a name?
>
> *Hermogenes*: I don't know.
>
> *Socrates*: Can you at least tell me this? Who or what provides us with the names we use?
>
> *Hermogenes*: I don't know that either.
>
> *Socrates*: Don't you think that the rules provide us with them?
>
> *Hermogenes*: I suppose they do.
>
> *Socrates*: So, when an instructor uses a name, he's using the product of a rule-setter [*nomothetes*].
>
> *Hermogenes*: I believe he is (388d-e).

We can understand the reasoning behind the more nuanced conventionalist position that Hermogenes thus adopts roughly as follows. The proper use of a name involves, not simply that a name be applied to a thing on one initial or individual occasion, but that it be able to be used regularly, to refer to the same thing (or, in the

case of a general name, the same kind of thing) again and again on subsequent occasions. It is only if it can do so that it can be correctly (as opposed to incorrectly) used. But in order to support this difference between correct and incorrect use, a name must be in some regular way connected to the nature or essence of the thing (or kind of thing) to which it refers. This regular connection must have been effected in some way, and it is here that Hermogenes appeals to the initial activity of a "nomothetes", or rule-giver, in initially laying down the rules which subsequently govern the referential or distinguishing use of a name.

It is important for what is to come that this conventionalism about words and objects does not simply invoke individual acts of decision at the original basis of naming. In order to admit the distinction between correct and incorrect use, it also requires the subsequent *maintenance*, by means of rules, of the connection once it is initially set up. In a contemporary context, it is perhaps tempting to think of names as "mere tags". That is, we may think of names as having no *descriptive* content, but as having the function within a sentence simply of "securing reference" to a specific particular, leaving it to the other parts of the sentence to carry out whatever work of (correct or incorrect) description it does. On this kind of view, it might seem reasonable to adopt, with respect to names in the narrow sense at least, the more extreme conventionalism that holds, with Hermogenes' first instincts, that a name is "whatever anyone decides to call a particular thing" on a particular occasion. However, to see our way to the more sophisticated conventionalism Hermogenes actually adopts, it is sufficient to note that even if a name is "purely referential" in the sense of being used *only* to pick out a particular individual object (or, in the case of a general name, a type of object) recurrently on subsequent occasions, its continued use *even for this "purely referential" purpose* must be governed by the kind of regularity that Hermogenes invokes. It must, in other words, be a matter of the name's being used to pick out the same thing, according to *what it is*. This is what Socrates calls its "nature" or "essence" – and it must be able to distinguish this thing from others (what Socrates calls "dividing being" by organizing things according to their natures). It is only if

the use of the name is thus conceived that it is also able to be *mis*used, a possibility that (as Hermogenes has admitted) is essential to the particular kind of tool that names are. But given this, there is no obvious alternative to thinking of the use of the name as governed by a rule connecting a particular word to a particular (kind of) thing, and thus as raising the question of how such a rule is both first instituted and subsequently maintained in use.[4]

The discussion now turns to the nature and power of the supposed original framer of rules, or *nomothethes*, and to the difficult question of how the *nomothetes* himself should determine his original, rule-setting decision. Socrates makes here the interesting suggestion, which we will consider in section 3, that the rule-setter's decision must, if it is to be able actually to institute the rule which will allow for the proper use of a name, itself look to the standard provided by the rule's *users*. For now, it is sufficient to note simply how the paradox of institution that ultimately dooms the idea of a divine *nomothetes* responsible for the institution of a name's proper use itself points to the irreducibility of the dimension of use. This paradox appears only at the end of the dialogue, after Cratylus, defending the contrary hypothesis of the naturalness of the name-object institution, himself appeals to the idea of a divine *nomothetes* or rule-setter at the origin of the use of names. This appeal is prompted, as it was earlier in the case of Hermogenes, by Socrates'

[4] Much critical ink has been spilled over the question of whether Plato makes a mistake in treating the "correctness of names," at 385b-d, as a matter of their being "true" or "false" in producing a true or false statement (*logos*), given the standard 20th century view that proper and general names do not make a separate and independently *truth-evaluable* contribution to sentences in which they figure, but only contribute to the truth or falsity of sentences insofar as they are combined with predicates. It is also apparently the case that Plato, in the *Sophist*, later sees his way to a more sophisticated view of the structure of sentences, whereby the distinction between names and verbs is fundamental, and each sentence requires both in order to say something, true or false. If we see the question, however, not primarily in terms of the question of the contribution of a name to a sentence but rather, as I have suggested, as the question of the basis of the regular use of a name to refer to a thing, both issues are rendered largely irrelevant. We can understand the question Plato is posing as that of what underlies this regular, primarily referential use of a name while, at the same time, still posing the question of the possibility of its *misuse*, both in predicative ("Hermogenes is Cratylus") and non-predicative ("This is Cratylus" (pointing)) contexts. For an argument that Plato's position in the *Cratylus* does not have to be seen as vitiated by his failure to draw there the later distinction between nouns and verbs (as well as further references), see Fine 1997.

reminder of the use of names in giving instruction, and hence of the necessary distinction between better and worse users of them. Cratylus agrees that, as naming is thus a performance carried out according to rules, there are those who follow the rules better than others. But he will not admit that the rules themselves vary in being better or worse. Rather, since the rule is (for Cratylus) constitutive of the name itself, the user who does not use a word in accordance with rules does not name incorrectly, but rather fails to name at all. Nevertheless, since the rules are themselves such as to allow us to "display the nature" of the thing named, an activity which again admits of a distinction between success and failure, the possibility of their doing so must again be traced to an original *nomothetes* or rule-setter:

> *Socrates*: A little while ago, you said, if you remember, that the name-giver had to know the things he named. Do you still believe that or not?
>
> *Cratylus*: I still do.
>
> *Socrates*: Do you think that the giver of the first names also knew the things he named?
>
> *Cratylus*: Yes, he did know them.
>
> *Socrates*: What names did he learn or discover these things from? After all, the first names had not yet been given. Yet it's impossible, on our view, to learn or discover things except by learning their names from others or discovering them for ourselves?
>
> *Cratylus*: You have a point there, Socrates.
>
> *Socrates*: So, if things cannot be learned except from their names, how can we possibly claim that the name-givers or rule-setters had knowledge before any names had been given for them to know?
>
> *Cratylus*: I think the truest account of the matter, Socrates, is that a more than human power gave the first names to things, so that they are necessarily correct (438b-c).

To see the critical point, it is sufficient to note that (as we have seen) the account of the institution of names that both Hermogenes and Cratylus envision requires not only that the divine *nomothetes* set up or designate connections between words and the things for which they are to stand, but that he do so *in such a way* as

to allow this connection between words and essences to be regularly maintained throughout the totality of subsequent occasions of the word's use. The problem is not just that it is implausible to grant the *nomothetes* the power to institute the use of the name unless he is pictured as *already* somehow having knowledge of the essence of the thing to be named, a knowledge which (for us at least) can seemingly come only through the use of names themselves, thus presupposing what is to be explained. It is rather, and more deeply, that *even if* we attribute this pre-existing knowledge to the divine name-giver (perhaps as resulting from some divine faculty of the direct inspection of essences, or a kind of intellectual intuition) it is obscure how he could *use* this knowledge to institute a regular practice of naming which will maintain the force of the distinction between correctness and incorrectness across *all* subsequent occasions of the name's use. Even granting the *nomothetes* the obscure power to know the essence of a thing prior to stipulating the word that is to name it, how can anything he does in the stipulation ensure that the distinction between a correct and incorrect use is maintained across all subsequent cases of use? In response to this problem, Cratylus can only respond by attributing to the *nomothetes* the (even more obscure) power to give names in such a way as they are *necessarily* correct. But this is a power whose postulation can only back Cratylus further into the theoretical corner in which he already has found himself.

The paradox developed here is an instance of a more general paradox of sense and institution, which appears as soon as we are prepared to countenance an instituted origin of the rule-governed *use* of language itself. The paradox, in its general form, is that the institution of the rules for correct use appears to presuppose a knowledge which could only come through this very use; or (even more broadly) the systematic institution of rules for understanding language appears to presuppose that one *already* understand language.[5] It also has an important political dimension, which

[5] In this respect, the structure of presupposition resembles that which Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, attributes to Augustine's account of the learning of a language (PI 32), according to which the child is pictured as already *knowing* a language before he can learn

emerges if we transfer the structure of the paradox to the "political" or juridical register of the force and authority of laws, a register which is already all but explicit in Plato's discussion in the *Cratylus*. Understood in these terms, the problem is that the juridical authority to legislate already presupposes that the legislator has been granted authority to do so under the law, or that a sovereign authority derives the legitimacy of his power from the very field over which he is thereby granted authority.[6] Much the same goes, analogously or actually homologously (since the underlying formal structure is the same), for any account of linguistic sense as instituted by means of the conventional laying down of rules: any account of the basis of sense which requires that rules of use connecting words to things be stipulated at an original moment of institution appears to presuppose the prior availability of the very senses thus ostensibly instituted, and so cannot explain it.

Further, the paradox raised by Socrates here is also integrally connected to the one at the root of the so-called "rule-following considerations" of the *Philosophical Investigations*. At *PI* 201, Wittgenstein summarizes this as the paradox that "…a rule cannot determine any way of proceeding, since every way of proceeding can be brought into agreement with the rule".[7] At the core of the problem is the question how any rule, given (by whatever means) in advance of its indefinitely many and varied possible contexts of application, can thereby determine this application across this infinite variety of cases. For the specific implication of the rule –

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one, or as anyway already able to "think", where to "think" means already to be able to talk to oneself. For one development of a similar paradox of presupposition at the root of Carnap's picture of the conventional structure of languages, and Quine's critique of it, see Livingston 2008, chapter 5.

[6] This structural paradox of the institution of names and laws is discussed in more detail in Livingston 2012, chapter 1. The structure here also bears similarities to the paradox of *Euthyphro* 10a-11b, according to which the piety of actions apparently depends on the gods' (legitimately) judging them pious, but the gods' judgment is unmotivated and arbitrary unless it is grounded in their preexisting quality of piety. For a trenchant recent consideration of some of the political implications of the Euthyphro paradox from a Wittgensteinian perspective, including implications for Rawls' idea of an "original position," see Read 2013.

[7] "…eine Regel könnte keine Handlungsweise bestimmen, da jede Handlungsweise mit der Regel in Übereinstimmung zu bringen sei." (translation slightly altered above).

what course of action it demands – can, in each case, of course be variously interpreted. As we have seen, the conception of the use of names as grounded in given rules, which is common ground for both Cratylus and Hermogenes, already suffices to raise the question how the rules, even if "given", suffice to determine what counts as a correct or incorrect application of them in each case. This is nothing other than the question how the divine *nomothetes*, even if accorded supernatural powers of knowledge or description, *could* lay down or institute the rules constitutive of correct use in such a way as to ensure the maintenance of the distinction between correctness and incorrectness in each case. The answer is that he cannot: there is no way to picture the *nomothetes* as capable of laying down rules which would be authoritative in this absolute sense without paradox or mystification, and so the conception of the meaningful usage of names according to which it rests on a set of rules which *could* be instituted in advance by means of conventional stipulation or designation must, accordingly, be rejected.

3. Plato against naturalism

What, though, of the alternative position that Socrates also criticizes, the naturalism defended by Cratylus? Here, both the position and Socrates' critical strategy are different, but the decisive considerations again turn on the idea of the correct and incorrect use of names as determined by rules given entirely in advance of that use. In the long intermediate section of the dialogue devoted to etymological analyses, Socrates repeatedly pursues the decomposition of proper and general names, most often into simpler component terms or syllables whose combined descriptive meaning plausibly fits (at least approximately) the term under analysis. As Socrates points out, however (421e-422c), this iterated decomposition will eventually yield maximally simple or primary names that are not capable of further decomposition into associated descriptions. Like letters which are the simplest elements into which significant words can be decomposed, these "elements" [*stoichea*] plausibly underlie all other significant naming, including that which is presupposed in descriptions. Their correctness, if indeed they are capable of correctness or incorrectness at all, must

accordingly consist in something other than their compressing accurate descriptions. The reasonable suggestion that it consists rather in their "expressing the nature of the things there are" (422d) leads Socrates to repeat the question he had earlier posed to Hermogenes: that of the nature and basis of the rules that support this possibility of expression in use.

Cratylus now reenters the dialogue, defending the view that "all names have been correctly given" since the rules by which they are given are such as to maintain a natural relationship to the things they present. Socrates and Cratylus consider what sort of relationship this could be. One possibility, which Cratylus initially favors, is that it is a relationship of similarity or mimesis. But it is hardly reasonable to suppose that a similarity of sounds is enough to serve as the basis of this relationship; otherwise, as Socrates points out, those who imitate the sounds of animals would thereby name them. Another possibility is another form of resemblance, perhaps between the sounds of letters within individual names and associated qualities (for instance the hardness or softness) of the things named. But there are apparent counterexamples to this thesis, and even more decisively, Socrates points out that it will be impossible to find unique names for each of the (infinite number of) numbers unless some kind of conventional rule, rather than mere relationships of similarity, is invoked.

It thus appears impossible to sustain the idea that the natural relationship between words and things at the basis of successful naming is indeed one of similarity. But this leaves open at least the bare possibility that it is some other kind of "natural" relationship of correspondence, regularly fixed in advance of use (and indeed in advance of the activity of the name-giver or *nomothetes*, whose activity then consists only in ratifying the pre-established rule itself). On such a view, it would be by standing in such a relationship of correspondence that a name, as used, has the referential or designative power, and hence the meaning, that it does. But Socrates quickly draws the conclusion to which this leads: that there is no such thing as a wrong or *incorrect* use of a name. Since it is only through the natural correspondence captured by the rule for using the name that the name has a referential or

designative meaning at all, a name used, contrary to the rule, in relationship to another object would in fact be no name at all. The consequence, to which Cratylus initially agrees, is that "false speaking is in every way impossible" (429d). The assignment of an incorrect name to someone – for instance when someone, in greeting him, calls Cratylus by the sound "Hermogenes" – is not a case of naming at all, but rather simply "making noise and acting pointlessly," as if one were "banging a brass pot" (430a). Cratylus sees a further basis for this position in the intuition that someone who says *something*, thereby says something "that is". As he points out, this implies that speaking falsely, understood as saying *what is not*, is in fact saying nothing, or (as he concludes) not saying or speaking at all.

The position closely resembles the "falsehood paradox" which Plato critically discusses in a number of dialogues, most centrally the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*. The premises of the argument for the paradox are first, that to say (or think) falsely is to say or think *what is not*, but second, that everyone who says or thinks at all says or thinks *something*, i.e. something that is. It follows that it is actually impossible for anyone ever to say or think falsely. The paradox has roots in Parmenides but was also deployed by various sophists, most notably Gorgias, in the service of views that deny any possible distinction between truth and falsehood (Palmer 1999). Here, it takes the specific form of Cratylus' assertion of the impossibility of using a *name* incorrectly: this is a direct consequence of his "naturalist" view of the rules for the use of names as both constitutive of their meaning and fixed in advance by means of an absolute correspondence between names and objects, maintained in use by means of a rule. On any view which has this general structure, since the connection between the name and the thing is thus constituted in advance and maintained throughout the significant use of language by the same rule which gives the name sense, it will indeed be impossible to violate it, while still saying anything (significant) at all.[8]

[8] In the dialogue *Sophist*, Plato responds to the falsehood paradox, in the voice of the Eleatic Visitor, with what has been treated as the first significant logical distinction in the Western tradition between subject and predicate in the sentence. On the kind of view

Much the same idea of an absolute and fixed correspondence between simple names and the objects for which they stand is of course central to Wittgenstein's logical atomist theory in the *Tractatus*, where it plays a crucial role in the account of logical form and of the possibility of logical analysis. On the *Tractatus* picture, the logical analysis of a sentence yields ultimately an arrangement of simple names, which are said to stand for ultimately simple objects. The relationship between a name and the simple object for which it stands, although it cannot be stated or affirmed, is maintained on the level of language by logical rules of combination which allow some names to enter into some combinations with others, while prohibiting other such relationships.[9] The logical form which permeates language and world is to be understood as a matter of the possible relationships which names can enjoy with each other in forming a sentence, correspondent to the possible relationships of simple objects in states of affairs.[10] On the level of the use of language, the rules of logical syntax, to be embodied in a perspicuous logical writing or notation, require that each sign be used according to just one rule and that each name stand for just one simple object. [11] In each of these respects, the early Wittgenstein's picture of names and simples and the correspondent conception of logical form closely resembles Cratylus's "naturalist" picture.

Gilbert Ryle somewhat famously noted the connections between the logical atomist views of Wittgenstein, Russell, Meinong, and Moore and similar positions suggested by Plato at various places, most often in response to varieties of Parmenides' falsehood paradox (see, e.g., Ryle 1939, Ryle 1960, and Ryle 1990).

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articulated there, names or nouns function primarily to secure reference to an object, whereas it is then possible to ascribe to the referent something which either in fact holds or does not hold of it; in the latter case one will have spoken falsely on the level of the sentence (or logos) as a whole. This response introduces complications which I unfortunately am not able to go into here, but for present purposes it is sufficient to notice how Cratylus's naturalist position about names replicates the paradoxical one suggested by Parmenides' argument more generally.

[9] *TLP* 3.302 – 3.24. Tractarian names thus don't "resemble" their objects *except* in the sense that they share a logical form with them.

[10] *TLP* 3.311, 4.023-4.025

[11] *TLP* 4.0311, 4.04.

In these treatments, Ryle notes the problems apparently posed by the question of falsehood for the logical atomist theory. He argues, though, that they can be answered by appealing to the contextualist view that names are to be understood as having significance only as they figure in sentences whose sense is (in some respect) primary: as this sense of sentences already includes their possibilities of truth or falsehood, there is then no deep problem with countenancing names about whose objects something false is said, or indeed names which fail of reference.

Does Wittgenstein's theory in the *Tractatus*, then, have the unacceptable consequence that Plato's Socrates draws from Cratylus's view, that of the impossibility of *using* a simple name incorrectly? Of course, false *sentences* are not impossible according to the *Tractatus* theory of logical form: they are just combinations of names that stand for mere *Sachverhalten*, merely possible combinations of objects, rather than actual *Tatsachen* (or atomic facts). Nevertheless, according to the *Tractatus*, the determinacy of sense itself requires that names, if they are truly logically simple, stand for objects which are similarly simple; it is not possible for a name to be used in such a way as to fail to have a reference, or for a simple object to lack a name, given that sense is determinate at all. [12] These objects, correspondent to the simplest significant elements of language, must themselves exist necessarily and sempiternally. The suggestion that names can accordingly never fail to be used *truly* is blocked by the claim that names do not admit of truth or falsity at all, since they do not in any sense *assert*. Nevertheless, since the correspondence of names to the objects for which they stand is constitutive of the determinacy of sense, it cannot be doubted as long as this determinacy is itself to be maintained. More generally, the claim of an absolute and given link between names and objects, established in advance and maintained by means of rules of logical syntax throughout the significant use

[12] Of course it is possible for non-simple names, such as those we ordinarily use in language, to fail to refer to objects (indeed, they generally do thus fail, since they contain concealed assertions (in line with Russell's theory of descriptions) which may be true or false: thus they may be used "falsely" – when the assertion is false – and even if used "truly" they do not refer directly to objects, but rather to facts).

of the language, is crucial to the *Tractatus* idea of logical form itself. For it is only this claim that guarantees the underlying correspondence between logically possible sentences, and actually possible states of affairs, which underlies and makes for the very possibility of a sentence's determinate truth value and sense. For this reason, even if one asserts a falsehood, one still does so by means of *names* which refer to things "that are" – that is, simple objects. The sentence may refer to a *Sachverhalt* rather than a *Tatsache*, but it still has sense at all only owing to the formal rules which ultimately connect the simple names in it to simple objects.

Can the idea of a correspondence of logical form at the basis of sense be maintained, while admitting the possibility of using a *simple* name incorrectly, for instance to refer to nothing, or to refer to the "wrong" thing? It is difficult to see how, since logical form is itself exhausted by the systematic rules which govern the possible combinations of names into possible sentences, themselves correspondent to the ontological possibilities of states of affairs. Even if we adopt the sort of picture suggested by Ryle, on which the truth and falsity of sentences is primary and names are to be understood more as abstractable "features" of sentences than simple elements out of which they are made, the truth and falsity of sentences itself requires their determinate correspondence and non-correspondence to states of affairs. And this correspondence and non-correspondence must itself be understood in terms of the simpler correspondence of names to elements. Although the Tractatarian Wittgenstein thinks that we may mistake *which* rules we are using in using a particular sign, he never so much as considers that the rule *actually* underlying use might be incorrect, or even that it might be misapplied. Indeed, to do so would be to consider that the rules *constitutive* of the sense of signs might be wrong or misapplied, and thus that a symbol might be used both meaningfully and without its proper sense (which would be a contradiction). It is only because the rules underlying sense correlate names to objects that names have sense at all. So it is not possible, in this context as for Cratylus himself, to suppose that names might be incorrect while still being names.

Of course one might admit all of this and hold to Cratylus's position officially, biting the bullet of the paradox of falsehood by holding that the Parmenidean conclusion of the impossibility of incorrectness is right, at least on the level of names. But then we would still face the question of the *nomothetes*, of how the order of correspondence at the basis of sense is *established* in such a way as to be maintained through the regular use of language. It is not clear how the position of the *Tractatus* can give any motivated answer to this question, beyond something like the obscurantist appeal to divine authority that Cratylus in fact does ultimately rely upon. This is a position for which "the sense of the world" and its basis must indeed, as Wittgenstein says in the *Tractatus*, lie "outside the world," perspicuous as a whole only from a position that itself stands systematically outside the order thus instituted.[13] Once the question of the ultimate instituting basis of the regular sense of names is raised, it cannot seem satisfying, except as a placeholder for the insuperable paradox of the "mystical" and inexpressible fact that there is a world at all.[14]

4. Beyond naturalism and conventionalism: forms and form-of-life

I have argued that, as Plato appears already to see, both conventionalist and naturalist accounts of the correctness of names as it is maintained in practice fail because both encounter the double problem of the paradox of institution – whereby correctness must apparently be presupposed in order to be instituted – and of maintaining a distinction between correctness and incorrectness in iterated use. Similar or identical difficulties, as I have argued, face Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* account in terms of logical form, and Plato's own critique of both kinds of position closely resembles the critical considerations about rule-following which Wittgenstein, in the *Investigations*, brings to bear against his own earlier picture. But if naturalism and conventionalism both thus fail to account for the sense of names, is there another

[13] *TLP* 6.41.
[14] *TLP* 6.44.

alternative? Wittgenstein's own argument in the *Investigations* is of course largely negative, directed toward diagnosing the inherent aporias of any position that founds language on a primitive connection between words and things, or an institution of rules, understood as given and fixed in advance, before linguistic use itself. Nevertheless, there are, as well, positive indications of a way out, such as the scattered remarks in which he points to the dimension of life and practice which is, for him, "bedrock." In this connection, it is significant that Plato twice in the *Cratylus* appears to indicate at least the possibility of a positive resolution to both of the interlinked problems of logical form he introduces by means of what can be seen, perhaps anachronistically but without distortion, as an appeal to the specific idea of a *form of life*.

The first of these appeals comes early on in the dialogue, when Socrates is questioning Hermogenes about the implications of his conventionalist position. Faced with the distinction between a better and a worse use of names, Hermogenes has agreed that a name can be seen as a kind of tool and is, as such, capable of being better or worse made. Socrates now asks, extending the analogy, *where* the *nomothetes* who is here conceived as the craftsman of names should look in order to achieve success in his productive work.

> *Socrates*: Come now, consider where a rule-setter [*nomothetes*] looks in giving names. Use the previous discussion as your guide. Where does a carpenter look in making a shuttle? Isn't it to that sort of thing whose nature is to weave?
>
> *Hermogenes*: Certainly.
>
> *Socrates*: Suppose the shuttle breaks while he's making it. Will he make another looking to the broken one? Or will he look to the very form (*to eidos*) to which he looked in making the one he broke?
>
> *Hermogenes*: In my view, he will look to the form.
>
> *Socrates*: Then it would be absolutely right to call that what a shuttle itself is.
>
> *Hermogenes*: I suppose so (389a-b).

Socrates here makes a typically Platonic appeal to what he calls the "form". In the sense relevant here, the form is what ultimately sets

the standards for the good or correct construction of a tool intended for a particular kind of purpose. The form thus has the value of a paradigm for the good construction of the tool. But it is also explained as *nothing other than* what the tool in question itself *is*: what a shuttle is in itself and as such, or (on the suggested analogy) what a name is or must be in order to be able to function as it does. Like a skilled blacksmith, the capable *nomothetes* must be able skillfully to embody in the material at hand the kind of tool that is well suited for the kind of work needed, here the use of names in both referring to things and instructing others about them. As he often does, Socrates appeals here to the dimension of form as abstracted from the particular material in which it figures: just as a blacksmith's tool may be made of any of various pieces or types of metal, a name may be forged from various possible sounds. But what is less typical and more notable is his further suggestion that the form *itself* is to be understood not simply by reference to the craftsman who forges the tool or the name, but, more decisively, by reference to the tool's (or the name's) ordinary *use*:

> *Socrates*: Now, who is likely to know whether the appropriate form of shuttle is present in any given bit of wood? A carpenter who makes it or a waver who uses it?
>
> *Hermogenes*: In all likelihood, Socrates, it is the one who uses it.
>
> *Socrates*: So who uses what a lyre-maker produces? Isn't he the one who would know best how to supervise the manufacture of lyres and would also know whether what has been made has been well made or not?
>
> *Hermogenes*: Certainly.
>
> *Socrates*: Who is that?
>
> *Hermogenes*: A lyre-player.
>
> *Socrates*: And who will supervise a ship-builder?
>
> *Hermogenes*: A ship's captain.
>
> *Socrates*: And who can best supervise the work of a rule-setter, whether here or abroad, and judge its products? Isn't it whoever will use them?
>
> *Hermogenes*: Yes (390b-c).

Just as a successful ship-builder or lyre-maker must look toward, and be guided by, those who actually use their products for their purposes, the setter of rules for the use of names can do no better, in referring to their forms, then to look to the ordinary practice of their use. It is within the ordinary use of names that is to be found, ultimately, that dimension of them which at once provides a paradigm for a name's functioning to indicate something and allows it to present what its referent essentially is. In thus specifying the dimension of form as it applies to names in their relation to things, Socrates does not suggest that – and (given the paradox of the *nomothetes* itself) he does not even seem to leave room for the idea that – the form of the connection of the name to the thing *could* be given in advance of the life and practices in which it has its use. The most characteristic of these, for Plato, is the practice of dialectical questioning, wherein it becomes clear what anything is. As specified this way, the form of a name is thus no longer a logical form, fixed in advance of use and thereby somehow capable of determining its application to things once and for all without risk of incorrectness or incorrect use. Given Socrates' arguments against both the positions of Hermogenes and Cratylus, it is, moreover, no longer to be understood either as the name's natural connection or similitude to the thing it stands for *or* as the product of an essentially arbitrary conventional institution. It is rather to be understood, in relation to the essential irreducibility of use, and including essentially the dimension of correct or incorrect use, as an aspect of a form of life.

The second point at which Socrates at least seems to indicate the possibility of a characterization of the forms of names that links them, beyond naturalism and conventionalism, to a form of life comes near the end of the dialogue. Here, he is pressing Cratylus on the apparent limits of the natural connection between the sounds composing a name and the thing it names. The name "sklerotes" (hardness), for example, includes an 'l' which has been previously held to stand for softness rather than hardness. Cratylus suggests that, in cases like these, one should simply amend the name, in this case replacing the 'l' with an 'r' to make the analysis

go through, but Socrates objects on the basis of our apparent ordinary understanding of the unaltered word:

> *Socrates*: ….But what about when someone says "skleron" ('hard'), and pronounces it the way we do at present? Don't we understand him? Don't you yourself know what *I* mean by it?
>
> *Cratylus*: I do, but that's because of usage [*ethos*].
>
> *Socrates*: When you say 'usage' [*ethos*], do you mean something other than convention [*synthekes*]? Do you mean something by 'usage' besides this: when I utter this name and mean hardness by it, you know that this is what I mean? Isn't that what you're saying?
>
> *Cratylus*: Yes.
>
> *Socrates*: And if when I utter a name, you know what I mean, doesn't that name become a way for me to express it to you?
>
> *Cratylus*: Yes.
>
> *Socrates*: Even though the name I utter is unlike the thing I mean – since 'l' is unlike hardness (to revert to your example). But if that's right, surely you have entered into a convention [*synethou*] with yourself, and the correctness of names has become a matter of convention for you, for isn't it the chance of usage and convention that makes both like and unlike letters express things? And even if usage [*ethos*] is completely different from convention, still you must say that expressing something isn't a matter of likeness but of usage, since usage, it seems, enables both like and unlike names to express things. Since we agree on these points, Cratylus, for I take your silence as a sign of agreement, both convention and usage must contribute something to expressing what we mean when we speak. Consider numbers, Cratylus, since you want to have recourse to them. Where do you think you'll get names that are like each one of the numbers, if you don't allow this agreement and convention of yours to have some control over the correctness of names?... (434d-435c).

Cratylus is here faced with the variety and apparent intractability of the counterexamples to the claim of a natural resemblance between each word and the thing for which it stands. The most decisive of these counterexamples is the case of numbers, for which there must be an unlimited variety of names, and it is impossible to specify the resemblance between the signs and the objects without appealing as well to some principle of regular convention or

agreement on the basis for the systematic generation of the names. In response to these apparent counterexamples, Cratylus can do no better than to appeal to the fact that we *do* understand each other, even when the names bear no natural resemblance to what they are supposed to stand for, and to ascribe this understanding to the prior existence of "usage", custom, or *ethos*. This admission is sufficient for Socrates to establish, against Cratylus's naturalist position, that there must be a basis for regular use in some form of agreement or customary practice: our agreement in a commonly shared way of "going on", as we may say, that owes nothing to natural resemblance itself. This allows Socrates to show that Cratylus, in order to maintain his position, will apparently at least have to temper it by acknowledging the opposite principle of conventionally regulated usage, just as he has earlier shown Hermogenes that he must apparently admit some kind of "natural" likeness of words to things in order to account for the correctness of names at all. Socrates allows, here, that such regulated usage may indeed have to be understood as a matter of agreement in the sense of "convention" [*synthekes*], a kind of agreement that (as we might suppose) Cratylus or any speaker has made "with himself" to use a word in a particular signification. But Socrates also clearly indicates the possibility that the right grounding is to be found, not in such an in-advance agreement, but in what he calls "usage" or *ethos*, the lived phenomenon of the concrete and intersubjective use of a name.[15] Even if Cratylus cannot distinguish between the two, it remains that Socrates at least gestures toward the possibility of a distinction between them, and therefore of a sense of founding "agreement" that is not a matter of conventions formed in advance, but rather of the "agreement" that we again and again find in the practice of a language, in using names, asking questions, giving explanations, and so forth. But although all of these practices essentially include the possibility of the distinction between correctness and incorrectness on which Socrates' argument turns, this is no longer a question of agreement on a rule

[15] It is admittedly somewhat contentious to translate "ethos" by "usage;" "custom" or perhaps "customary way of life" would do as well. But the point remains the same, regardless of the specific translation.

for use or a standard for it that can be separated from the ongoing life of our practices with the word itself. It is (we may say with Wittgenstein) no longer agreement in *what* we believe, but rather agreement in form of life (*PI* 241).

At the end of the dialogue, the conclusion that Socrates draws is aporeatic. He himself prefers that "names should be as much like things as possible," and appears still to hope to find a basis for this view in the examination of the "things themselves," that is, the aspects of things that he treats as the forms. But he acknowledges that we will also almost certainly have to "make use of this worthless thing, convention, in the correctness of names" (435c-d).

Socrates does not here develop – nor does Plato develop in detail anywhere else – the suggestion of a third possibility which he nevertheless appears to make. This is the suggestion of a grounding of names and their correctness in a dimension of life and practice which is neither simply natural nor conventional in the sense of conventional rules stipulated or agreed to in advance of usage. However, if we were to follow up on these apparent suggestions, how could we understand this conception of the correctness of names as grounded ultimately in something like a form of life? I briefly adumbrate a few features, without arguing for them in any detail:

I) The correctness of names and their use in instruction would be grounded in something that is genuinely *formal* – something bearing, that is, the objectivity and even the ideality characteristic of what Plato understood as the form or idea. Here, the form of a name – what the name itself "is" – is (as in the case of a well-formed tool) to be understood in terms of its capability to accomplish the various ends for which it is used. These ends, and the features of the tool which make it liable to accomplish them, are separable in principle from any number of concrete instances of its use on an occasion; but they nevertheless do not involve any standard of success or achievement that is absolutely fixed or determined in advance.

2) The use of the name, as understood as a matter of form of life, would thus constitutively involve, as Plato emphasizes, a distinction between correctness that is in no way subjective,

variable relative to specific languages or communities, or itself arbitrary. It would thus bear the *universality* proper to (what Plato understands as) a form as such, and it would be wholly appropriate to take toward it the resolutely "realist" attitude which is licensed by the distinction between correctness and incorrectness that it introduces to begin with.[16]

3) Nevertheless, the correctness of a name would have no basis, as we have seen, in anything prior to or independent of the usage of it in the course of ordinary life and practices (as well as the dialectic which tries to get clear about this usage, or indeed involves it as a constituent instrument). We could put this by saying that that which the ordinary use of a name rests on, and which is illuminated by the dialectic with respect to it, is inseparable from the *essence* of the thing, what Plato understands as its "what it is". With this, the dialectical investigation of the form becomes at the same time, and irreducibly, an investigation of grammatical form as form of life.

In all of this, Plato appears to agree with Wittgenstein when he holds, criticizing his own earlier view according to which one cannot describe ultimately simple elements but only *name* them, that the institution of names is "not yet a move in a language-game". While "with the mere naming of a thing, nothing has yet been done", neither does anything *have* a name "except in a game" (*PI* 49). It is only in the context of a regularity of use and practice that names can have the significance of naming at all, and it is only a dialectic or grammatical investigation of this use and practice that can ultimately illuminate the correctness of names and their relation to truth.[17] But as I have argued, Plato appears also to agree with Wittgenstein when he holds that "*Essence* is expressed by grammar" and that "grammar tells what kind of object anything is". (PI 371, PI 373). The critical or dialectical reflection on grammar, is, then, nothing other than the elucidation of the forms of things, and thus

[16] It is no objection to this to point out that very different sounds may be used in different languages to refer to the same thing. As Socrates points out, this is explicitly analogous to the fact that the same kind of tool may be made out of slightly different material from case to case, and yet still accomplish the same function.

[17] Plato often draws the connection of dialectical to grammatical investigation; see e.g. *Sophist* 253a ff., *Philebus* 18b ff.

illuminates the ultimate basis for the correctness and incorrectness of their use in the essences of the things themselves. But it does not ascribe this basis to anything, or seek to articulate it anywhere, other than on the ground which Wittgenstein also indicates as "what must be accepted" as "the given," namely that of forms of life (PI, PPF, 345).

It will be objected that such a suggestion can do no better, in explaining the basis of names and their content, than either of the programs of naturalism or conventionalism that have been refuted in the dialogue by the paradox of the *nomothetes*. For if the form of life is here seen as a prior basis for the usage and correctness of names, then the question inevitably arises of how such a form is itself grounded: what makes *it* correct or incorrect, or explains its inevitable "correctness", if it enjoys such, in a non-arbitrary way? And then we seem to be back with the vicious circle of presupposition that we encountered in considering the basis of the action of the *nomothetes* to begin with. The answer to this, though, which can be given in a Wittgensteinian or (as I have argued) indeed also in a "Platonic" voice, is that where it is not a question of ultimate explanations but rather of making clear to ourselves the forms that are in fact already involved in our meaning and understanding what we do, the circle is no longer vicious. Once we see how the correctness or incorrectness of the use of names can indeed be embodied in forms of life and practice with them, we can admit that there is no non-paradoxical answer to the question of what ultimately or finally grounds them. At the same time, we can pursue the different task of a formal clarification of them by means, as it may be, of a Platonic (or indeed a Wittgensteinian) practice of dialectic, a task for the accomplishment of which a non-paradoxical *explanation* of their ultimate "basis" is neither necessary nor useful.

5. Formalism and naturalism: McDowell's "naturalism of second nature"

I have argued that the critical considerations Plato adduces against both naturalist and conventionalist accounts of the correctness of names bear essential parallels to some of those involved in the late

Wittgenstein's investigations of rule-following, and positively that suggestions of both philosophers may contribute to the articulation of an alternative to both kinds of account. The alternative is an understanding of names in terms of what is specified, for both philosophers, as form(s) of life. If this is right, it plausibly bears significant implications for contemporary discussions of the implications of Wittgenstein's arguments, particularly those that attempt to develop an understanding of language, content, and practices that takes them into consideration. It is notable in this regard, in particular, that contemporary discussions of the positive upshot of Wittgenstein's views, especially those following on Kripke's influential framing of Wittgenstein's argument about rule-following, have often taken the form of an oscillation between a kind of conventionalism and a kind of naturalism. On the one hand, there are "pragmatist," "communitarian," or "social" accounts that see content and rule-following as irreducibly grounded in socially instituted and maintained practices. On the other, there are biologistic or anthropomorphic accounts couched in terms of the specificity of the "human" organism as such. But if considerations common to Plato and Wittgenstein offer the grounds for a basic refutation of both naturalism and conventionalism about linguistic rules then it may be that they point to an essential and constitutive dimension which is typically missed by both kinds of contemporary accounts, even when they try to interpret Wittgenstein's idea of form-of-life, namely that of form itself.

Of course, there can be no question here of re-introducing a banal "Platonism" by invoking (for instance) to supersensible objects of an envisioned "third realm", beyond spatiotemporal existence. But as we have seen, Plato himself appears to move beyond such a picture when he clarifies forms, in the sense relevant to the *Cratylus* discussion of names, as ultimately given in their usage and subject to standards introduced only there. To insist upon this dimension, which is, as I have argued, rightly called a dimension of *form* without being any the less a dimension *of* life and usage, is also not to dispute what Stanley Cavell says (for instance) when he carefully argues in *The Claim of Reason* that Wittgenstein's

concept of "form of life" admits of *both* "naturalist" and "conventionalist" kinds of clarification and specification, the first (as Wittgenstein says), in terms of the system of the "common behavior of mankind" and the second (as Cavell helpfully suggests), in terms of the kind of "convening of our criteria" wherein we recurrently bring our socially conventional and instituted practices up for critical reflection and rational judgment (Cavell 1979: 108-125). But it is to suggest that the concept of form(s) of life essentially includes another kind of dimension, actually irreducible to the terms involved in either the conventionalism of instituted practices, or the naturalism of lives, that characterize the spectrum of the current discussion.

In closing, I shall attempt briefly to specify this suggestion of an irreducible third dimension, as it contrasts with one prominent contemporary account. I shall not consider the critical bearing of Plato's argument against broadly conventionalist views of rule-following, for instance those which advert to instituted practices of correcting, assertibility conditions in the place of truth conditions, instituted proprieties, and so forth, since I think the considerations decisive against these views have already been noted. First, it is essentially obscure how collective agreement can institute regularities of practice or criticism that can be expected to maintain a standard of correctness (or conforming or failing to conform with the institution) across all possible instances of use. And second, even granting that these forms of institution indeed successfully institute such regularities of practice or criticism, it remains obscure how we could assess or evaluate *their* basic correctness or grounding.[18] Nor shall I consider any of the more reductive forms of naturalistic account which have been offered on Wittgenstein's behalf (or as partially critical responses to his views), for instance those which attempt to reduce rule-following to a kind

[18] It is additionally striking (though I do not pursue the point here) that one of the major lines of argument of the *Investigations* typically adduced by partisans of conventionalist views to support an irreducibly social or conventional account of the institution of language, namely the "private language argument," turns centrally on the possibility of distinguishing between the correct and incorrect use of a (public) sign in reference to one's *own* experience (cf. *PI* 258), a possibility which (as I have argued) the conventionalist picture cannot by itself provide a foundation for.

of neurobiologically basic or hard-wired functioning. I shall consider only the more nuanced Aristotelian naturalism suggested by McDowell in *Mind and World* as a response to what he puts as the problem of thought's engagement with a world, what he calls a naturalism of "second nature" or a "naturalized Platonism".

McDowell's suggestion of such a naturalism responds to the challenge of bringing what he calls our "responsiveness to meaning" into the realm of what is broadly conceivable as natural, given the evident impossibility of doing so if nature itself is pictured (as it is in the context of what he calls "bald naturalism") as exhausted by the realm of causal natural law. Such a picture, McDowell correctly suggests, cannot accommodate genuine exercises of spontaneity, and so cannot explain how our activities of thinking and judging can genuinely involve a responsiveness to meaning, a "knowing one's way about in the space of reasons" as opposed to just being caused to react in the space of causes. The solution he recommends is to reconceive "nature" itself in a broader way, so as to include essentially capacities which are ours, *qua* human, and are actualized in becoming initiated and acculturated into a particular way of life:

> The rethinking requires a different conception of actualizations of our nature. We need to bring responsiveness to meaning back into the operations of our natural sentient capacities as such, even while we insist that responsiveness to meaning cannot be captured in naturalistic terms, so long as 'naturalistic' is glossed in terms of the realm of law. (McDowell 1997: 77)

This reconception, as McDowell specifies it, involves denying that the "space of reasons" is constituted in a way that is independent of anything "specifically human"; rather, it is to be seen as accessible to us through the specific capacities we possess as a "certain species of animals" (McDowell 1977: 77). This allows us to understand this responsiveness to meaning in a way that thus avoids, as he argues, a "rampant Platonism" which pictures it as an "autonomous" and "inhuman" structure of a supernatural kind, whereby our apparent access to it would seem to place us simultaneously both inside and outside nature. McDowell goes on to argue that a way in to the recommended alternative of

"naturalized Platonism or "naturalism of second nature" can be found by reflecting on Aristotle's own conception of virtue of character as grounded in the actualization of the capacity of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, to respond to the demands of reason in particular cases of deliberation and action (McDowell 1997: 78-89).

One of the central motivations of McDowell's picture of our access to what he calls, following Sellars, the "space of reasons," is to preserve, as against conventionalist or coherentist pictures, the essential distinction, within this access, between correctness and incorrectness. He emphasizes, for instance, that in characterizing our relationship to the realm of contents and their rational linkages, we respond to requirements that are "there anyway", regardless of what we think or do. It is an integral part of this picture that there must be a distinction, fixed independently of particular cultural institutions or contexts, between getting these requirements right and mistaking them. It is thus clear that McDowell's picture does not directly fall victim to one of the problems that vitiates Cratylus's naturalist account in the dialogue: namely that of the impossibility, given the claim of an *a priori* natural connection between words and things, of using a name incorrectly. But we can begin to ask whether McDowell's naturalism does not after all involve a covert appeal to the constitutive dimension of form we have discussed by asking what the specifically rational capacities he invokes are capacities *for*. How should we understand what our rational capacities, if in fact actualized by means of our "second-natural" acculturation into a linguistic community, put us in a position to do? One way to answer this would be to appeal to what is in fact Aristotle's own answer to the question of the specific capacity definitive of the rational soul: that it allows us to grasp *all* of the forms, regardless of their spatial or temporal location or our own empirical limitations (Aristotle 1984: 682 (*De Anima*, III.4, 429a10-29)). But the universality of this answer would itself rest, in an obvious way, on a dimension of the formal that cannot easily be understood in terms of a *specific* cultural tradition or community, or what is available to those acculturated to it. On the other hand, one could opt for a conventionalist answer: one gains the ability to

access those contents and rational linkages which are accessible to those who belong to a particularly constituted community, given the practices and norms which it adopts. But to opt for this kind of answer would obviously be to return to a conventionalism which cannot account for either the correctness of the norms or, indeed, their authority and force once (supposedly) adopted.

As I have suggested, what seems to be the idea of forms of life that is held in common by Plato and Wittgenstein can provide at least a partial way out of this dilemma, by locating the essential and universal dimension of form, not indeed in "specifically human" capacities, but rather in the structure of language as such. On this kind of picture, it is language as such that gives us access to the universality of the forms, and yields, through its use, the constitutive distinction of correctness and incorrectness with respect to them. This is not to return to a "rampant Platonism", since the use of language is of course not simply alien to us or what we do, but it is also not to ground our access to form in the biological capacities of any individual or species. The appeal is not to anything before or beyond what Wittgenstein would put as the "natural" facts of our usage of language, but it is also essential to it that language figure as more than just the expression of the results of individual rational capacities of thought or (as McDowell also suggests) a repository for (cultural) tradition (McDowell 1997: 125-26). It would instead figure, as Plato already suggests, as a kind of original dimension that is indeed not specifically human, but rather captures, embodies, and gives effective reality to the universal dimension of form. Rather than understanding language in terms of the specific biology of the human, it would then appear as an original dimension into which we enter with our specific maturity, and with which we are constitutively and irreducibly taken up at the fundamental and problematic point of the possible entry into life of the articulate truth of what is.[19]

[19] I would like to thank the participants in a graduate seminar on "Wittgenstein and Plato" held at UNM in fall, 2014, where much of the material presented in this paper was initially worked out, and Hao Tang and the participants at the 2015 International Wittgenstein Conference in Guangzhou, People's Republic of China, where the paper was first

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BT *Big Typescript* (2005) [TS 213]

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TLP *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921, 1922, 1933, 1955, 1961, 1963, 1972, 1989, 2003, 2004, 2009) [TSS 202-203. Kritische Ausgabe 1989: TSS 202–203, MSS 101-104, 301, TSS 201a–b]

Biographical Note

Paul Livingston is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of New Mexico. He has published widely on the history of twentieth

presented. I would like to thank Martin Gustafsson for inviting me to publish the paper here. Thanks also to John Bova for helpful feedback on an earlier draft.

century philosophy and topics in contemporary analytic and continental philosophy. He is the sole author of three books; the most recent of these, *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism* (Routledge, 2012), considers the implications of formalism and formal structures for contemporary thought about politics, social organization, and the possibility of radical change. His book, *The Logic of Being: Realism, Truth, and Time*, which investigates the relationship of truth and time from a perspective informed by Heidegger's ontological project, drawing also on the work of Frege, Tarski, Davidson, and Dummett, will be published by Northwestern University Press in 2016 or 2017. He is also working on an ongoing project (of which this paper is a part) on parallels and connections between Plato and Wittgenstein.