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*Cratylus*

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Rice University, 1987
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SAUSSURE'S AND DERRIDA'S ANTI-METAPHYSICS:
A READING OF PLATO'S CRATYLUS

by

Jean Latham Carlisle

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

Jane Chance
Jane Chance, Professor of English, Chairman

William Bowman Piper
William Bowman Piper,
Professor of English

Deborah Nelson
Deborah Nelson, Associate Professor of French

Douglas Mitchell
Douglas Mitchell, Adjunct Associate Professor of Linguistics and Semiotics

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Abstract

The theory of language articulated in Plato's Cratylus anticipates many of the points of the contemporary language theories in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida. The Cratylus is the only dialogue in the canon of Plato's work devoted exclusively to the study of language signs, called by him "names," and I will argue that it contains Plato's primary theory of language. I will also argue that passages of the Cratylus are misread by Derrida.

My argument is divided into four parts. The first part is devoted to tracing out the traditionally read metaphysics of language in Plato's Phaedo and placing it in context as the basis for the metaphysics to which and against which Saussure and Derrida respond in their work, Course in General Linguistics and Speech and Phenomena, respectively. Chapter II elucidates Plato's theory of the sign in the synthesis of the Cratylus. My point in this chapter is that the theory is not metaphysical and that it has several features in common with the theories of Saussure and Derrida. Also in this chapter I cite specific passages from the Cratylus which I believe Derrida has misconstrued. The third chapter consists of the thesis and antithesis of the dialogue. The thesis of the dialogue,
Cratylus' argument, is that the signifier is bound naturally to what it signifies. The antithesis, Hermogenes' counterargument, is that language signs are radically arbitrary and that each individual speaker can make up his own names for things. The last chapter is an analysis of the praxis of the dialogue in which Socrates tests Cratylus' thesis by means of etymological analysis of words, names. In this section, Socrates demonstrates the instability of language signs and the unreliability of meaning inferred from signs. This is the last persuasion that language signs are conventional, differential, ambiguous traces of other signs, not things.
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Preface

I became interested in what Plato says about language while studying theories of literary criticism and philosophy of language at Rice University under the tutelage of Professor Wesley Morris. In the course of my studies, I read Paul de Man's book, Allegories in Reading and was disconcerted by how his method of analysis thins a literary text. The emphasis of his method of analysis falls upon the mechanics of signs, that is, how they work. In his text, he credits the influence of the French semioticians and German poetologists with influencing him to practice their method of analysis in his own criticism. I began working backward from de Man to see the trail that had led to a preoccupation with how words "mean" over what they mean. I found that de Man and the French semioticians built upon the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida.

In reading Derrida, I found corrective references to Saussure's Course in General Linguistics and Plato's Phaedrus. Both Saussure and Derrida were at odds with a popular understanding of Platonism, so I began reading Plato's dialogues to better understand his theory of Forms
and its part in a Platonic theory of Language. In the process of searching for a metaphysical theory of language in the work of Plato, I read the *Cratylus* and was surprised to find in its synthesis a theory which sounded much like Saussure's and Derrida's. It was then that I began serious research and study of that dialogue. The revelations that lay in the work were the similarity of contemporary theories to Plato's own and the clarity with which those theories could be articulated by a simple prose style which has not lost its freshness and impact.
Introduction

Plato is exerting a well-concealed influence upon literary theory today. The old, recognizable Plato lives in the pages of the Republic, the Ion and the Phaedrus and he condemns the poet, the poem, and written speeches in general. He speaks of Forms and pure Ideas. But a little known Plato, speaking through the Socrates of the Cratylus, has just as long been speaking a message which is surprisingly contemporaneous to the messages of Structuralism and post-Structuralism. The conventional notion of Plato's theory of language is inferred from his theory of Forms, but there is another Platonic theory of language in the Cratylus and it is specific and to the point. When one reads the Cratylus, one has the uncanny feeling of recognition that comes with knowing that one has read the same thing somewhere else. But the similar texts come from contemporary schools of thought and the Plato of the Cratylus sounds ultimately like Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida, or more correctly, vice versa. All three thinkers theorize that language signs are arbitrary and conventional, not metaphysical. They all three exclude language from access to absolute truth and maintain that language "means" through its power to differentiate. The Plato of the Cratylus is right at home in the semiotic new wave reaching America from the European continent and unsettling critical approaches to literature.
For many years in the United States, the Anglo-American New Criticism was the greatest new influence in literary criticism. Many American critics and scholars adopted the New Critics' formalist theory of literary language for their own work and taught it to students. The poem as autonomous, self-referential whole was interpreted using evidence that was valid only if it came from the poem itself. Language, the New Critic said, is a medium of the artist and means only what it means within the poem. There is now a different voice in literary criticism.

The legitimacy of the formalism of New Criticism is being challenged by French literary and linguistic studies based on the language theories of Saussure and Derrida, theories which do not see the poem as an isolated artifact but a contingent, cultural, and rhetorical text. Structuralism, generally acknowledged to be the offspring of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and utilized by such influential thinkers as Claude Levi-Strauss in anthropology and Roland Barthes in literary criticism, urges the reader to see in the text signs which signify the structures of society. According to the *Course*, the linguistic sign is a union of concept and sound image and, collectively, signs make up the *langue* of a community of speakers (66). Language is a system and is the storehouse containing the "signs" arbitrarily assigned to the concepts that the community talks about. There is no natural tie between the name and what it names; man could
have as easily been named "horse." Signifiers convey meaning only insofar as they are associated with signifieds by convention and once the convention is made, it is permanent or only gradually, imperceptibly changed. Saussure denies that language refers to "ready-made ideas;" it is a system made up of arbitrary pairings of signifier and signified (65). Language is essentially a spoken system and writing is only speech written down. Jacques Derrida, in various texts, agrees with Saussure that the sign is arbitrary and that language does not refer to Ideas, but he challenges Saussure's theory on two counts. He objects to Saussure's system of reference to concepts and his priority to spoken language.

First, he finds that in Saussure's linguistics the sign still refers to metaphysical concepts, even though dissociated from Forms. He carries Saussure's notion of non-necessary relationship between signifier and signified further and theoretically detaches it from any suggestion of what he calls the metaphysics of presence. Derrida's objection to what Saussure presents is pinpointed in Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak's Preface to Of Grammatology:

He (Derrida) sees in the traditional concept of the sign a heterogeneity - "the other of the signified is never contemporary, it is at best a subtly discrepant inverse or parallel - discrepant by the time of a breath - of the order of the signifier." It is indeed an ineluctable nostalgia for presence that makes of this heterogeneity a unity by declaring that a sign brings forth the presence of the signified. (xvi)
Belief in the presence of the signified in the sign itself is persistent in Western philosophy, Derrida says, and there is little doubt that such metaphysics is rooted in Plato. Vincent Leitch in his excellent study of Derrida's post-structuralist deconstruction, *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* says it this way:

Let's say provisionally that the history of contemporary deconstruction opens with Jacques Derrida's *De la grammatologie* (1967), which opens with a critique of Saussure. The semiology of Saussure is here framed as the final gasp of Western philosophy, that is, of a metaphysical system that spans from Plato and Aristotle to Heidegger and Levi-Strauss. By Derrida this system is called "logocentric," meant as a critical and unkind epithet. (24)

Writing in his Preface to Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, Newton Garver also locates the root of Western metaphysics in Plato's theory of Forms:

In the history of Western philosophy, the philosophy of language— including a great deal of its metaphysics— has almost invariably been based on logic rather than rhetoric. This is certainly true of Plato's theory of forms, of Aristotle's doctrine of predication, of the mediaeval controversy over universals, of Leibniz' grand project for a universal symbolism, and of rationalism and idealism in general. (xi)

Garver follows the influence of logocentric metaphysics even further forward through Hobbes, Locke, James, and Russell. He might have included Saussure, according to Derrida, for Saussure continues Plato's logocentrism. This line of development leads to Derrida's second objection to Saussure's *Course*.

Logocentric theories privilege spoken language over
written. Leitch says, "as portrayed by Derrida, the logocentric system always assigns the origin of truth to the *logos* — the spoken word, to the voice of reason, or to the Word of God" (25). So, not only does Derrida contest the reference of the sign to the seemingly metaphysical concepts, he also contests the privilege of voice over graphics. Saussure's view of writing as secondary to speech is unacceptable to Derrida and the objection is a continuation of his argument with Plato's *Phaedrus*. Derrida argues that writing is primary to speech. His argument runs throughout *Of Grammatology*, *Dissemination*, and *Speech and Phenomena*.

What evolves, then, is a pattern that includes all three theorists, a pattern based upon a presumption that Plato's theory of language is metaphysical. It goes like this: Plato theorizes that language signs refer to and participate in metaphysical Forms (the *Phaedo*) and that speech is better than writing because it is the more immediate to thought (the *Phaedrus*). Saussure responds that language does not refer to Forms but to conventional concepts defined by a community of speakers. Voice is still privileged over writing. Derrida replies that Saussure's body of floating communal concepts is still metaphysical and that it implies a system of logical, one-to-one reference that does not actually obtain. He continues that voice has no nearer access to thought than writing does and that writing actually comes first.
The point I want to make here is that both Saussure and Derrida ostensibly write in opposition, either implicitly or explicitly, to a Platonic theory of language. Plato provides for them the specific metaphysical background against which to pit their own theories of language. Saussure does not go as far as Derrida and it is the remnant of metaphysics in Saussure that Derrida opposes.

I shall argue that metaphysics is not the basis for Plato's primary theory of language. My thesis is that, although it has been unexplicated and unrecognized heretofore, Plato's *Cratylus* develops a complex theory of language which repudiates any metaphysics of presence in linguistic signs. The *Cratylus* unmistakably anticipates the theories of Saussure and Derrida. The project of this dissertation is to explicate the *Cratylus* to document Plato's primary theory of language, and to point out the striking similarities within it to the latter theorists' theories. In the development of my argument, I shall call into question Derrida's interpretation and representation of Plato's theory of language. I specifically challenge his reading of the *Phaedrus* as Plato's valorization of speech over writing and his citations of the *Cratylus* to support his reading of Plato's theory of language.

Though nearly all texts on the history of literary theory and criticism begin with Plato and his comments on poetry and rhetoric, his *Cratylus* has apparently been
overlooked in the scholarship of criticism. Without its explication and placement as the oldest extant text on the subject of how language works, and how signs are rooted in social conventions, the history of literary theory is incomplete. Unless it is understood and its value appreciated, the *Cratylus* will remain just an infrequently read dialogue filled with seemingly playful but nonproductive, often tedious, banter about names and etymologies.

Although the Plato of the *Cratylus* and Saussure and Derrida have much in common, the three have not been compared and no acknowledgement has been made of debt of scholarship the two latter scholars owe to the former. All three have been much written about, but the scholars who study them have had other agendas than mine.

Plato's *Cratylus* has only recently received attention as a significant dialogue in Plato's canon. Earlier scholars dismissed it with a cursory glance. H. N. Fowler introduces his translation of the dialogue with the remark that it cannot be "of great importance in the development of the Platonic system, as it treats of a special subject somewhat apart from general philosophic theory. . . . Linguistic science was in Plato's day little more than a priori speculation" (4). A. E. Taylor dismissed it with much the same disinterest in his book *Plato: The Man and his Work*. Paul Friedlander in his *Plato: An Introduction* says the dialogue is "more like a medley of merry pranks
than a specific treatise in linguistics" (32).

But later scholars have looked again to find there is much to consider seriously in the work. Some see the tie to language theory and others concern themselves with the question of metaphysics. Georgios Anagnostopoulos argues in his essay, "The Significance of Plato's 'Cratylus'," that the dialogue may be "the earliest attempt to solve a perennial philosophical problem about the relation between the nature and structure of language and the nature and structure of the world" (319). W. M. Pfeiffer examines the seeming presence of a correspondence theory of truth in "True and False Speech in Plato's CRATYLUS 385 B-C." Julius A. Elias in Plato's Defence of Poetry sees it as part of a buried "theory about the nature of language" (66). Rudolph H. Weingartner calls attention to Plato's refutation of a representational theory of language and points out that Plato's position puts him "at odds with his contemporaries and antecedents" (7). Richard Robinson's "A Criticism of Plato's Cratylus" is a penetrating study of the conflict between Plato's desire to have names and things match and his own awareness that such is not the case. Harry Berger, Jr., deals directly with the ontological-historical implications in a dialogue about language in "Plato's Cratylus: Dialogue as Revision." J. V. Luce, in "The Theory of Ideas in the Cratylus," Brian Calvert in "Forms and Flux in Plato's Cratylus," and Erik Nis Ostenfeld in Forms, Matter and Mind: Three Strands in
Plato's *Metaphysics*, debate the issue of metaphysical reference in the *Cratylus*. None of those interested in the dialogue has associated it with the language theories of Saussure and Derrida though they make contributions relevant to the project of this dissertation.

The scholarship on Saussure's *Course* is extensive and includes considerable literature about his sources as well as explanations of his language theories. The source studies fall into two overlapping categories: ancient/early historical influences and contemporary. W. Keith Percival's essay "Ferdinand de Saussure and the History of Semiotics" finds Saussure's concern with sign relations in works from Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, through Hippolyte Taine's *De l'intelligence*. Roman Jakobson's "Sign and System of Language: A Reassessment of Saussure's Doctrine" sees the influence of St. Augustine in Saussure's work. James A. Boon in "Saussure/Pierce a propos Language, Society and Culture" says Saussure's theory of difference is "very Mysterious-Eastern, or very preliterate, or very Platonic," but does not pin down those influences (88). It is clear in Boon's context that by "Platonic" he means "metaphysical."

In another essay, "The Saussurean Paradigm: Fact or Fantasy," Percival offers the reviews of the *Course* by Saussure's contemporaries and comments by those who might be presumed under his influence. The consensus among them is that Saussure was not an innovator but a follower of his immediate precursors and his contemporaries. The
structuralism of the Copenhagen, Geneva and Prague schools of linguistics was established before the Course and therefore, according to Percival, free of Saussure's influence. Jeppersen, Jakobsen, Trubetzkow, Bally and Sechehay were at odds with Saussure in print, he says. He attributes Saussure's rise to leadership to political events (33-49). Ernst Frideryk Konrad Loerner in his 1971 dissertation, "Ferdinand de Saussure. Origin and Development of His Linguistic Theory in Western Studies of Language: A Critical Evaluation of the Evolution of Saussurean Principles and Their Relevance to Contemporary Linguist Theories," promises much but delivers sources no further distant than the nineteenth century. Koerner built several other publications from his dissertation, including a bibliography of antecedents, but none does more to trace sources than his thesis. Ironically, one of Koerner's publications appeared in the German journal Kratylos but made no mention of a resemblance between the Course and Plato's Cratylos. Roman Jakobson's "Sign and System" also looks at Saussure's contemporaries and cites Polish linguist M. Kruszewski and American C. S. Pierce as scholars whose influence is underestimated by Saussure. Jonathan Culler's Structural Poetics offers the broadest and most general background and explanation of the Course. He sees Structuralism as a process built upon the foundation of Saussure's Course and he acknowledges linguists contemporary with Saussure, but he does not root
Saussure in the work of others. While there is some indication that many critics think of Saussure as a less than original scholar, none makes the connection to or comparison with Plato's *Cratylus*.

Derrida's texts on language range over such a broad spectrum that scholars place him variously in lines of influence of writers of apocalyptic theology, phenomenology, existentialism, linguistics, and Freudian psychology. It is David Raber's thesis, "Derrida's Apocalypse (Deconstruction, Poststructuralism, France)," which sees Derrida influenced by the theological thinking of the apocalyptic writers. Richard Rorty in "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing" finds in Derrida a debt to Heidegger and so does Geoffrey H. Hartman in "Monsieur Texte: On Jacques Derrida, His Glas." Susan Ruth Carlton in her dissertation, "On Authors, Readers, and Phenomenology: Husserlian Intentionality and the Literary Theories of E. D. Hirsch and Jacques Derrida," sees a link to another phenomenologist, Husserl, and says that Derrida's deconstruction and theory of *differance* are begun in a Kantian phenomenology as Idea. Hartman's essay also sees the influence of Nietzsche. Charles Altieri's essay, "Wittgenstein on Consciousness and Language: A Challenge to Derridean Literary Theory," cites the influence of Nietzsche, and Hartman's essay agrees. The most comprehensive study of Derrida's language theory is Vincent B. Leitch's *Deconstructive Criticism* and he lists the
forerunners and precursors of deconstruction: "Freud, Hegel, Heidegger, Husserl, Lacan, Levi-Strauss, Marx, Nietzsche, Saussure" (25). Significant to this dissertation is the fact that the comparison to Plato is still unexplored, the similarities still unnoticed.

To elucidate Plato's primary theory of language and explore the similarities will require four chapters. The first chapter is devoted to showing the three theories of language as they stand now. I will analyze significant passages from Plato's Phaedo and show how these form the basis for the presumed Platonic theory of language, acknowledged by Saussure and Derrida implicitly and explicitly, even though the subject of the dialogue is not language. I will then show how the theories of Saussure and Derrida respond to and work against that theory. The second chapter is devoted to Plato's theory of language as it is apparent in the third section of the dialogue as Socrates formulates his synthesis between absolute arbitrariness of the sign and natural representationalism. The synthesis attained is a conventionalist theory which I maintain is the forerunner of the theories of Saussure and Derrida. In this chapter I point out specific passages of the Cratylus which makes it most clear that Plato does not subscribe to a metaphysical reference for conventional human language. Socrates' synthesis is the dialectical resolution of the theories of the other two principles in the Cratylus, theories presented in earlier passages. It is necessary to
read the entire dialogue to see how the synthesis is generated, a point which leads to the next chapter. In the third chapter, I explicate the first section of the Cratylus and elucidate the thesis and antithesis of the dialogue: the natural representationalism of Cratylus and the absolute arbitrariness of Hermogenes. I will emphasize in this chapter that the irony of Socrates unsettles what might be mistaken for his subscription to a theory of natural, representational language. The fourth chapter is an analysis of the etymology section of the Cratylus. The purpose of this chapter is to show how Socrates tests Cratylus' theory of natural language and finds it lacking before he moves to his synthesis. This chapter also shows how Derrida's analysis of name etymologies and contingent, self-contradictory meanings is like Plato's own. An important segment of the chapter is devoted to showing that Derrida's reading of the Phaedrus forms an incomplete basis for Plato's theory of language. The four chapters are sections of my argument that Plato's primary theory of language is a remarkable presage to Saussure's and Derrida's. The startling newness of the two latter theorists is actually an involvement with the ancient questions which Plato asks in the Cratylus.
I use the terms "sign" and "signifier" interchangeably throughout for the linguistic expression which stands for a referent. Some scholars use one and some another and this seemed the least confusing compromise.
Chapter One

Theories of Plato, Saussure, and Derrida

Recent excursions into philosophy by literary theorists, and vice versa, in their studies of language make the *Cratylus* important in exploring how Plato treats language because it is the only dialogue devoted exclusively to that subject. Heretofore, literary scholars have concentrated on the passages in Plato's dialogues in which Socrates denounces sophists and poets for their practice of fictionalizing. Current emphasis upon language as a mechanism demands an analysis of what may be the earliest text on a still contemporary subject. That text is the *Cratylus* and it contains Plato's primary theory of language. The aim of this first chapter is to fill in the background that will make an explication of the *Cratylus* significant, surprising, and informative to modern movements in critical theory. The dialogue presents a theory which is quite a reversal of theories which assume Plato's commitment to the theory of Forms. To appreciate the contrast and departure in the *Cratylus* and to appreciate the likeness it bears to contemporary theory, one must first appreciate the basis for Platonic theory as we know it. That basis is the theory of Forms which, it is widely assumed, includes language and its participation in the Form itself. The theory itself is inferred from various
system, words would refer not to abstract qualities or material objects, but to their perfected ideals in some dimension beyond the senses. Opposition, deliberate or incidental, to such a theory of the relation of sign to signified is a fundamental point of departure for schools of literary theory which seek to study not what words mean, but how they mean whatever they mean, if anything. In this chapter, I shall first discuss Plato's theory of Forms and the relationship it has to a theory of language generally held to be Platonic. Next, I shall briefly discuss the chief contemporary opposition to such a theory. This discussion begins with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and his theory of the relationship of sign to signified in his *Course in General Linguistics*. The next segment is a discussion of the work of Jacques Derrida and his incorporation of Saussure's work into his own challenge, repudiation actually, of ideal referents in his *Speech and Phenomena*. After discussion of Plato's theory of Forms and responses to metaphysical theories from Saussure and Derrida, I shall conclude with some alternative possibilities for the metaphysical and logocentric presumptions common among ordinary users of language in Western cultures. In an effort to effect coherence and avoid fragmentation, I shall, throughout this chapter, point the reader forward to comparisons of Derrida and Saussure with Plato which will be part of the subsequent explication of the *Cratylus*.
Reference to Forms, the perfect, otherworldly form of any one of the many subjects under discussion in various dialogues, is so frequent that a theory of forms seems to be a completed system of thought. But except in the Parminides, the forms are not really the subject under discussion. And even in that dialogue, the actual subject of the discussion is obscure and is, itself, the subject of scholarly debate. But a theory of forms is brought to closure in none of the dialogues nor all of them combined. Be that as it may, references to the Forms, either explicit or implicit, have a persuasive effect. When one reads a dialogue and comes across references and digressions devoted to the Forms, one is led to believe that they are to a system that is worked out thoroughly elsewhere, in some other dialogue. Such is not the case. In practice, when such a theory is broken down into even first fragments, it raises questions that make the whole insupportable. Subjects overlap; they contain their opposites; qualities cohabitate objects; subjects are endlessly divisible into smaller subjects. The problem of dividing into ever smaller entities is present also in the etymology section of the Cratylus. Over and above these problems, which Plato does not resolve in discussions of the Forms, is the fact that the goals of the various dialogues do not allow pursuit of the subject of Forms itself.
The notion of a Form usually arises when speakers in a dialogue are after a definition of the subject under inquiry. Typically, after a subject is announced, Socrates solicits clarification of just what is meant by that subject. For example, the subject of the *Euthyphro* is piety, but the best definition Euthyphro can give of piety, and he thinks it an excellent one, is his own thinking and actions. His own piety is acted out in his prosecuting his father for murder in a case which turns out to be ridiculous. The obvious difference between popular piety, which the pious individual loves to affect, Euthyphro's piety, and costly personal piety, produces a need to decide just what piety really is.

In the *Euthyphro* and other dialogues, then, faced by the problem of narrowing the subject, participants give examples, but Socrates pushes them onward to discover for themselves the real quality under discussion. It usually falls out that the group cannot reach agreement upon what inheres in examples, say of piety, and discussants must try to abstract piety from the examples and find what it is that makes all pious actions pious. They try to separate the quality from its sensible manifestation and they find that they are reaching for the Ideal Form. If the Ideal Form could be defined, they would know exactly what piety is. They would actually be putting piety into words. If that were possible, as Socrates will say in the *Cratylus*, defining would be naming and vice versa and the conclusion
would follow that by learning the name, one learns the very quality. We do indeed talk as if there were Forms. In popular conversation, sometimes very serious discourse, right is Right and good is Good and there is a Right way and a Wrong way. We know, upon reflection, most of us, that such absolutes do not hold; definitions are as widely variant as definers. It is for such reasons that Plato never resolves the inquiry with a prescribed absolute.

But in several of the dialogues, Socrates pushes further. The forms are knowable and to know them is to know reality. Knowledge of Forms is different from opinion or belief about sensible nature. Since the Forms are not in sensible nature but are knowable, the inference is that we can know what we cannot sensibly perceive. Plato's proposition about knowledge of the Forms also suggests that language has a tie to the ideal. There is a tension, of course, between such a suggestion and Plato's consistent denial that professional users of language, and the language they use, are truthful. Nonetheless, the suggestion is almost an implication that language has a natural bond with Forms. Plato does not say that, but it would be easy to presume that he does. Knowledge, as opposed to opinion or belief, is of things beyond the natural world. How then do we come to know the real? We recollect, according to Socrates. The theory of recollection, anamnesis, is dependent upon a belief in experience prior to existence and Francis Cornford in
Plato's Theory of Knowledge thinks it probable that Plato held that belief (3). At any rate, it is quite obviously an attractive theory for him. In the Meno, Socrates demonstrates his version of evidence that learning is actually recollection when he examines a young, uneducated slave. By asking the right questions, Socrates stimulates the mind of the untutored slave to recall how geometry works to solve problems of area measurement. That episode is perhaps the most familiar example of Plato's belief in a prenatal life. The most fanciful and most poetic is the myth of the soul in the Phaedrus. Because of the breadth and depth of its power of implication, the myth in the Phaedrus is the most literary. Reading the struggle of the soul as Socrates relates the episode to Phaedrus, the reader loses touch with the original argument of the dialogue which is concerned with proper and improper rhetoric. As is most often the case, the subject of the Forms, which the soul experiences before life or between lives, is a side issue, part of a larger argument.

The references in the Meno and the Phaedrus are important in that they point to a source of knowledge beyond life experiences and they are referential supporting evidence, within his own works, that Plato's philosophy relied upon a metaphysical source of knowledge and reality. For our purposes here, the Phaedrus is also important because it is a companion piece to the Cratylus, the former about the unreliability of the written message and the
latter about the unreliability of the spoken. That the two have many other parallels becomes apparent to anyone familiar with the Phaedrus as the explication of the Cratylus proceeds, and it is tempting to dwell further here upon that dialogue. That, however, is another study to undertake. For our purposes here, the most straightforward statement of the Platonic conviction that knowledge is a capacity of the soul/intellect, only, and not of the senses is found in the Phaedo. It, more than any other, is the statement of advocacy of the argument that there is an implied connection between discourse and Forms which can be inferred through the soul's reflection (65c). We cannot sense the ultimate expressions of reality, but we seem to recall them; we cannot sense their pure and unadulterated forms, but only approach them by applying "pure and unadulterated thought to the pure and unadulterated object". (66a). Many passages of the Phaedo make the message clear though the dialogue's central subject is not knowledge but immortality. Phaedo, who, it is said here, was with Socrates when he died, is recounting the daylong discussion of Socrates with his friends before he died. Phaedo is repeating to Echecrates Socrates' argument that death is not fearsome because the soul does not die. A side issue develops into the argument that knowledge is the soul's recollection.

It is the Phaedo which comes closest to saying that when we engage in serious discourse about vital matters, we
attempt to speak of Ideal Forms. The dialogue ties human experience in the natural world to that in prenatal existence. That is one reason that it is the dialogue which I will discuss most thoroughly here in preparation for the explication of the Cratylus below. The other reason is that I want to include in this chapter a comparison of Jacques Derrida's "trace" and Plato's generation of opposites. A good case could be made for others, but it is my conviction that a presumption of pre-existence (which theorizes that being enters the phenomenal world from nonbeing) and a theory that what we see is not being but representation arrested after the fact, are here demonstrated as powerful influences in a Platonic faith in an ideal reality to which all sensory reality must compare. It is important to present a full account of that theory of ideal reality and to yield that point before arguing that language, naming, does not participate in it. All of these requirements make the Phaedo most representatively suitable to the demands of this chapter. And it is impossible to discuss the Forms in the whole canon of Plato in a work not devoted exclusively to that subject.

Stylistically, it is interesting to notice how far Plato, as author, places himself from the characters in his dialogue. Phaedo is telling Echecrates what Socrates said to Cebes. So, we are in the memory not of Plato but of Phaedo, and Socrates, not Phaedo, is the dominant speaker. There are the three removes to which Plato objected in the
Republic. In the Republic the artist who paints a picture of a bed is not as close to the real bed as is the carpenter who builds the bed. And even the carpenter is one remove from the real bed which God makes. The painter, copying the carpenter's construction gives the world third hand information which is too far removed from the real bed to be reliable; he can only imitate the imitation (Republic X: 596-98). In the Republic Plato is condemning dramatic tragedy as imitation, but in the Phaedo he is using dramatization for his own purposes. Structurally, he is as far away from the real situation as the painter. In the Phaedo, Socrates is reasoning from signs. He accomplishes his project with such consummate poetic skill that as one is caught up in the subject of the digression, one forgets that here, as elsewhere, Forms are not the subject Socrates started out to discuss. The larger argument is that death is not frightful; the soul is immortal. But to make his point that death, like birth, is but a transition which the soul makes, Socrates sets up a hypothetical prenatal existence. To support that hypothesis, he calls upon his listeners to recognize the experience of being reminded of something absent by something present and to accept that set of associations as analogous to the soul's recollection of its pre-existence among the realities of which physical phenomena are but reminding suggestions.

Are we also agreed in calling it recollection when knowledge comes in a particular way? I will explain what I mean. Suppose that a person on
seeing or hearing or otherwise noticing one thing not only becomes conscious of that thing but also thinks of a something else which is an object of a different sort of knowledge. Are we not justified in saying that he was reminded of the object which he thought of? ... (73 b-d)

But we must keep in mind that all this is supporting evidence for Socrates' point that the soul recalls in like manner its existence among pure Forms, reminded of what the natural world of the senses imitates. This complicated structure of explanation is an inward spiral and the reference network is complex and remote, but its seeming immediacy is compellingly persuasive. One forgets that the theory of recollection is a digression created to support a larger point in a dialogue about death and dying. The stylistically complicated discussion-within-a-discussion does not disarm or compromise the power of Plato's brilliantly simple prose. What Plato manages to do is to enlist the ethos of the dying martyr, Socrates, to argue for the immortality of the soul and, thereby, the soul's access to knowledge. The pathos of the situation is absorbed to accomplish the mission of the dialogue which is to answer Socrates' bluntly stated question: "Do the souls of the departed exist in another world or not?" (70c)

It is interesting that Socrates begins his answer to the question he asks by appealing to legend. Legend has an etymological tie to the modern word "logic" in that the Greek legein meaning "to gather" or "to say" is also the basis of logos, meaning "speech," "word" or "reason." What
makes such observation relevant here is the manifest bond between poetry and logic which Derrida denies in his dispute with Husserl. In this speech of Socrates in the Phaedo, rhetorical purpose and logic combine in a speech event. Ethos, logos and pathos combine in this event to incorporate the various strands of thought which Plato characteristically sees as connected threads in a larger tapestry. As Hamilton Cairns says in his "Introduction" to The Collected Dialogues of Plato, all of Plato's dialogues are interrelated expositions of interrelated systems of a larger order; all ties are part of the pattern (xiv). The power to see the interrelating patterns and to induce others to is what makes the apparently divergent subjects of the Phaedo work together to bring order and sense out of a dialogue which takes place in the context of the ever present, always impending death of Socrates. Putting it all together in a pattern is the function of Socrates and the goal of Plato. The legend he calls upon here has it that souls exist, pre-exist, and re-exist. From this source, Socrates draws the basis for what seems to be Plato's own contention. It becomes almost syllogistic: all living comes from the dead; Socrates is living; therefore, Socrates came from the dead. Socrates says it this way in the Phaedo:

There is an old legend, which we still remember, to the effect that they (souls) do exist there (in another world) and that they return again to this world and come into being from the dead. If this is so, that the living come into being again from the dead - does it not follow that our souls exist in the other world? They could not come
into being again if they did not exist, and it will be sufficient proof that my contention is true if it really becomes apparent that the living come from the dead, and nowhere else. (70d)

Socrates' goal is to prove his argument that souls are immortal and that, for that reason, death is not to be feared. A list of opposites which cancel each other out gains for Socrates agreement that yes, opposites do indeed breed opposites. His point all along in this argument is that from death comes life. The point, couched and cushioned in optimistic and comforting argument, is that his approaching death is not fearful and is but a transition to another stage of being. Nonetheless, it is a statement strikingly like Derrida's that nonbeing is the source, the generator of being. The parallel will be further exploited later in the section of this chapter devoted to Derrida. Here, Socrates sums up:

I believe this . . . coming to life again is a fact, and it is a fact that the living come from the dead, and a fact that the souls of the dead exist. (72e)

Socrates' conclusion is important here also because it places the soul, which is the learning instrument of the body/soul, at the site of ultimate knowledge, the site of the Forms. That is the part of this text which is often cited as proof that Plato believed that language speaks reality. It lays the foundation for the theory that learning is recollection, a theory which in present context appears to be an already existing theory of Socrates'.
Cebes recalls it from earlier conversations with Socrates:

There is that theory which you have often described to us - that what we call learning is really just recollection. If that is true, then surely what we recollect now we must have learned at some time before, which is impossible unless our souls have existed somewhere before they entered this human shape. (72e)

The author of the Phaedo has just given authorship of a significant theory to a respected individual in a unique position to make a convincing argument. It is a marvellous example of the literary use of character ethos. It is Socrates' theory which Cebes articulates; it is Phaedo's memory which Plato writes. The dramatic situation gives even more credibility in that Socrates is apparently holding nothing back as he prepares himself and his followers for his approaching death. It is no wonder that such persuasive setting, character, and situation induce the presumption that we are reading Plato's convictions. It is a fact, however, that we have nothing authored by Plato which claims to speak for him on the subject. At best, we make the presumption with second-hand evidence. For our purposes, what is most important is that Socrates has placed the soul with the Forms. If the soul recollects from its prenatal life, what can it recall but the pure Ideas themselves? In the explication of the Cratylus, I will be arguing that Socrates finds that there are no "messages" which man can trust about the reality of being.

There follows Socrates' dialogue with Cebes in which Socrates likens such supernal recollection to our being
reminded of someone absent by something present. It is typical of Socrates to root argument in familiar analogs:

You know what happens to lovers when they see a musical instrument or piece of clothing or any other private property of the person whom they love. When they recognize the thing, their minds conjure up a picture of its owner. That is recollection. In the same way the sight of Simmias often reminds one of Cebes, and of course there are thousands of other examples. . . . (73d)

Now, of course, everyone listening to Socrates as the episode develops would concede that he has just described a familiar experience. Who has not seen an object which called to mind a person or another event? What he will proceed to do now is to use that common experience to extend existential episodes to supernatural projections. And, after all, how else does the human mind reason about what is beyond existence?

When you are reminded by similarity surely you must be conscious whether the similarity is perfect or only partial. . . . Here is a further step. . . . We admit, I suppose that there is such a thing as equality . . . absolute equality. Where did we get our knowledge? Was it not from the particular examples that we mentioned just now? Was it not from seeing equal sticks or stones or other equal things that have suggested and conveyed to you your knowledge of absolute equality, although they are distinct from it . . . whether it is similar to them or dissimilar? (74a-c)

Of course, we do not consciously question whether similarity is perfect or partial. That is, the pattern of thought which the mind follows in seeing something and thinking of something or someone else as a result of the stimulus does not include a pause to calculate the degree
of similarity or difference. But, past that step, Socrates is more interested in driving home that the qualities, such as equality, by which we evaluate are abstract qualities and that we manage to measure degree against something. The question he is aiming to trigger is whence the standard against which we measure. If not here, in existential phenomena where sense can apprehend, where dwells equality, beauty, truth, justice, etc? Is it in some other dimension beyond sense? If so, if they are there and we are here, speaking unavoidably in spatial metaphor, how do we know them?

Suppose that when you see something you say to yourself, this thing which I can see has a tendency to be like something else, but it falls short and cannot be really like it, only a poor imitation. Don't you agree with me that anyone who recieves that impression must in fact have previous knowledge of that thing which he says that the other thing resembles, but inadequately? . . . Then we must have had some previous knowledge of equality before the time when we first saw equal things and realized that they were striving after equality, but fell short of it. And at the same time we are agreed upon this point, that we have not and could not have acquired this notion of equality except by sight or touch or one of the other senses. I am treating them as being all the same. . . . So it must be through the senses that we obtained the notion that all sensible equals are striving after absolute equality but falling short. (74e-75b)

This passage is significant because it introduces the concept of abstract measurement in literary criticism. We use such a measure when we announce that a play or a poem or a story is about love. The implication in the very use of such judgment is that there is something, love, for a
literary work to be about. The work is not love, itself, but it is recognizably about love. A sensible representation of a situation which exemplifies love but which falls short of being love, itself, is like the imitation of equality: it has a tendency to be like love, but "falls short and cannot really be like it." But its representation is a bridge to the knowledge of the real world where ideal love stands, unchanging, as the absolute standard. The bearing upon epistemology is inescapable. If we know something is more or less equal to something, say a play about love to love itself, where is the perfect Form which, if we knew all of love, we would know? How can one know all there is to know about love without knowing its Form wherein resides all there is to know? Socrates' answer to these questions probably forms the basis for what contemporary theorists mean when they spell the word "represent" with a hyphen, "re-present." Socrates argues that all that really is was part of our awareness before we existed in time in space:

So before we began to see and hear and use our other senses we must somewhere have acquired the knowledge that there is such a thing as absolute equality. Otherwise we could have never realized, by using it as a standard for comparison, that all equal objects of senses are desirous of being like it, but are only imperfect copies. (75d)

In our prenatal existence, we used not our senses, but our conscious intelligence; in that state and with that faculty, we learned all we know. Reminders are copies which trigger our recollections of what really is and "by the
exercise of our senses upon sensible objects, (we) recover knowledge which we had before," and this recollecting is "what we call learning" (77e). Our souls pre-existed our bodies and "they were possessed of intelligence" (76c). Socrates extracts from his listeners their agreement that "the absolute reality which we define in our discussions remains always constant and invariable" (75d). Perhaps for our purposes, the key word is "define."

This is the closest Socrates comes, in the *Phaedo*, to saying that the absolute reality can be defined. But even here, it is not the Forms love, justice, truth, beauty, etc., that can be defined; it is the notion of an absolute reality. Perhaps the intellect has access through memory to a reality which the soul experienced before temporal life, but that reality itself lies beyond the power of discourse to make present. The closest language can come, then, is speculation, however intuitively certain and sincere that speculation may be. And in this dialogue, proof of the incomposite soul's indestructibility depends upon convincing argument that simples such as the abstractions above exist. By making his argument dependent upon acceptance of the premise that there are pure Forms of goodness, truth, justice, Socrates gains credibility for his argument that the soul is immortal.

Well, how do we stand now, Simmias. If all these absolute realities, such as beauty and goodness, which we are always talking about, really exist, if it is to them, as we rediscover our own former knowledge of them that we refer,
as copies to their patterns, all the objects of our physical perception — if these realities exist, does it not follow that our souls must exist too even before our birth, whereas if they do not exist our discussion would seem to be a waste of time. Is this the position, that it is logically just as certain that our souls exist before our birth as it is that these realities exist, and that if the one is impossible, so is the other?

It is perfectly obvious to me, Socrates, said Simmias, that the same logical necessity applies to both. It suits me very well that your argument should rely upon the point that our soul's existence before our birth stands or falls with the existence of your grade of reality. I cannot imagine anything more self-evident than the fact that absolute beauty and goodness and all the rest that you mentioned just now exist in the fullest possible sense. In my opinion the proof is quite satisfactory. (76e-77a)

Though in the dialogue these abstractions must be left to stand beyond definition, their existence is certain enough to win an argument for the immortality of the soul. This availability of knowledge through disclosure to the intellect is suggestive of the expressive self-presence in Husserl's phenomenology against which Derrida argues in Speech and Phenomena and that point becomes important when we consider Derrida's work. But it is also important to keep in mind that the proposition which persuades Simmias is an "if/then" argument which gains its acceptance from Simmias' confidence that absolute beauty and goodness, etc., exist.

Whenever one steps outside the digressions on Forms, here and in other dialogues, one sees that is improbable and inconsistent that Plato's Socrates would ever argue that language has the power to name reality. Many of the
dialogues testify to the running quarrel Socrates, and presumably Plato, had with professional users of language—rhetoricians, sophists, and poets. If Socrates were to argue convincingly that words named Forms, even if his argument limited such claims to the language of philosophers, he would leave open the possibility of access through language to truth itself. He could not then guarantee any difference between the claims of persuasive sophists and those of dedicated, disciplined philosophers. He cannot earn a privilege for philosophers which necessarily excludes poets, rhetoricians, and sophists. It is not surprising that poets, and by implication other wordsmiths, would be excluded from the ideal state with its philosopher king. A review of Socrates' rhetoric in winning belief for the immortality of the soul shows that he knows well how a point is proven, an argument won. If definition is admitted possible, then even truth itself could be defined and would be subject to any speaker's terms. That would be unacceptable and the passage stops where it has to stop, just short of claims that language alone can verify a reality which exists beyond the senses. Anything more would open up the territory to all comers and Socrates would be right back in competition.

In summary, then, we can say that Plato's Socrates does base his argument for immortality upon the theory that there exists a higher order of reality and that we know it by way of the intellect which recalls experience among the
forms of truth, justice, love, etc. Now, we cannot name these forms in definitions; they elude discourse time after time. It is always important to keep in mind what argument Socrates is trying to win and here it is not that there are Forms which correspond to language. While current literary theorists debate the relative merits of anything proven by logic, we should acknowledge the brilliance of Socrates' argument here which is framed without the religious figures and guarantees which we have become used to. And Socrates has a paradox to deal with. We are incapable of "saying" in the sense of making manifest or of presencing, the absolutely real Form of love, but we are, conversely, facilely capable of saying, fluently and convincingly, what is not: not real, not true, not accurate, etc. Why is absolute truth so much harder to say than what is absolutely false? It is time to move to later theorists who challenge any belief in an ideal reality and any presumption that it is the reality to which all discourse refers.

Ferdinand de Saussure does not say that it is Plato who ties the sign to its signified by some inherent bond; he just speaks out against that presumption as part of a common belief about language. He was one of the group of linguists who concerned themselves with the actual functioning of language as a medium. Other familiar names are Frege and Jacobson. They looked at the surface structure of language and differentiated between that and
its deep structure. They broke sentences into component words and words into component syllables and syllables into component sounds. The *Cratylus* will show how nearly identical Plato's activities were to these later theorists'. Modern linguists traced the history of language and found evidence which supported the hypothesis of an Indo-European ancestor common to all Western languages. They looked at the relationship of words to their referents. It was in this last activity that Saussure made his contribution.

Saussure's position in the development of language theory as it affects literary criticism is pivotal. His *Course in General Linguistics*, a book made up of his lectures published by his students after his death, articulates the position opposite to the presumed Platonic position. One of the basic tenets of Saussure's theory of language is that the relationship of the signifier to the signified is arbitrary. He sets his theory in a counterstatement against what he calls a common notion of language, a notion very suggestive of logocentrism. The example he gives of such a commonly held theory is a belief that language, "when reduced to its elements," is a naming system only.

This conception is open to criticism at several points. It assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words . . . it does not tell us whether a name is vocal or psychological in nature . . . . finally, it lets us assume that the linking of a name and a thing is a very simple operation - an
assumption that is anything but true. (65)
(Italics mine)

The "ready-made" ideas are counterparts for the Platonic Forms. It is the science of linguistics, Saussure says, that uncovers and publishes the complex relationships between thought and language, signifier and signified.

Someone pronounces the French word nu 'bare': a superficial observer would be tempted to call the word a concrete linguistic object; but a more careful examination would reveal successively three or four quite different things, depending on whether the word is concerned as sound, as the expression of an idea, as the equivalent of Latin nudum, etc. Far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that is is the viewpoint that creates the object. (8)

This complexity of reference is what Saussure attempts to sort out. Language, he finds, cannot be reduced "to sound or detach(ed) from oral articulation. Sound is not a simple thing, not speech by itself. . . . It is only the instrument of thought; by itself it has not existence" (8).

Saussure makes another point crucial to the understanding of the sign and of the science of the sign, semiology: the sign is a necessarily social, social meaning public, property. Signs are not private. Private arbitrary signs, of course, would be chaotic and counterproductive to communication. Perhaps an efficient way to clarify the importance of the social dimension of the sign is to contrast that notion with Paul de Man's concept of the sign as he conducts his semiological readings in Allegories of Reading. There, he reads the poems of Rilke and the prose of Proust as metalanguage
about tropes (60-7). De Man's brand of semiology is not consistent with that of the founder of that science. Saussure says that "speech has both an individual and a social life, and we cannot conceive of one without the other." And more decisively and precisely:

There is first of all the superficial notion of the general public: people see nothing more than a name-giving system in language. . . . Then there is the viewpoint of the psychologist, who studies the sign-mechanism in the individual; this is the easiest method, but it does not lead beyond individual execution and does not reach the sign, which is social. (17) (Italics mine)

If the sign is part of the system, if it is necessarily social, then de Man's reading of Rilke and Proust texts as coded messages about tropes, hidden like allegorical allusions, messages which only the initiated literary analyst can decode, does not qualify as a semiology. The sign is social and the signified socially recognizable. A semiological analysis would search out the social sign, such as costume, setting, etc., which is a social artifact in the poem or story. Reading that sign would broaden or deepen the understanding of the whole within its society and the society within the poem. This is not to disqualify de Man's system as something other than literary analysis. However, an analysis of literature through tropes, while possible and perhaps useful, is still trope-hunting and is not socially revealing. Slang, linguistic patterns, vernacular, all these and more are semiotically important. But to say, as de Man does, that
the significance of metaphors in a passage of Proust lies in their being a coded message that the author really prefers metonymy, does not qualify those metaphors as semiological artifacts. De Man does concede in a footnote that "A reading of Proust in terms of speech-act theory would have to proceed along different lines" (63). I would argue that de Man's reading does not qualify for either semiotics or allegory. What matters here, of course, since Saussure is the father of semiology, is that de Man's analysis appropriates Saussure's term "sign" inaccurately as a private linguistic artifact. The point I am making here in what seems a digression is important because de Man's argument is the same as Hermogenes' in the Cratylus. Hermogenes argues for names as private linguistic signifiers which are arbitrary and subjective at the whim of each individual without regard for the code of the speaking community.

Language, Saussure says, is a system, part of a social system. Language as system, langue, was here when we got here, "an established system and an evolution; at every moment it is an existing institution and a product of the past" (8). It is a system of public, social convention, which belongs to each member of the speaking community individually, but is, at the same time, inseparable and nonfunctional apart from society. Any claim for the privilege of a problematic metalanguage outside those constrictions will not stand the weight of Saussure's
notion of the sign. Plato works on the same problem in the Cratylus. In finding that speech and language are not just two names for the same thing, he anticipates the following observation by Saussure:

> Taken as a whole, speech is many-sided and heterogeneous; straddling several areas simultaneously — physical, physiological, and psychological . . . we cannot put it into any category of human facts, for we cannot discover its unity. . . . Language, on the contrary, is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification. As soon as we give language first place among the facts of speech, we introduce a natural order into a mass that lends itself to no other classification. (9)

Saussure, like Plato before him, does not believe that words carry their meanings in their letters, syllables, or etymologies. Nevertheless, he, like Derrida, relies upon definitions to make a point. He is discussing signs and vocal apparatus here in Course:

> One definition of articulated speech might confirm that conclusion (that vocality is secondary to speech). In Latin, artículus means a member, part, or subdivision of a sequence; applied to speech, articulation designates either the subdivision of a spoken chain into syllables or the subdivision of the chain of meanings into significant unities; gegliertete Sprache is used in the second sense in German. Using the second definition, we can say what is natural to a language, i.e., a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas. (10).

But, of course, to presume that a word contains a definition and carries that definition with it in any context is to presume that some sort of meaning inheres in the signifier, however arbitrary or conventional the sign may be. Such a presumption would lead to a conclusion that
we could learn about things by learning about their names. Saussure does not mean this and Plato is at pains to exhaust any such possibility and disavow any theory that words carry meanings in their parts. Saussure more probably is exploiting the social side of language. Without common agreement upon definitions, communication would fail. (As we shall see, Saussure's answer to Hermogenes' argument would be the same as Socrates'.) A sign, pulled through time and use, accumulates layer after layer of definition and implication, some of which is lost when a piece of literature leaves its home location or contained setting. The more the reader can read the text of custom, location, costumes, events, rituals, etc., the broader and deeper the implications of literature. Roland Barthes illustrates the breadth of social implication of the sign in *S/Z* in which he identifies five semiological codes, hermeneutic, semantic, proairetic, cultural and symbolic, and employs them in his analysis of the story "Sarrasine," by Honore de Balzac. The book is exhaustive, exhausting, tedious, informative, taxing, and rewarding for those who persevere. But it is a testament to the complexity of reading the signs which are part of the structure of society.

Saussure intends his linguistics to be a radical departure from common presumptions about language, especially referential presumptions. However, even he is forced to depart from a totally physical explanation of how signs work. The physiology of speech, which operates
mechanistically, is dependent upon a given set of "mental facts." At least two people, A and B, are necessary for a "speaking-circuit."

Suppose that the opening of the circuit is in A's brain, where mental facts (concepts) are associated with representations of linguistic sounds (sound-images) that are used for their expression. A given concept unlocks a corresponding sound-image in the brain; this purely psychological phenomenon is followed in turn by a physiological process: the brain transmits an impulse. . . . (11)

These "mental facts (concepts)" and "purely psychological phenomenon" function very much like Socrates' Forms and even more like Husserl's "expression" in what he calls "solitary mental life," which Derrida argues against in Speech and Phenomena. But Saussure's aim is not to replace Socrates' other world of pre-existence and experience with an interior world of reference. He wants, instead, to place the locus of language referents in the speaking community. Langue is a socially set code which the individual may use in separate speaking acts, parole, to the degree that he is able to store in his memory the signs and their significations. Short of adding a separate code and its conventions to his native storehouse, the speaker may not participate in acts of speech with the speaker of a different language. And it is the community which prescribes or describes, differing in French and English, for example, accordingly. Once the language patterns are set, they function in a predictable pattern. Words are narrowed in signification by other, modifying words which
restrict meaning in a sentence; suffixes and prefixes adjust roots. These are the syntagmatic operations of language. One may start with "house" and modify it to "the big white house with the green shutters" by stringing "house" in order with the other beads of signification in a phrase or sentence. Different languages use inflections to greater and lesser degree. In English, to give an example, "use" becomes "useful" or "useless" as the parole dictates. But English nouns are not inflected according to the grammatical role the noun plays in a sentence: subject, object, etc. With his explanation or observation of syntagmatic relations, Saussure introduces another general observation for which Jacques Derrida is far better known: the concept of difference which becomes Derrida's difference. It was difference to Plato, too.

"In language," Saussure says, "everything boils down to differences" (128). And, considering the sign and its totality, he says, "Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences . . . differences without positive terms" (120). While difference as a principle of language has found its best-known spokesman in Derrida, it does not originate with either him or Saussure. It is another connecting link which ties Saussure and Derrida to Plato. The notion of difference is discussed below as the explication of the Cratylus is developed. The principle is also part of other dialogues and worked out relative to
sounds and letters in the _Philebus_ (18 ff.).

The point Saussure makes is that the difference between the word which appears in a speech construction and all the words that could appear but do not is what makes language specific. First, then, in conversation, as well as in written discourse, words are made specific by their having been singled out for position in a line of words. This linear relation which narrows words by association is labeled by Saussure, _syntagmatic_. Relations which we make in our minds and store by association and contrast are what he calls _associative relations_ which are very like Plato's associations above:

The syntagmatic relation is _in praesentia_. It is based on two or more terms that occur in an effective series. Against this, the associative relation unites terms _in absentia_ in a potential mnemonic series. (123)

Saussure's vocabulary recalls Plato's and presages Derrida's which makes much of the terms presence and absence. Derrida capitalizes on the spelling similarity between "defer" and "differ" to change his spelling of difference to _differance_, a neologism. But compare the simple explanation above with Derrida's in _Speech and Phenomenon_ of how presence and absence, being and non-being, effect _differance_:

How am I to speak of the _α_ of differance? It is clear that it cannot be _exposed_. We can expose only what, at a certain moment, can become _present_, manifest; what can be shown, presented as a present, a being-present in its truth, the truth of a present or the presence of a present. However, the differance _is_ (I also cross out
the "is") what makes the presentation of being-present possible, it never presents itself as such. It is never given in the present or to anyone. Holding back and not exposing itself, it goes beyond the order of truth on this specific point and in this determined way, yet is not itself concealed, as if it were something, a mysterious being, in the occult zone of a nonknowing. Any exposition would expose it to disappearing as a disappearance. It would risk appearing, thus disappearing. (134)

As language theorists become more distrustful of the capacity of language to carry meaning, do they rely more and more on the syntagmatic relations between words to narrow meaning? And as this uncertainty breeds greater dependence upon the mechanics of syntagmatic distinction and qualification, does not the focus of language blur? It would seem so, but it may be only the fashion. It was not so with Saussure who was able to state even negative difference as a positive accomplishment of language:

Although both the signified and the signifier are purely differential and negative when considered separately, their combination is a positive fact; it is even the sole type of facts that language has, for maintaining the parallelism between the two classes of differences is the distinctive function of the linguistic institution. (120-21)

The main point here is that Saussure articulates the presumption that language has referents which are beyond existential phenomena and challenges it. He formulates and elaborates a theory of language which contests metaphysical reference and locates the signifieds in a community of speakers who inherited the language they use as well as the patterns which make it work. This, of course, is only a part of Saussure's Course in General Linguistics, not all
of which is relevant to this study. But one more thing interests us here. It is something which has consequences in modern literary theory, particularly among those captivated by French literary theory as de Man claims to be in *Allegories*. According to him, "a semiology of literature comes about as the outcome of the long-deferred but all the more explosive encounter of the nimble French literary mind with the category of form" (5). Again, I include de Man's observation here because I find it at odds with Saussure's christening of semiotics. Saussure defined and named a "new science," semiotics. It was his brainchild and he took pains to say exactly what it is:

Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and is therefore comparable to a system of writing, the alphabet of deaf-mutes, symbolic rites, polite formulas, military signals, etc. But it is the most important of these systems. A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it *semiology* (from Greek *semeion* 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, and what laws govern them. (16)

Saussure's semiology points the way to more studies of signs other than words in literature. Frank Lentricchia in *After the New Criticism* observes that Roland Barthes takes Saussure seriously and makes "brilliant connections between semiotics and the movies, wrestling, cooking, political sloganeering, advertising, fashions in clothes, stripteasing, cars, photography, toys, and margarine" (129). Lentricchia continues:
The semiological system, unlike *langue* in its basic sense, is a second-order discourse built upon the model of language; and unlike *langue* it is elaborated not by the "speaking mass" but by a deciding group. In this sense it can be held that in most semiological languages, the sign is really and truly 'arbitrary' since it is founded in artificial fashion by a unilateral decision; these in fact are fabricated languages, 'logo-techniques.' The user follows these languages, draws messages (or 'speech') from them but has no part in their elaboration. Barthes' examples are the languages of the fashion, automobile, and furniture industries.

The immense force of this point is perhaps matched only by the near universality with which it has been resisted, in the contemporary critical theory community. (131-32)

The study of non-linguistic signs in noncontemporary literature would also seem to be complicated by the fact that "deciding groups" are unique to time and place. Decoding signs synchronic with literature, signs whose values have been lost or misread is not the same kind of research done in university libraries distant from the time and scene. This is not to discount its value, but to heighten its cost. It is a fertile and still fallow field.

The work of Derrida concerns us next and much of what he says in *Speech and Phenomena*, one of his texts relevant to this study, "assumes familiarity with Saussure's terminology and its implications, and a key point in his attack on metaphysics... is his attack on the requirement of a logical account of language that a sign be a completely different sort of thing from what it signifies and that the latter not be determined in any manner by the former" (xiv). Newton Garver, in his *Translator's...*
Introduction to *Speech and Phenomena*, directly associates Plato's presumed philosophy of language with the target of Derrida's argument:

In the history of Western philosophy, the philosophy of language— including a great deal of its metaphysics— has almost invariably been based on logic rather than rhetoric. This is certainly true of Plato's *theory of forms*, of Aristotle's doctrine of predication, of the medieval controversy over universals, of Leibniz' grand project for a universal symbolism, and rationalism and idealism in general. It is also true, though less obviously so, of empiricist philosophy from Hobbs and Locke through to Brentano and James and Russell; for the empiricists have taken it for granted that the ideas represented by our linguistic signs already stand in logical relations to one another before we have signs to represent them. (xi) (Emphasis mine.)

Garver's is a clear summation of the presumption that, starting with Plato, language refers to some variation of Forms. The same presumption is the point of Saussure's objection. It is important to us here that Derrida, though challenging his metaphysics, continues Saussure's theories and incorporates them into his own argument. In *Speech and Phenomena*, Derrida makes some of his best-known arguments against idealism and Western metaphysics. And though it addresses, analyzes, and argues specifically against Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, it is nonetheless clear that Derrida sees Husserl's "authentic metaphysics" as a change in terms only. Husserl's "solitary mental life" postulates something very reminiscent of Plato's theory of recollection: both attempt to account for the beginning of awareness by documenting the experience itself and
searching for its source and it is no mistake to conclude that Derrida's case is a case against traditional, presumably Platonic, Western metaphysics. While it is not profitable here to give an in-depth account of Husserl's text or its content, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the phenomenologist's theory, which later underwent significant change, in order to understand Derrida's remarks.

Garver points out that Derrida's quarrel with Husserl is that the latter takes without qualification the traditional interpretation of sense of being as presence and makes it the "axiomatic foundation for phenomenology" (xxxii). If we define our terms which delineate that which really is so that they limit being to what is present either physically or mentally, we include the obviously physical and we include that which is present in thought. Herein lies a complication which ties Husserl's "authentic metaphysics" to traditional metaphysics. Derrida will spend much of his analysis in finding the weak link in Husserl's explanation of how being expresses itself to the self in "solitary mental life." For purposes of distinguishing prelinguistic expression from language which intends or indicates meaning, Husserl called the prelinguistic perception of being which takes place as one engages, metaphorically speaking, in communion with oneself, "expression." This is part of the activity of thought. Being presences itself to us, not in words, for we do not
think in linear, word constructions, but in thought. We apprehend being in our imaginations and the self-presenting expression is part of a system of signification. A different term is used to designate what we do with the expression when we communicate it in words. Husserl calls this activity "indication." Husserl's formula for being as objective presence and subjective self-presence is the core of his phenomenology and it is a necessary component of scientific communication in logical signs. The meaning of communication is in expression. Garver explains that indication is:

a movement of empirical association. One sensible sign stands for something else; a mark, a note, an object makes us pass from something present to thought to something that is only anticipated or expected. There is no meaning-content present in indication; there is only an empty signifier and nothing that is signified: that is yet to come, it is yet to be presented. (xxxiv)

The sensible sign that "makes us pass from something present to thought to something that is only anticipated or expected" is strikingly like Socrates' illustration of being reminded and Saussure's "association," above. In all three systems, such activity is an outward activity, a mechanism, only. Meaning for Husserl and knowledge for Plato's Socrates lies elsewhere. The outward activity is patterned after an intellectual activity in which meaning itself is present. Again Garver clarifies:

An expression, however, carries a meaning-content with it. Meaning is present as the signified content of expression. (xxxiv)
Husserl, of course, does not offer recollection as an explanation of the presence of meaning in solitary mental life, but meaning does present itself there. Likewise, in Saussure's model of communication discussed above, the origin of meaning is in the mind of the initiator of parole. Here, then is the point of connection for theories which explain ties of signs to any abstraction or ideas which stand in logical relation to each other. The notion of meaning on its own initiative presencing itself to human consciousness is a metaphysical notion offered as an explanation for the human experience of knowing from the inside out, rather than the reverse, what it is that we discuss in serious discourse and what it is that we represent in art. It is the metaphysical character of Husserl's argument which Derrida sees as vulnerable to deconstruction. It is the last possible argument. When it is defeated, Western metaphysics is closed out.

There are subtleties and refinements in Husserl's argument which are not included here, such as the necessity of the interweaving of expression and indication in actual parole, but they do not alter the metaphysical target at which Derrida aims. It is sufficient that Husserl keeps intact the ideal status of meaning which is present in pure form in "solitary mental life" as "expression." Its representation in discourse is just that, a re-presentation, an imitation of meaning which, Garver says, is real only in "phantasy representation" which "takes place entirely in
the imagination" (xxxvi). Forms, then, are here phantasies. For Husserl, the ideality of meaning in expression is undermined and adulterated by the empirical element. Further, the expression in imagination "is always the modification of an antecedent event" in empirical experience (xxxvi). Husserl's schema has meaning evolving in a transaction between the empirical world and the mind; Plato's schema would have it evolving in a transaction between pre-existent reality and the mind. Derrida is not satisfied that such a change as the phenomenologist posits is a legitimate compromise.

Immediate self-presence, necessary for expression of unmediated meaning, instantaneous according to Husserl, is, for Derrida, inconsistent with the reality of time. Present requires past and future. In short, unconditioned meaning is not available to us. Meaning is communicated only through differance. The sign means only what all other signs do not.

Now, let us pause to clarify that what Husserl says becomes present to our minds, "expression," is what the intellect translates into the signs of language. The words, signs, which we use to represent the true meaning which has disclosed itself to us, are signs which do not have a meaning of their own, inherent in their construction, but function to communicate something transcendentally real which our minds have experienced in "solitary mental life." This mental life, Derrida contends, is "without reason."
Signs would be foreign to this self-presence, which is the ground of presence in general. It is because signs are foreign to the self-presence of the living present that they may be called foreign to presence in general in (what is currently styled) intuition or perception.

If representation of indicative speech in the monologue is false, it is because it is useless; this is the ultimate basis of the argument. . . . If the subject indicates nothing to himself, it is because he cannot do so, and he cannot do so because there is no need of it. Since lived experience is immediately self-present in the mode of certitude and absolute necessity, the manifestation of the self to the self through the delegation or representation of an indicative sign is impossible because it is superfluous. It would be, in every sense of the term, without reason - thus without cause. Without cause because without purpose. . . . (58)

One presumption in Derrida's argument is that events are always accurately interpreted by the ever conscious and present self. There is, he says, no need for any disclosure except the experience itself. There is a considerable body of argument possible against such a thesis. Another presumption necessary for Derrida's argument is that all mental activity is occupied with events of the now. But, one may say, the mind, unlike the body, goes forward and back in time and the activity of remembering or projecting into the future does not necessarily involve empirical events of the phenomenal present. The "present of self-presence" may "be indivisible as the blink of an eye," but the mind is frequently unaware of the empirical present in favor of other expression. Husserl attempts to deal with that problem and ends up arguing for flux. Interestingly enough, Plato examines that solution, but rejects it in the
Cratylus.

Again, we must refocus our attention upon what really is at issue. The questions are: what is it that we talk about? What is it that we put into words? Plato says that we recall all that we know; Saussure says content lies within a shared system of references; Husserl says the pre-expression source is the primordial sign which presences itself to us in "solitary mental life." Derrida responds that all three are examples of extra-mundane experience of metaphysical implication.

Derrida corrects the mistake by his theory of the "trace." Husserl's schema will not work because by the "time" sense is apprehended by the self, it has become sign; it has already been "written." The signature of being-become-sign-in-time is the "trace." This "protowriting," according to Derrida, "is at work in the origin of sense" (85). Until Husserl's pre-expressive, primordial being is signed into sense, we cannot apprehend it. The system of signs that makes the language of sense possible is writing, which is privileged over voice. Words come only after being is a part of the now; the non-presence of being is not representable.

Derrida's dispute with Husserl is also his disagreement with Saussure and both are expressions of his quarrel with Plato. The three of them, he would say, agree in one basic error: they valorize the spoken word, claiming that by virtue of its being voiced, it is primary in its
relationship of access to thought and primary in its primordial aboriginality. Not so, says Derrida. The sign (trace) is primary: writing begets the spoken word. For clarity here, I should like to enlist Vincent B. Leitch's lucid explanation of the "trace" in his Deconstructive Criticism (28). He compares Derrida's "trace" to the "quark" of physics. It is not that we all understand the "quark"; it is that Leitch's style makes it understandable and it is that science makes this hypothesis more available to the popular reader and seems to build him more bridges than barricades. It is perhaps significant that to students of language it takes a scientific analogy to clarify a language concept. At any rate, Leitch's analog makes sense:

Like the quark in physics, the trace is a theoretical unit in grammatology that, though imperceptible - more nothing than something - operates amidst the innermost reaches of writing, permeating and energizing its entire activity, affecting omnipresence, yet remaining out of hand. Just as the quark posited by Gell-Mann and Zweig during the early 1960's, accounted for the strange activities of particles within subatomic spheres, so Derrida's trace explains the peculiar effects of writing detected at microlevels of the sign. Neither a free quark nor a pure trace can be dislodged or isolated because they are functions of relations - mirage "effects" of primordial differentiation in process. The trace is the sum of all possible relations, whether isolated or not, which inhabit and constitute the sign. And, similar to the quark that so soon showed up with other guises and with different charges in the up quark, down quark, strange quark, charmed quark, and anti quark, the trace almost immediately appears in other roles and with different values in arché-trace, grapheme, gramme, difference, and writing. (28)
Leitch's analogy allows the imagination to participate in cognition and that is its great advantage. Derrida's own explanation of the "trace" seems to avoid involving anything like Husserl's "phantasy representation." For speakers of English to whom the word "trace" gives pause, there is another interesting and helpful route. It is the dictionary trail which offers description of how a word is currently being used and some help, also, from etymology. While less thorough than the *Oxford English Dictionary*, even an ordinary *Webster's Collegiate* gives two meanings for "gramme" or "gram": it is a small weight and it is "writing" or "letter" from *graphein*, the Greek "to write." The definition ends with, "more at CARVE." Looking up "carve" one finds that that word, too, is from the Greek *graphein* and adds "scratch" to "write." Carving, writing, and scratching are all of a piece and so one comes up with scratching or carving out being which is not far from "tracing" out. Derridian graphing or writing or carving out or scratching happens before we can write or talk about it, before we can have any being to talk about for the "trace" is tracing being, itself.

My own analogy, worked out years ago to give me a handle on what we were studying in class, leads to a further point. The transformation of being into knowable, recognizable identity may be likened to photosynthesis. Sunlight and water are transformed into living, active leaf cells, which we can see, but we cannot witness the actual
transformation; we cannot catch it in the act. By the "time" we catch it, it already is. The language we use to express the existence of the transformation is Derrida's supplement, which stands in the place of what cannot be caught in the act of becoming. What we have, according to Derrida, is the "absence" of being.

It is tempting to conclude that the obscurity which we find in Derrida's prose is deliberate and is so because this "tracing" has all been "done" before and we insist upon reading it, it insists upon being read, as if it had not.

Spenser, in the "Garden of Adonis," Book III, Canto VI of The Faerie Queene speaks of Mutabilitie's message to man in a way very suggestive of Derrida's "trace" message. In Book VII, "Two Cantos of Mutability," the flowers are nature's signifiers, her writing, which scratches out or carves out being. Flowers are "being" which we can see and put into language and the message is that being undergoes endless change (38-63). Spenser's versions of "trace" and "differance" so permeate the "Mutability Cantos" that to trace them all out would be another entire project. But the notion of nature writing messages about being which man interprets is not new. Plato, too, in the Phaedo hypothesized that being must be from nonbeing (70e). According to Leitch, Derrida says that "writing is the most primordial 'activity' of differentiation" (27). It is a prevocal process which "inaugurates language, bestows
consciousness, institutes being" (12). Being, then, comes from nonbeing. Here is how Socrates says it in the _Phaedo_. He is developing his argument that the living come from the dead:

If you want to understand the question more readily, said Socrates, consider it with reference not only to human beings but to all animals and plants. Let us see whether in general everything that admits of generation is generated in this way and no other — opposites from opposites, wherever there is an opposite. . . . Let us consider whether it is a necessary law that everything which has an opposite is generated from that opposite and from no other source. (70e)

There follows a long listing of examples which culminate in sleep as the opposite to waking which Socrates pairs with living as the opposite to being dead. The opposites, he says, come from each other and have "their two processes of generation between the two of them" (71c).

Very well, then, said Socrates. I will state one pair of opposites which I mentioned just now — the opposites themselves and the processes between them — and you shall state the other. My opposites are sleeping and waking, and I say that waking comes from sleeping and sleeping from waking, and that the processes between them are going to sleep and waking up. Does that satisfy you, he asked, or not?

Perfectly.
Now you tell me in the same way, he went on, about life and death. Do you not admit that death is the opposite of life?
I do.
And that they come from one another?
Yes.
Then what comes from the living?
The dead.
And what, asked Socrates, comes from the dead?
I must admit, he said, that it is the living.
So it is from the dead, _Cebes_! that living things and people come? (71c-d)
This is how Plato says that being is generated out of nonbeing. The metaphors are different from Spenser's and different also from Derrida's, but not so different as to be arguable incomparable or recognizably different in the bases. Each is engaging the intellect in a struggle to get behind the obvious fact that being is and that we cannot account for how it comes to be. They are making their arguments from observable signs and neither the name of the sign nor the sign itself is for any of them what it is that they are talking about. Whether it is the presence of absence or the absence of presence does not answer the question being asked. Saying and writing freeze a description of being in its act of becoming apparent to the observer. Saying and writing also interrupt the observation. The reader/listener can see/hear that frozen section up close, but while the writer or speaker is articulating, he is missing a part of the action which, like a play goes on. The observer cannot reproduce what he observes; he cannot imitate it. Plato certainly agrees. An important part of what I am arguing against is Derrida's misrepresentation of Plato's Cratylus as saying that Plato believes that language is imitation.

Briefly summarized, we have moved from a theory of language based on the theory of Forms of reality recalled from pre-existence to theories of language which deny such a metaphysical possibility. The first counterspokesman considered is Saussure, primarily a linguist and not a
philosopher, who carries source of language no further than the conventions of the community speakers. He does not take up the argument for or against metaphysical disclosure from pre-existence or transcendental signifiers. Then we have discussed Derrida's argument against Husserl's "authentic metaphysics" which bases truth upon disclosures experienced in "solitary mental life." Derrida also aims his corrections at Saussure though he avails himself of the lexicon popularized by Saussure in the Course. Derrida sees Saussure and Husserl as actively metaphysical in the tradition of Western philosophy which begins with Plato. He aims to supplant Saussure's semiology with his own grammaticology, privileging writing as primary over speaking. In Of Grammatology, Derrida deliberately paraphrases Saussure:

By a substitution which would be anything but verbal, one may replace semiology by grammaticology in the program of the Course in General Linguistics:

I shall call it (grammatology). . . Since the science does not yet exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance. Linguistics is only part of (that) general science. . . . The laws discovered by (grammatology) will be applicable to linguistics. (33)/16/(51)

What I have demonstrated thus far is that the metaphysics of Plato played an important part in later theories of language, Saussure's, Derrida's and even Husserl's. Any theory of language which writes either in favor of or against metaphysical sources of reference is
involved in the theory of metaphysical Forms because it is the first building block in Western metaphysics. The similarities that exist between the resolutions of the problems of metaphysical references of Plato, Saussure and Derrida will become apparent only when Plato's rejection is explicated in the Cratylus. For now, the three theorists are connected in the way generally acknowledged: Plato says language participates in Forms; Saussure says language signs are arbitrary and refer to no set of ideas; Derrida says Saussure is still too metaphysical with community concepts and privileging of voice. That is the background against which we begin the explication of the Cratylus.

The last objective of this chapter is to offer some alternative sources for what Derrida terms the logocentrism of language in the Western world. In Dissemination, he refers to Plato as the father of Western metaphysics and that equates with being the father of a theory of language which sees a metaphysical relationship between words and what they stand for and valorizes spoken speech over writing. Though Derrida's objection is to Western metaphysics, the myth of an Egyptian god of writing forms the core of Dissemination and I think that significant because, though Derrida does not note the fact, word as metaphysics is more Eastern than Western in origin. I do not quarrel with Derrida's claim that Western languages have a logocentric characteristic. The flavor is there even in Saussure's theory which denies ideas as reference. He
seems to grant an underlying if not acknowledged assumption of universals common to speaking communities. Husserl moves toward the transcendental signified. Common sense users of language would generally agree that there is an ultimate standard for truth, justice, love, etc., but it is important to remember that they would not agree upon what those standards are. Despite Plato's attempts to define such terms by hanging them on Forms which stand aloof and unchanging outside phenomenal reality and human discourse as complete patterns for all empirical examples in lived experience, the common mystique of universals probably comes from another, more culturally wide-spread experience. It is much more probable that it comes from the religions of the East which have become the religions of Western man as well.

Three major religions practiced in the West specifically cite word as being, ultimate being. The Genesis story of creation accounts for the presence of life on earth with the phrase, "God said let there be . . . and there was." Recall that the God whose name was not spoken identified Himself to Moses as "I am." That phrase is the first person present of the verb to be; Derrida busies himself with "the definite and particular verb form 'is' the third person singular of the present indicative. . . ." And throughout the books of prophecy which are part of both the Jewish and Christian religious canon, God speaks words to the prophets which they then
speak to the people. Such presencing powerfully recalls Husserl's self-presencing expression which is later translated into language. And, of course, there is no more vivid example than the Gospel which has been called the most Jewish of all the Gospels, St. John's. It begins:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (I:1, King James Version)

The Gospels are the source of what is now the doctrine of the Incarnate Word, God become man is the Word become man. The communion of man with God occurs through the medium of language. This Christian tradition is directly in the line of Judaic influence and faithful to it. It is firmly rooted in the Talmud wherein God spoke the Ten Commandments to Moses who later scribed them, scratched them, carved them, traced them, in stone. The Christian prays to have this decalogue "written" in his heart. It cannot be overemphasized that orthodox Christianity would never be reconciled to an equation of the phenomenal world to God. What I mean is that nature is the word of God, but not the Incarnate Word, not the Christ. Nature is not God. The phenomena of the world can never be confused with the "Text," the Word itself. It is a byproduct.

The gospels were, of course, remembrances and recordings of events which postdate Plato's life. But the Old Testament, its precursor, predates Plato. Judaism records one of the earliest monotheisms, a monotheism which manifests itself in the word. It is also the early
foundation of another religion which attributes the power of the word to God, Allah. According to Muhammad, God first revealed Himself this way:

Recite thou, in the name of thy Lord, who created; 
Created man from clots of blood— 
Recite thou! for thy Lord is the most Beneficient, 
Who hath taught the use of the pen— 
Hath taught Man that which he knoweth not. 
(the Koran Sura 96)

Here, God not only proclaims himself father of language but source of knowledge, knowledge which he gives to man in language. The presence of calligraphy in the art of Islam demonstrates, graphically in a literal way, the importance of language in their perspective of what is real and holy.

It is interesting to note that the religion of Muhammad flourished in our Middle Ages and that its scholars were attracted to the writings of Plato. They have been credited with preserving in their centers of learning the works of Plato, translated into Arabic.

Even if one looks at pre-monotheistic religions, one finds that the communication of divine knowledge is frequently through priests who claim that their language is the gods'. If Plato were actually the father of Western metaphysics, it would have to be accepted that philosophy was more popularly disseminated than religion. That is most probably not true. Logical explanations, Plato's form of logic, were later and were less culturally powerful than
supernatural explanations. In fact, supernatural messages were the thinly disguised targets of Plato’s attack on Homer’s poetry. Homer presented gods and heroes and the populace embraced them, but they were unacceptable to Plato. He was ever suspicious of any who spoke by the power of gods or muses.

It is possible that Greek thought into which Plato was born was the first body of thought to posit the reality of universals and that such a theory influenced the religions of the Middle East which proclaimed identity of deity with word. But it is more probable that the movement was in the other direction. One thing is certain. It is the onto-theological referent, being as god, from which Derrida wishes to disengage language. Whether the tie began with Plato and whether Plato accepted such a tie is open to doubt. Such a position is incompatible with his only dialogue on the subject of language, the *Cratylus*. 
Notes to Chapter One

1. The most familiar and frequently cited passages are from the *Ion*, the *Republic*, II, III, and X, and *Laws*, II and VII.

2. Professor Wesley Morris has pointed out that "in contemporary theory, thinkers tend to see language as Plato does, but have cut themselves away from the metaphysical." This comment was part of Professor Morris' lecture on September 2, 1980, to his seminar entitled Literary Criticism: History and Theory, held at Rice University. The point this thesis makes is that Plato cut himself away from the metaphysical in the *Cratylus* and left theory of Forms out of his theory of language.

3. This is Paul de Man's phrase to define French semiology and German poetics, direct inheritors of the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure and Jacques Derrida. See *Allegories of Reading*, p. 5. In *Criticism and Social Change*, Frank Lentricchia calls de Man the probable "undisputed master in the United States of what is called deconstruction" (38).

4. Derrida finds in Saussure the same metaphysical softness that he finds in Husserl, but he nonetheless uses Saussure's thought and lexicon to make his case. Newton Garver in his Preface to *Speech and Phenomena* says that Derrida "assumes familiarity with Saussure's terminology and its implications" (xiv).

5. The Forms appear prominently in the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic*, the *Parminides*, the *Meno*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Statesman*, *Laws*, and the *Timaeus*.

6. One of the pithiest, and certainly one of the most comprehensive, studies of Plato's persistent discussions of Forms and the lack of theoretical completion is found in Erik Nis Ostenfeld's *Forms, Matter and Mind*. Ostenfeld clarifies with hard textural evidence that Plato did not bring his discussions of forms into line as an actual theory. Ostenfeld also focuses sharply on the problems inherent in such a theory. The pitfalls are many in a generalization that holds that for every subject of discourse there is, in a dimension beyond mass available
only to the intellect, an ideal form of that subject. See p. 131 ff.

7 To compare Plato's reminding suggestions with Saussure's mental associations, see the Course, p. 13-14 and p. 123.

8 Derrida doubts that there can be a separation and distinction made between logic and rhetoric and, consequently, radicalizes all language as rhetoric. For a discussion of this distinction, or lack of it, see Garver's Preface to Speech and Phenomena, x-xiii.

9 This quotation is from a note to the text Of Grammatology. Derrida is discussing "being" in Heidegger on page 23 of the text. The note is number 13 and is on page 325.
Chapter Two

Synthesis

The key to understanding the Cratylus is the last section. It contrasts dramatically in tone and argument with the two earlier sections. Here, more than in the other two sections, one hears Plato's voice unaffected by irony as Socrates presents his synthesis. This last section presents the basic issues of my argument and for that reason, I explicate it first. The section is, of course, part of the coherent whole of the dialogue and would lose its power cut off from the earlier controversy. I shall follow with explication of the other two sections in order. This last segment of the dialogue contains Plato's primary theory of language; it reveals striking similarities to the theories of Saussure and Derrida; and it holds passages which, explicated, reveal Derrida's misreading of the dialogue.

In this summary section of the dialogue, Plato sets forth his primary theory of language in Socrates' argument against the representationalism (re-presentationalism) which he argued for in the two earlier sections. Socrates engages Cratylus repeatedly in a debate about the latter's theory of names and out of this debate issues a third argument, a synthesis. It contains the earliest antecedents of the theories of Saussure and Derrida. They are as anti-Husserl as Derrida is in Speech and Phenomena, as decidedly
conventional as Saussure is in the *Course*, and as distrustful of language as any post-Structuralist. Much of what is railed against as Platonism will fall before Socrates' keen analysis of Cratylus' theory that language holds knowledge and re-presents reality unerringly and truthfully. In effect, Cratylus argues for the metaphysics of presence. Against Cratylus' faith in a natural ground for language, Socrates will argue as gently but as tellingly as water on stone that names have no connection with things save by custom and habit. Language may express our guesses, our gossip and our reasoned conclusions, but all those are, at best, academic. The rightness of language is its accordance with the system, *langue*, as it is used in individual acts of speech, *parole*. That is its conventionalism. Knowledge is not a passenger of words and neither the thing nor its essence is re-presented in its assigned name. And perhaps of greatest importance, Socrates ends the *Cratylus* with a "maybe" that undermines even his own speculations and opens upon endless possibility. In that action, he is very much like Jacques Derrida who is sometimes undecided or undecidable. So much are their arguments alike that Socrates could be Derrida and Cratylus the Plato Derrida creates by implication in *Dissemination*.

Another item of business introduced for this chapter is a discussion of the way Derrida incorporates the *Cratylus* into his argument in the text of *Dissemination*. I will argue that the quotation from the *Cratylus*, taken as
it is from separate conversations from disparate arguments with two different respondents, represents as Platonic thought that which is at odds with the whole of the Cratylus. Because the two conversations occur ten pages apart, it is difficult to consider them at the same time. Therefore, I will, in the course of the chapter, call attention to the passages Derrida quotes and comment separately upon the effect of his collage. To cite or quote passages before explication of them would lessen the effect of their opposite viewpoints.

Before Socrates engages Cratylus, he has a few matters to close out in his conversation with Hermogenes. I have placed this remainder of that portion of the dialogue in this chapter because it contains the first part of Derrida's quotation. Plato breaks the dialogue completely between the two conversations: Hermogenes never speaks again and Cratylus has spoken only once before. Had I followed Plato's formal unity, half of the quotation from Derrida would have been in one chapter and half in another.

In the dramatic plan of the Cratylus we are near the end of the etymology section, a section which serves as a test for Cratylus' thesis that names have a bond with what they name. Socrates and Hermogenes have thrashed their ways through the very improbable and unstable interpretation of names through etymology. Socrates prepares to treat the question of words as imitation objects at length and in meticulous detail. His goal is to disallow Cratylus' claim
that a name is inherently correct by virtue of its being a name at all. At issue is the truth value of names, and, by extension, the truth value of language. If a name is unalterably and irrefutably bound to what it names because it is an imitation of the essence of that thing, there are only correct names. Names re-present essence. That is, in fact, Cratylus' thesis. Hermogenes' response is extreme in a contrary direction: names are absolutely and radically arbitrary. It is ironic that Cratylus believes in a theory of reality, flux, in which such a stable relationship of name to named as he advocates and defends would be impossible.

We begin with the transition passage which serves as an ironic last test for a theory that meaning is inherent in words. Hermogenes notes that the letters of the word for "being" are incorporated in the word for "name." Hermogenes' observation here allows Socrates to address directly the question of whether "being" is in names in any metaphysical sense of presence. The multivalence of the question is belied by Plato's unaffected prose, but it is, nonetheless, a central issue in the dialogue. Cratylus' representationalism would answer that being as presence is in the name of a thing. Things are tied to their names by a bond of nature and names are the source of knowledge about things. Socrates does not dodge the question, but plays out the possibilities, showing how language signs can be manipulated to accommodate theories. He responds to
Hermogenes by pointing out that those letters, the letters in the word "being," appear in many words, but that while one can string tangentially related words together in a deliberate and planned way, one cannot generalize the method to cover every word which contains the letters of another word. The letters in "name" seem "to be a compressed sentence signifying . . . being for which there is a search," and by changing a few letters one can turn the whole into "seeking" and with a few more minor changes come up with "divine wondering" which implies "the divine motion of existence" (421b). Socrates' point is that meanings which can be changed so easily are not very stable after all. The only "being" in "name" is put there by man, either by projection, insinuation, or spelling convention.

Such stringing together of vaguely and peripherally related meanings is typical of the etymology section which is the subject of the last chapter of this dissertation. In that section, Socrates demonstrates that the meanings of the names of such cultural foundations as heroes, gods, goddesses, and mythic places cannot be explained through analysis of syllables, letters or etymology. Every meaning has several tangential connections to other suggested meanings which have the same, and so on and on. Names are contradictory: they contain a meaning and its opposite. How then, Hermogenes wants to know, does one respond to the problem of words which will not decode by etymology?

The question is a serious one. If some words, even a
very few words, cannot be broken into nuggets of pure meaning, then the whole of language is flawed. Anything negotiated through language is unstable, even the present conversation between Socrates and Hermogenes, even the script of the dialogue. How can Socrates justify the pursuit of meaning in language; how can he retreat from this dead end? He has an out, he says. One can always say that "names which we do not understand are of foreign origin, and this is very likely the right answer" (421d). But Socrates does not use his own alibi. He wants, instead, to move the discussion forward with the recognition that absolute meaning is an unrealistic goal. He justifies continuing the discussion in a speech which suggests that sophistical debates about language and meaning were a part of Athens' intellectual scene:

Socrates: For we should remember that if a person goes on analyzing names into words, and inquiring also into the elements out of which the words are formed, and keeps on always repeating this process, he who has to answer him must at last give up the inquiry in despair. (421e)

The passage has a remarkably contemporary ring. Any who have read Derrida's Dissemination or Paul de Man's Allegories of Reading can feel sympathy with such a response to a text which dazzles with brilliance but does not clarify. "At what point," Socrates asks, "ought he (the inquirer) to lose heart and give up the inquiry?" (422a) Socrates' question suggests the probable frustration of any who undertook to dispute with the sophists of the day whose
specialty was a razzle dazzle version of ancient linguistics. Certainly if their expositions were as lengthy and beguiling and interesting as Derrida's, many listeners would give up the inquiry.

The plot structure of the dialogue allows Socrates and Hermogenes to make progress, even if it seems backward movement. They have taken names and broken them into smaller names, searching for their meanings. They conclude that names that can be broken into smaller names are secondary and derivative. Unlike eggs, they cannot be cracked open to reveal their contents. Instead, cracking them reveals only that they are empty compounds of other elements which can also be broken apart. Words refer only to other words. If compounds "derive their significance from the primary," Socrates and Hermogenes must search on for the primary names (422e). Such an attempt to employ primary meanings reminds one of the hyphenating syllabication one comes upon in contemporary language theory, and, indeed, in the present analysis, above. To clarify that one means "represent" in other than the vulgar sense, one writes "re-present" to indicate that one is writing about the kind of making present again which is part of metaphysical theories of presence in language, such as Cratylus' theory. The effort is to employ a defamiliarized term. Whether breaking words apart makes their signification any more effective is problematic, but it is a device relied upon, by Derrida and others, to
defamiliarize frequently used terms. Its use is at odds with the argument that words cannot really "mean" anything, anyway. By insisting upon printing the most primary parts of compound words, an author suggests that meanings can be transmitted if one just breaks signs into their primary parts. This is the same issue Socrates is dealing with here.

Before Socrates and Hermogenes can resolve the issue of primary names, an issue which will return in Socrates' discourse with Cratylus, another question arises. Is a name "a vocal imitation of that which the vocal imitator names or imitates"? (423c) Socrates thinks not.

Socrates: Nay, my friend, I am disposed to think that we have not reached the truth as yet.
Hermogenes: Why not?
Socrates: Because if we have we shall be obliged to admit that the people who imitate sheep, or cocks, or other animals, name that which they imitate. (423c)

Clearly, onomatopoeia as imitation is not a theory to which Socrates/Plato subscribes. Naming may be an art, he says, but not an art of sound. Socrates' conclusion here militates against charges of phonocentrism in Plato. But Socrates is not through playing out the possibilities of the imitation theory.

What follows is a speculative drawing into question of the ways things might be imitated through language. Socrates examines the various possibilities. Perhaps, Socrates suggests, the essence of each thing is expressed in letters and syllables in much the same way that music
and drawing express their subjects. Perhaps the namers is as much an imitator as is a musician and a painter. Here again is a contemporary issue: mimesis. If language works to name through imitation, then literature, by extension, is an imitation of life, or as Aristotle says in the Poetics, an imitation of actions. The issue of art as imitation is a live issue in contemporary theory.

The context of these passages on imitation is important here because it supports my argument that Derrida misreads the Cratylus. Hermogenes and Socrates have quit the searchground of etymology to see if they can imagine how some fictional namers in prehistory arrived at the names he gave objects in his environment. Socrates does not entertain the notion that a name is a sound imitation. The speculations of Socrates and Hermogenes are not their own theories of how names imitate, but are guesses about how an aboriginal namers might have approached his project. What Derrida neglects to do is establish the context and make clear whose theories he is quoting.

In Dissemination, Derrida introduces Socrates' attempt to duplicate the steps of the erstwhile primal namers in a context which makes the effort appear to be Socrates' own attempt to account for "the differential elements of language." Here is Derrida's preface to his quotation from the Cratylus:

He (Socrates) is obliged, as is Saussure after him, to suspend the insistence on voice as sonority imitative of sounds (imitative music).
If the voice names, it is through the differences and relations that are introduced among the stoikheia, the elements or letters (grammata). The same word (stoikheia) is used for both elements and letters. And one ought to reflect upon what here appears to be a conventional pedagogical necessity: Phonemes in general, vowels - phoneenta - are designated by the letters that inscribe them. (140-1)

Here one must recall that the complicated process which Socrates executes to reach for aboriginal names is part of a larger pattern in the dramatic plot. After the etymology section, Hermogenes wants to test the process on a few short words. Etymology fails. That being so, Socrates moves on to imitate a sophist who simply outlasts and outmanoeuvres any challenger. Etymology, about which Socrates appeared to be enthusiastic, has proven inadequate and a producer of ill names. For a new perspective, they will try to imagine the start of language. Had man no voice, he would surely mime "with the hands and head and the rest of the body" (422e). And miming is certainly imitation. How then does man imitate with his voice? Socrates and Hermogenes examine the names "stream" and "retention" to see whether the namer has grasped the nature of them in letters and syllables in such manner as to give a faithful rendering of the essence or not. All this activity is a game of imagination, but Derrida leaves out the information that the exercise is an attempt to imagine what might have happened in the mind of a fictional namer. Once one sees that, one sees clearly that the quotation does not reflect Plato's thinking. Here is Derrida's
quotation from the Cratylus. It immediately follows the passage quoted above from Dissemination.

Socrates: ... But how shall we further analyze them, and when does the imitator begin? Imitation of the essence is made by syllables and letters. Ought we not, therefore, first to separate letters, just as those who are beginning rhythm first distinguish the powers of elementary sounds (staikheion) and then of compound sounds, and when they have done so, but not before, proceed to the consideration of rhythms?

Hermogenes: Yes.

Socrates: Must we not begin in the same way with letters — first separating the vowels (phoneenta), and then the consonants and mutes (alphonai aphthona), into classes, according to the received distinctions of the learned, also the semivowels, which are neither vowels nor yet mutes, and distinguishing into classes the vowels themselves. And when we have perfected the classification of things, we shall give their names, and see whether, as in the case of letters, there are any classes to which they may all be referred, and hence we shall see their natures, and see, too, whether they have in them classes as there are in the letters. And when we have well considered all this, we shall know how to apply them to what they resemble, whether one letter is used to denote one thing, or whether there is to be an admixture of several of them, just as, in painting, the painter who wants to depict anything sometimes uses purple only, or any other color (allo ton pharmakon) as his figures appear to require it. And so, too, we shall apply letters to the expression of objects, either single letters when required, or several letters, and so we shall form syllables, as they are called, and from syllables make nouns and verbs and thus, at last, from the combination of nouns and verbs arrive at language, large and fair and whole, just as the painter used his paint (tei graphikei) to reproduce a living creature (zoon). (424b-425a). Dissemination 141-2)

Here is the continuation which Derrida omits:

Not that I am literally speaking of ourselves, but I was carried away — meaning to say that this was the way in which not we, but the ancients formed language, and what they put together we
must take to pieces in like manner, if we are to attain a scientific view of the whole subject.
(425b)

By omitting this passage, Derrida has made it appear that Socrates is expressing his own belief that he and Hermogenes will actually "arrive at language, large and fair and whole." That is certainly at least inaccurate. Also by leaving out Socrates' "take to pieces" mode of analysis, Derrida omits what might be a first reference to his own analysis by deconstruction. Recall that Annas calls Plato's method decomposition. Socrates, however, undermines the possibility for success:

Socrates: Shall we leave them (elements of names), then? Or shall we seek to discover, if we can, something about them, according to the measure of our ability, saying by way of preface, as I said before of the gods, that of the truth about them we know nothing, and do but entertain human notions of them. (425c)

This is a flat statement of denial of the metaphysics of presence. If Plato says elsewhere, in other dialogues, that language is a metaphysical link to the Real, and I cannot find that he does, he does not say it here; he says the direct opposite. And it is the Cratylus which Derrida chooses to quote in his explication of the Phaedrus.

Derrida quotes the Cratylus in this part of Dissemination in seeming unawareness of Socrates' constant flow of irony which discounts so much of what might otherwise be taken for Plato's own thought. It is interesting to wonder why mention of the irony is omitted here, but is a part of a comment about the Cratylus.
elsewhere in the same book when it serves the purpose of the author. In another context, forty plus pages on, Derrida says this:

After showing in the Cratylus that nomination excluded mimesis, that the form of a word could not, mimelike, resemble the form of a thing (423a ff), Socrates nevertheless maintains that, through another sort of resemblance, a nonsensible sort, the right name could be taken as an image of the thing in its "truth" (439a ff). And this thesis is not carried off in the ironic oscillations of the Cratylus. (Dissemination 188n)

Even here, Derrida suggests that Socrates/Plato believed and taught that a word could actually image a "thing in its 'truth.'" The implication is insupportable. This quotation cannot stand alone. It too is part of a larger context which disallows the implication intended in Derrida's note. Socrates almost immediately qualifies the above passage with this:

Socrates: How real existence is to be studied or discovered, I suspect, is beyond you and me. But we admit so much, that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. (339b)

The point I want to insist upon here is that whatever Derrida's project, he has misrepresented or misread Plato's Cratylus. Derrida is a powerful spokesman in his challenge of what he has called the Western metaphysic; many are profoundly influenced by him, particularly some in the community of literary critics. His is a fascinating message, but I submit that if even a tiny portion of his argument is built upon misreading or misunderstanding Plato, his confidence in his own argument should be
reconsidered or reread in the light of the possibility that Derrida is himself writing ironically. Another question arises. Is Derrida getting in the way of what Plato offers to our profit? Or, perhaps more accurately, does the postmodern reader interpose Derrida between himself and Plato and, thereby, cut himself off from the still instructive ancient source? Dismissing Plato as a metaphysical philosopher outdated by all we have learned since his time is presuming, perhaps, that we have learned more than we actually have. As for Derrida's argument, there are many passages in Plato's work in which oral speech is valorized over written, but concluding that anything from the Cratylus contributes to that valorization is an error. It might well be read to say the opposite, that letters precede names. Here is an example:

Socrates: Thus did the legislator, reducing all things into letters and syllables, and impressing on them names and signs, and out of them by imitation compounding other signs. This is my view, Hermogenes, of the truth of names, but I should like to hear what Cratylus has more to say. (427d)

This passage is also ironic and Socrates later disavows the "truth of names," but read as it stands here, alone and out of context, it appears to be his conclusion. It is not; it is, more likely, the dramatic bridge to engaging Cratylus in the dialogue and surely that is its major purpose. Hermogenes invites, urges, Cratylus to join the two of them now to express his agreement or disagreement and to explain away his obscurity. We return to the drama of the Cratylus
at this point.

Cratylius breaks his silence and enters the discussion. He presents himself as one who shares Socrates' theory of language, as he understands it. Socrates said at the opening of the discussion that "knowledge of names is a great part of knowledge" (384b). Missing the irony in the remark, Cratylius reaffirms the position as part of his own theory. He cannot, on short notice, explain anything of importance, "at any rate, not such a subject as language which is, perhaps, the very greatest of all" (427e). From this point forward, Socrates, serving as the catalyst for the dialectic, examines Cratylius' representationalism which formed the thesis of the dialogue against which Hermogenes' conventionalism argued. It has been Hermogenes' theory of language which occupied Socrates heretofore, but now the emphasis shifts. Cratylius' expression of his own logocentrism serves to clarify that Plato has offered logocentrism as an ironic and extreme overcorrection to absolute arbitrariness of signs. It also eliminates Cratylius' position, against which Socrates argues, as Socrates' own position. The speech above is a patronizing lure to Cratylius. Socrates makes major shifts now.

Cratylius' opening remarks are complements to Socrates' scholarship and a statement of his own, compatible theory. Like Cratylius, any reader who stopped at this point in the dialogue might well believe that Socrates has concluded his own argument, but the following discussion will prove that
such is not the case. The dialogue thus far has consisted in the briefly stated thesis of Cratylos that names have a correctness which comes from a natural bonding between sign and signified, and Hermogenes' antithesis that names are absolutely arbitrary, to the point that even conventions are not binding upon an individual speaker. It is predictable that Socrates will produce a synthesis of the two. My argument is that he does so in this last section, his conversation with Cratylos. The synthesis will be a theory of conventionalism which is the theory motivating the dialogue. It is, in all likelihood, the earliest text for what Saussure later refined into his own theory of the arbitrary sign. Socrates needs Cratylos here to argue against; the flattery continues:

Socrates: I am by no means positive, Cratylos, in the view which Hermogenes and myself have worked out, and therefore do not hesitate to say what you think, which if it be better than my own view I shall gladly accept. And I should not be at all surprised to find that you have found some better notion. For you have evidently reflected on these matters and have had teachers and if you have really a better theory of the truth of names, you may count me in the number of your disciples. (428b)

Cratylos acknowledges his own expertise on the subject of names, not without a little pride, and adds that what Socrates has said thus far to Hermogenes is a reflection of his own thinking. The presumption Cratylos makes is that Socrates has stated his own view. But it serves Plato's dramatic purpose to have seeming agreement here. It is a familiar trick in the dialogues. Cratylos speaks with
confidence in himself and the harmony he finds with Socrates:

Cratylus: And you, Socrates, appear to me to be an oracle, and to give answers much to my mind, whether you are inspired by Euthyphro, or whether some Muse may long have been an inhabitant of your breast, unconsciously to yourself. (429c)

Clearly, it is Cratylus who has confidence in Euthyphro, not Socrates. But more interesting is the muse Cratylus trusts. His belief that the muse discloses truth to Socrates is like Husserl's belief that truth expresses itself to one's mind in solitary mental life. Neither is representative of Socrates' distrust of such poetic inspiration. But for his purposes here, Socrates has hooked Cratylus, who cultivates the common ground he perceives. It will not be a solid place to stand; its slow erosion is effected as Socrates elicits Cratylus' position which, at this point, is inflexible. Only right names exist. A wrong name is something else completely. But Socrates is unwilling to dismiss the possibility of right or wrong names because to do so would be to dismiss the possibility of falseness in words. Socrates offers hypothetical situations in an effort to demonstrate that names can be wrong and, if wrong, false, not by some metaphysical form, but by deliberate misuse of the conventional signs in a communal language, langue.

Socrates: Your argument, friend, is too subtle for a man of my age. But I should like to know whether you are one of those philosophers who thinks that falsehood may be spoken but not said?
Cratylus: Neither spoken nor said. Socrates: Nor uttered nor addressed? For example: If a person, saluting you in a foreign country, were to take your hand and say: 'Hail, Athenian stranger, Hermogenes, son of Smicrion'—these words, whether spoken, said, uttered, or addressed, would have no application to you but only to our friend Hermogenes, or perhaps to nobody at all? (429e)

Of course, in its absolute form, the argument for a natural language has to insist upon this point. Cratylus makes no allowances for mistaken identity. His reply is that if such a person should address him so, "the speaker would only be talking nonsense" (430a). To clarify Socrates rephrases the issue:

Socrates: Well, but that will be quite enough for me, if you will tell me whether the nonsense would be true or false, or partly true and partly false, which is all that I want to know. Cratylus: I should say that he would be putting himself in motion to no purpose, and that his words would be an unmeaning sound like the noise of hammering at a brazen pot. (430a)

What Socrates will settle for is Cratylus' admission that there is an empty space between signifier and signified, that the signifier is not what it signifies but only an imitation. For a while, it seems that Socrates deals with imitation differently here than in the Republic where all imitation is suspect. At first glance, he seems to subscribe to imitation in a positive way. It is a ploy:

Socrates: But let us see, Cratylus, whether we cannot find a meeting point, for you would admit that the name is not the same with the thing named. Cratylus: I should. Socrates: And would you further acknowledge that the name is an imitation of the thing? Cratylus: Certainly. (430b)
Having gained Cratylus' admission that he believes names to be imitations of things, Socrates begins to undermine the workability of such a theory. Socrates compares imitation by portraiture with imitation by names and asks Cratylus whether he can tell the difference between a portrait which is an accurate likeness, as far as a woman's portrait being more correct for a woman than a man's portrait. And then, he asks, is it not possible to mix them up and say to the subject, "This is your picture, showing him his own likeness, or perhaps the likeness of a woman?" That, Cratylus agrees, is possible (431a). In contemporary terms, what Socrates is examining is the theory of mimesis. His point is as old as Plato and as new as today: we can "say" anything is true. Pictures are signs and words are signs; if one can be misassigned, so can the other. Cratylus believes that words are some other kind of sign, a kind of sign that by its nature cannot misrepresent. Socrates is aiming at the conclusion that language is sometimes rhetorical, not always logical, and what it "says" has no necessary attachment to what is. Derrida radicalizes this conditional approach, saying that language is always only rhetorical. Socrates preserves the different functions of language, though Derrida does not acknowledge that fact, and makes the sign more functionally flexible. It works like pictures. Postponing the question of whether he is right, which "need hardly be disputed at present," Socrates makes the case for the comparison.
Socrates: But if I can assign names as well as pictures to objects, the right assignment of them we may call truth, and the wrong assignment of them falsehood. Now if there be such a wrong assignment of names, there may also be a wrong or inappropriate assignment of verbs; and if names and verbs then of sentences, which are made up of them. What do you say, Cratylus?
Cratylus: I agree; and I think what you say is true. (431c)

What Socrates objects to is the belief that language imitates reality or states of affairs as they actually are. Now we see the familiar objection to poetry, particularly dramatic tragedy. If it is believed that language, word by word into phrases and from phrases into sentences and from sentences into dramas, is an imitation of life, those who believe so will accept a false representation of what is. It seems impossible to classify the philosophy of one who has so little confidence in words to be reliable as logocentrism. As Weingartner points out, in the Cratylus "the very end of the dialogue makes it completely clear that truth is not to be sought in language itself" (6). The Cratylus is the necessary completion to the view of language Derrida finds in the Phaedrus. The implication of his explication is that, for Plato, spoken language is logical because of its direct association with the phone and that it is written language which Plato distrusts because it is removed from the breath of life. Quite clearly, the Cratylus contradicts any such inference.

The argument of Cratylus is that words are not like pictures and while Plato's style of exposition is seemingly
simple, the argument is not unlike any other that differentiates between the plastic arts and the literary.

Cratylius: But the case of language, you see, is different; for when by the help of grammar we assign the letters a or b, or any other letters to a certain name, then, if we add, or subtract, or misplace a letter, the name which is written is not only written wrongly, but not written at all; and in any of these cases at once becomes other than a name. (423a)

Cratylius' faith in writing and writing's power to inscribe a more primary truth is almost Derridian. Written letters, available to the first namer, before names existed, were set in a "right" order to be the perfect imitation of the thing itself; no variations can be tolerated. If a letter is left out or if the letters are rearranged or changed, the letters no longer are a name. Cratylius' insistence upon perfect imitation gives Socrates the opportunity to deal with essential imitation. This is, of course, another argument against the metaphysics of presence which holds that the name makes present the named.

Socrates: Let us suppose the existence of two objects. One of them shall be Cratylius, and the other the image of Cratylius; and we will suppose, further, that some God makes not only a representation such as a painter would make of your outward form and colour, but also creates an inward organization like yours, having the same warmth and softness; and into this infuses motion, and soul, and mind, such as you have, and in a word copies all your qualities, and places them by you in another form; would you say that this was Cratylius and the image of Cratylius, or that there were two Cratyluses? (432c)

Cratylius recognizes the inconsistency in his own argument and gives up this part of his imitation theory which is
destabilized when it loses the infallibility of letters.

It is this conversation, in which Socrates works diligently to undermine any argument that names, any more than pictures, are imitations of their models, which is the context of the second part of Derrida's quotation discussed earlier in this chapter. Now, as we have seen, Socrates has switched from arguing for representationalism to arguing against it; he is talking to a different person and he is finding the flaws in Cratylus' theory of natural signs which imitate what they signify. Here is what Derrida quotes, attached to the earlier quotation:

Socrates: Very good, but if the name is to be like the thing, the letters out of which the first names are composed must also be like things. Returning to the image of the picture, I would ask how anyone could ever compose a picture which would be like anything at all, if there were not pigments (pharmakeia) in nature which resembled the things imitated, and out of which the picture is composed. (434a-b)

This passage is attached to one which ends with Socrates saying to Hermogenes that they will apply letters to make syllables to make nouns and verbs and "arrive at language, large and fair and whole, just as the painter used his paint. . . ." It is impossible to misunderstand the implication that Socrates believed that this was possible. The whole Cratylius is a denial and those passages, together or apart, are misrepresented. Derrida misreads, either out of a predisposition to believe that Plato has a metaphysical theory of language, in an attempt at irony which fails, or out of an anxiety of influence.
Clearly, Derrida’s context indicates that Socrates is speaking of his own theory and does not show that he is arguing against the very notions which Derrida quotes.

Socrates also puts to rest any confidence in the perfection of received language. We are getting here to sources. How do we know that the object is what we "say" it is. In the Hermogenes section, Socrates postulated the legislator, the original, primal namer. It is a notion full of nostalgia, looking back to a time when all was immediately received. The namer "knew" what things were and we have his "word" for it. The metaphor is a useful one now to call into question the ethics of accepting what language gives as truth passed on from a source immediately available to truth.

In the process of divesting "original" names of their metaphysical power, Plato presages another development in modern linguistics, one which Saussure says does not occur until the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth. It is true that Saussure's critics would not think him a reliable source for the dating of comparative linguistics, but it is a case of his giving credit for a "first" specifically to someone and in so doing denying Plato's contribution. Socrates actually compares the language spoken in Athens with other dialects of Greece more than once in the dialogue, but this is a good example for this text because it can be written without Greek script.
In the context of the ongoing drama, Cratylus has been unwilling heretofore to admit any possibility of variation in letters of a name. To get to his point, Socrates offers Cratylus two opposing positions: representationalism and conventionalism. The speech sums up the thesis and antithesis of the dialogue; it is a key passage:

Socrates: If you admit that primitive or first nouns are representations of things, is there any better way of framing representations than by assimilating them to the objects as much as you can? Or do you prefer the notion of Hermogenes and of many others who say that names are conventional, and have a meaning to those who have agreed about them, and who have previous knowledge of the things intended by them, and that convention is the only principle? And whether you abide by our present convention, or make a new and opposite one, according to which you call small great and great small - that, they would say, makes no difference, if you are only agreed. Which of these two notions do you prefer? (433d-e)

Of course, Cratylus prefers representationalism and his choice sets up two opportunities: first, to question why perfect names do not hold from language to language. Next, Socrates will question the authority of the original namer. If names are made of letters and are imitations of things, the letters must match the thing in order to imitate it, Socrates theorizes. The most primary part of a word is its letters; "the original elements are letters" (434b). There is no opposition to this point from Cratylus. Socrates says that the letter "r," he and Hermogenes agree, is expressive of "rapidity, motion, and hardness," and the letter "l" is expressive of "smoothness, and softness."
Cratylus agrees. How then can Cratylus account for the spelling of the word "skleroter," or for the fact that it is spelled differently by Eretrians, "skelerotez"? The problem is, according to Socrates, that one has a word meaning "hard" spelled with a soft letter, "l." In addition, one has a "perfect" imitation which does not hold in another language; the spelling is changed, if only in one letter. By Cratylus' reckoning, there is only one, right imitation and it allows no substitutions or changes.

What Plato has done is introduce two necessary exceptions, one of which anticipates modern comparative linguistics. The first exception is an inconsistency in imitation. Soft letters should not appear in a word which imitates hardness. And, perfect imitations are not subject to change. The comparison of two dialects is suggestive of comparisons such as the French chat and English cat. To demonstrate where comparative linguistics leads, consider the fact that while "skeleroter" is not in English usage, we use "hard," we measure degrees of hardness with a sclerometer and we know that arterial sclerosis is hardening of the arteries. Plato's has thus anticipated by twenty-two centuries the theory of a common Indo-European root for Western languages. W. Jones in the late eighteenth century and Franz Bopp in the early nineteenth century were the first to come upon such an idea and it came through comparative linguistics, according to Saussure's account in the Course (2).
Suddenly, Cratylus reverses his adamant stand that no letter in a name can be altered. Maybe those letters "should be altered . . . as you were saying to Hermogenes, and in my opinion rightly, when you spoke of adding and subtracting letters upon occasion" (434e). He also switches to "custom" as an explanation.

Socrates: But still the word is intelligible to both of us; when I say . . . hard, you know what I mean.
Cratylus: Yes, my dear friend, and the explanation of that is custom. (emphasis mine)
Socrates: And what is custom but convention? When I utter this sound, I have that thing in mind, and you know that I have it in mind; is not this what you mean by 'custom'?
Cratylus: Yes.
Socrates: And if when I speak you know my meaning, there is an indication given by me to you?
Cratylus: Yes.
Socrates: This indication of my meaning may proceed from unlike as well as from like. . . . But if this is true, then you have made a convention with yourself, and the correctness of a name turns out to be a convention, since letters which are unlike are indicative equally with those which are like, if they are sanctioned by custom and convention. And even supposing that you distinguish custom from convention ever so much, still you must say that the signification of words is given by custom and not by likeness. . . . (434e-435a-b)

In this concentrated section of the Cratylus which, compared to the Hermogenes section, speeds along, there is no passage more important to this thesis. The comparison with Saussure's arbitrary sign and his theory of "sound-image" is irresistible. The theory of conventions in a system, langue, is almost exactly paraphrased. Saussure says that "the linguistic signs unite, not a thing and a
name, but a concept and a sound-image" (66, emphasis mine). Here Socrates says the same thing. The thing is not in the name; but a concept is in one's mind. And it is the system of *convention* that makes it work. Cratylus wants to suggest that his "custom" and Socrates' "convention" are not the same thing, but Socrates seizes the opportunity to demonstrate that there is no difference.

Cratylus: The use of names, Socrates, as I should imagine, is to inform: the simple truth is, that he who knows names knows also the things which are expressed by them.

Socrates: I suppose you mean to say, Cratylus, that as the name is, so also is the thing; and that he who knows the one will also know the other, because they are similars, and all similars fall under the same art or science; and therefore you would say that he who knows names will also know things.

Cratylus: That is precisely what I mean.

Socrates: But let us consider what is the nature of this information about things which, according to you, is given us by names. Is it the best sort of information? or is there any other? What do you say?

Cratylus: I believe that to be both the only and the best sort of information about them; there can be no other. (435e-436a)

What happens now is critical. Socrates is going to undermine the testimony, the *logos* of the primal namer, the transmitter of immediate truth. He is dealing with the issue that Derrida questions in Husserl's theory in *Speech and Phenomena*. Where does "truth" in indication come from? Husserl says it is disclosed to the intellect through imagination in solitary mental life. The Hermogenes section would lead one to believe that Socrates subscribes to his metaphor for such disclosure, the primal namer. But just as
Derrida deconstructs Husserl's argument, Socrates "takes to pieces" Cratylus'. Things, he says, precede names and that means that the ancient giver of names had to rely upon his perception of objects in formulating names for them. This being so, the receivers of language know no more about the things named than the second-hand perceptions of an ancient namer. His access is no more privileged than any other.

Socrates: If his conception was erroneous, and he gave names according to his conception, in what position shall we who are his followers find ourselves? Shall we not be deceived by him? (436b)

The etymology section disallowed messages from the gods as unmediated truth; Hermes is a liar. Here, the original man was just someone trying to figure out what things are; he was fallible and we inherit his misconceptions. There is no such thing as unmediated knowledge. Cratylus does not want to believe that erroneous names survive. His argument reverts to his first defense: whoever imposed the first names had to know what things were or his names would not be names. (Husserl's truth had disclosed itself to the mind of the namer.) Cratylus' circular argument counts upon proof from within its own construction. Socrates will not let go the notion of original, human error and he compares it to a flaw in the first steps of a geometric proof. If the basic assumption is false, the proof is invalid. Socrates undertakes to demonstrate the contradiction which makes Cratylus' proof invalid.
Socrates: Were we not saying that our vocabulary indicates the essence of things on the assumption that all things are in motion and progress and flux?
Cratylos: Yes; that is assuredly their meaning, and the true meaning. (436e, emphasis mine)

Socrates' goal is to make the essentialist theory of re-presentation, re-presencing, vulnerable. A theory of flux contradicts enduring tradition. Analyzing names which are supposed to imitate motion and thus demonstrate that motion is the sole consistency in nature, Socrates demonstrates their ambiguity and instability. "Knowledge" is ambiguous, "seeming rather to signify stopping the soul at things than going round them" (437a, emphasis mine). The names "sure," "inquiry," "faithful," and "memory," are examples of "motion" words which have counterflux associations.

Socrates: Thus these names which in these instances we find to have the worst sense, will turn out to be framed on the same principle as those which have the best. And anyone I believe who would take the trouble might find many other examples which the giver of names indicates, not that things are in motion of progress, but that they are at rest... .
Cratylos: Yes, Socrates, but observe; the greater number express motion.
Socrates: What of that, Cratylos? Are we to count them like votes? and is correctness of names the voice of the majority? Are we to say of whichever sort there are the most, those are the true ones?
Cratylos: No; that is not reasonable. (437c-d)

Thus Socrates dismisses truth by majority. But he still wants to confront that mystical source, the "original" namer. If names are, as Cratylos believes, the only source of knowledge about things, and when we reflect
about where we got our knowledge of anything the presumption does not seem as ridiculous as it appears in this simplified version, then what source did the ancients use? It is an interesting and provocative question. There were no names from which aboriginal man could learn the nature of objects which they named. Cratylus, caught in the limitless regress, is forced to fall back on onto-theology:

Cratylus: I believe, Socrates, the true account of the matter to be, that a power more than human gave things their first names, and that the names which are thus given are necessarily true names. (438c)

Socrates is as impatient with this deus ex machina device as Derrida is and labels such an argument the last resort of the poets of tragedy who get bogged down in a story they cannot resolve. Here is a head-on confrontation of the onto-theological argument of presence in language. Cratylus wants to counter with the equivocation that some names express one principle of reality and others, another. There may be no more contemporary comment than Socrates' response in all of the Cratylus:

Socrates: But if this is a battle of names, some of them asserting that they are like the truth, others contending that they are, how or by what criterion are we to decide between them? For there are no other names to which appeal can be made, but obviously recourse must be had to another standard, which without employing names, will make clear which of the two are right; and this must be a standard which shows the truth of things. (438d-e)

Theories of rhetoric, ancient and modern, seek a criterion for determining among competing messages which is
true. Socrates here rules out recourse to other words for truth-value; in literary theory, that would, of course, extend to other texts. Wherever Truth is the goal, words are inadequate; they refer to other words, but not to Truth.

The message seems clear here that Plato's philosophy is not logocentric, at least not in the Cratylus. Socrates drives that message home by submitting that the only device through which we can claim to know things is "the true and natural way, through their affinities, when they are akin to each other, and through themselves. For that which is other and different from them must signify something other and different" (438e, emphasis mine). Here again is Derrida's differance. And here is Saussure's difference. First, signifiers are other than signifieds; there is a space between them. Secondly, difference is what we observe with language, not sameness. Words do not imitate; they differentiate. There being no absolute imitation, all signifiers signify something other and to any degree that we can learn of things through words, that knowledge is incomplete.

Socrates: Let us suppose that to any extent you please you can learn through the medium of names, and suppose also that you can learn from the things themselves - which is likely to be the nobler and clearer way; to learn of the image, whether the image and the truth of which the image is the expression have been rightly conceived, or to learn of the truth whether the truth and the image of it have been duly executed?
Cratylus: I should say that to learn of the truth must be the best way. (439b)

Having reached this accord with Cratylus, Socrates returns to the recurring theme: that truth and reality are beyond language.

Socrates: How real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, beyond you and me. We must rest content with the admission that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names. No; they must rather be studied and investigated in their connexion with one another.

Cratylus: Clearly, Socrates. (439b)

It would at first appear that on this note, very nearly at the end of the dialogue, Socrates has resolved the issue of presence re-presented in names and that Cratylus is dissuaded from such a theory. But the issue is not resolved. Even after another persuasive effort, Socrates sees Cratylus withdraw from such a concession. He has conceded that imitations formed through the medium of letters are flawed, but his commitment to Heracleitus keeps him from agreeing completely with Socrates. Socrates admits his own nostalgia for stability outweighs his reliance upon flux as explanation. He longs for some sort of stable reality which will render permanent the nature of qualities such as beauty and goodness. He is quite aware that it is a part of the human disposition to seek absolutes.

Socrates: I myself do not deny that the givers of names did really give them under the idea that all things were in motion and flux; which was their sincere but, I think, mistaken opinion. And having fallen into a kind of whirlpool themselves, they are carried round, and want to drag us in after them. There is a matter, master
Cratylus, about which I often dream, and should like to ask your opinion; tell me whether there is or is not any absolute beauty or good, or any other absolute existence.
Cratylus: Certainly, Socrates, I think so.
(439c-d)

With Cratylus' agreement on this point, Socrates moves the discussion of the problem of a name for this stable reality in the light of the earlier observation that any name is necessarily other than what it names. The theory of flux complicates the problem further, adding the impossibility of naming beauty if it "is never in the same state." It cannot be done, Socrates says, "for obviously things which are the same cannot change while they remain the same, and if they are always the same and in the same state, and never depart from their original form, they can never change or be moved" (439e). Cratylus' adherence to the principle of flux cancels out his desire for stable standards of goodness, beauty.

This is not a problem that Plato solves, here or elsewhere, for it is the enduring human conflict - the longing for absolute answers and the absence of any verifiable, stable reality. This existential conflict, as Plato well knew, could not be resolved with empirical knowledge or logic. He gives an example: the signifier justice, seemingly pure, can be used to mean one thing to one man and another thing to Socrates. The impalpability of justice as a concept is characteristic of all abstract qualities. Even knowledge, that quality which bolsters our
confidence in ourselves and gives us such pride, is just a signifier.

Socrates: Nor can we reasonably say, Cratylus, that there is knowledge at all, if everything is in a state of transition and there is nothing abiding. For knowledge too cannot continue to be knowledge unless continuing always to abide and exist. But if the very nature of knowledge changes, at the time when the change occurs there will be no knowledge, and if the transition is always going on, there will always be no knowledge, and according to this view, there will be no one to know and nothing to be known. (440a-b)

Here, the absence which Derrida substitutes for presence is a part of Socrates' own theory. Knowledge signifies nothing but an absence of knowledge. It is not a welcome resolution and Socrates resists it. Absolute forms, which he will ponder in several dialogues and finally abandon, appeal to him. But absolutes, he is sure, are beyond anything that language can touch.

Socrates: Whether there is this eternal nature in things, or whether the truth is what Heraclitus and his followers and many others say, is a question hard to determine, and no man of sense will like to put himself or the education of his mind in the power of names. Neither will he so far trust names or the givers of names as to be confident in any knowledge which condemns himself and other existences to an unhealthy state of reality; he will not believe that all things leak like a pot, or imagine that the world is a man who has a running at the nose. This may be true, Cratylus, but is also very likely to be untrue. (440d)

Here, as the dialogue ends, the whole text as signifier signifies an absence, an inability of language to fill in the blanks between the human question and any ultimate answer. One implication seems to dominate; logos
is testimony, speculation, gossip, hypothesis, but not Truth. In a dialogue about language, one might expect the author's last word on the subject. But that does not occur in the *Cratylus*. The author shares with the author of *Dissemination* an undecidability of evolving theories. For both, the last word is unstable.

What instability and lack of ultimate solution offer is a freedom to explore, looking always for more enlightened definitions which certainty, by its own definition, would exclude from human possibility. Possibility is, then, the greatest promise of all and it is possibility which must be defended against absolutes. Socrates cannot have it both ways: he cannot win the argument and keep possibility open. A mark of wisdom is the fact that he withdraws while the issue is open and there is still more than one possible answer.
Notes to Chapter Two

1 See the Republic II, III, and X for Plato's most complete condemnation of poetry as imitation.
Chapter Three

Thesis-Antithesis

This chapter is devoted to the portion of the Cratylus in which Plato sets forth two opposite theories of the sign: names have a natural tie to what they name on the one hand, and names are absolutely and individually arbitrary on the other. The two theories are efforts to answer the question of the dialogue which is "What is a name?" It is important to my argument to note here that that issue is not prescriptively decided, and Plato never arrives at a definiton of "name" which qualifies for Derrida's hypothetical sign with a center, a "point at which the substitution of elements or terms is no longer possible." What Derrida calls the center of a sign is analogous with the Platonic Form, the unchangeable, ever stable Ideal. A theory of language based upon metaphysical Forms as centers of signs would not offer any change in the assumed Platonic theory of language. The language theory which Socrates defends in this section is Cratylus' theory and it is based upon a stable, natural center of signs. He is arguing against Hermogenes' theory which holds that signs are absolutely conventional, even to the point that they may be arbitrarily changed by the individual speaker. Neither of these two extreme positions is the position of Socrates and, by extension, the position of Plato. This is the
portion of the dialogue that sets forth the traditionally Platonic theory of language which Socrates later rejects. He presents that traditional theory with deliberate irony and the attentive reader knows the rejection must follow.

To ensure that the reader does not miss the irony, Socrates reminds again and again that he is drawing upon what he has learned from a bargain course in linguistics given by a local sophist, or his conversation on the subject with Euthyphro. As usual, he pleads ignorance, willing to learn, to mediate. Again and again he constructs an argument on some point and easily persuades the ever-credulous Hermogenes only to undercut the argument with mockery and self-deprecation. In fact, in his very first speech he ironically qualifies his own expertise. Apparently Cratylus and Hermogenes have been discussing language, names specifically. Hermogenes has maintained that names are conventional while Cratylus has argued that names have an inherent truth and correctness which does not vary even in foreign languages. Socrates is pleased to join the discussion, but he does announce the limits of his knowledge.

Socrates: If I had not been poor, I might have heard the fifty-drachma course of the great Prodicus, which is a complete education in grammar and language - these are his own words - and then I should have been at once able to answer your question about the correctness of names. But, indeed, I have only heard the single-drachma course, and therefore I do not know the truth about such matters. I will, however, gladly assist you and Cratylus in the investigation of them. (384b-c)
Appreciating the irony is absolutely necessary here and it is much more obvious here than in many other passages. The limitations he sets upon himself are only part of it; his faith in Prodicus is also stated tongue-in-cheek. Socrates does not believe for one minute that Prodicus, or any other sophist or rhetorician, presents the truth about language, or any other subject. And so at the very outset, Socrates has placed truth in tension with language, thereby undermining the reliability of language. And, indeed, the irony here is intensified by the fact that Socrates is doing what would not be possible if names and things had a natural bond. He is saying one thing and meaning another. It is a brilliant demonstration of the trickery of language and the brief passage actually precludes Socrates' arriving at a conclusion that words have a natural, binding tie to the essence of any referent. One who attends to this opening condition knows to yield to the humor which Socrates calls upon repeatedly to undermine his own presentation of a point in the argument for a natural bond of sign with signified.

One parenthetical phrase in the quotation above, "these are his own words," articulates Socrates' overriding disrespect and disregard for sophists, rhetoricians and poets, which is certainly not new to any reader of Plato's dialogues. In literary criticism, the passages which reflect that disrespect are probably the most familiar. If, in fact, Socrates here allowed one of those three
wordsmiths their claims of saying what is real and true, the Cratylus would constitute a serious contradiction to the rest of Plato's work. And if he arrived at the conclusion that names have an inherent, natural correctness, then his abiding concern for the problem of the possibilbity of "saying that which is not" would become a nonissue. Also, if names have a natural connection to or with what they stand for, it would follow that knowledge of things can be gained by studying their names. That, we find, is the exact argument of Cratylus. One must not infer, however, that Socrates believes that accuracy in language is impossible. On the contrary, it is quite clear that functional accuracy is important to Socrates and that it is the quality which he finds impossible in Hermogenes' extreme conventionalism. As Weingartner points out, Hermogenes is advocating a nonsystem of language in which the only convention is with himself. And since each individual might "employ different sounds at different times," (7) the result would be far closer to Cratylus' pounding on a pot.

Hermogenes: I should explain to you, Socrates, that our friend Cratylus has been arguing about names; he says that they are natural and not conventional, not a portion of the human voice which men agree to use; but that there is a truth or correctness in them, which is the same for Hellenes as for barbarians. Whereupon I ask him whether his own name of Cratylus is a true name or not, and he answers yes. (383b)

Significantly, Cratylus also insists that Hermogenes' name is not a true name and that "if the whole world were
to call you Hermogenes, that would not be your name" (388b). In all that follows this passage, as Georgios Anagnostopoulos clarifies, two theories of language are the two elements of the one question in the Cratylus: how do names work? He argues, correctly I believe, that these are the issues in the Cratylus and not the origin of language. It is "the earliest attempt to solve a perennial philosophical problem about the relation between the nature and structure of language and the nature and structure of the world" (318-19). Throughout the Hermogenes section, Socrates will argue against the extreme option which Hermogenes offers. In so doing, he anticipates all objections to the conventionalism theory, articulates them, and reconciles them to his own theory which is a moderated version of Hermogenes'. Irony is the roadsign that keeps the reader on the right path; it allows him to follow Socrates' arguments in this section and at the same time know that they are not his own.

Even as the drama begins, another irony is already at work. It is alluded to in the passage quoted above. Plato undermines any belief that names refer essentially to what they name or that a thing is its name in any understanding of that phrase. He does this by choosing faulty names for the characters in the dialogue. Cratylus, who claims that his name is a "true" name, speaks for the natural representationalism argument. But Cratylus' name would give him an identity which mitigates against his position. The
historical Cratylus was a disciple of Heracleitus, a defender of the principle of flux. Anything so undefined as an object in flux cannot have a permanent state and without a state consistent enough to establish identity of nature, an object has no fixed nature to name. Despite Cratylus' confidence in his own name, it is not a "true" name by his own standard. The same irony is true of the name of the other member of the team. Hermogenes' name makes him the son of Hermes, god of speech. As such, he should argue for the permanence of a name and the power of speech to define. He should hold Cratylus' position that names are inherently true. The son of speech would be sure that messages from the gods, disclosures of truth to the mind, are reliable. His name says that he is the son of the word. Despite the fact that his name says that he is the son of the word, Hermogenes presents an argument for unstable language.

These brief opening passages, besides stating the question of the dialogue and setting the tone, provide its historical setting, actual or dramatic. Julias A. Elias thinks it likely that debates about linguistic properties were frequent at the time Plato wrote the Cratylus (69). Weingartner supports this idea and lists in his footnote some of the people Plato is contending against, among them Heracleitus, Protagoras, and Parmenides, Hippocrates, and Glauccon. The list represents predecessors and contemporaries (7). Certainly the political events of the period made facility with language important. Citizens were
often called upon to speak on matters of public policy. To argue well was an important skill and citizens no doubt were anxious to improve their ability to argue and increase their political influence. Of course, citizens of ancient Greece were no more influenced by language than modern citizens of the world are and questions about how, exactly, and if language "means" what it says are contemporary topics.

Hermogenes' statement of the problem also raises the first serious question in an explication of the *Cratylus*. Why does Plato introduce and then discredit a conventionalist theory of language? Hermogenes serves the function of the straw man. By presenting an extreme argument which Socrates can argue against, Hermogenes offers Socrates the opportunity to meet all possible objections to conventionalism before he offers his own more moderate conventionalism. If Socrates had opened the dialogue by announcing that he believed that names were related to things only by community conventions, *Cratylus* could have used Hermogenes' argument as evidence to show the extremes to which conventionalism would lead. By placing the extreme at the beginning, Plato allows Socrates to play with it until, by the end of the dialogue, his compromise makes more sense than any other argument.

As the drama continues, Hermogenes gives his own evidence upon which he bases his thesis of arbitrary and private conventionalism. He has observed that a name does
not affect its referent. Names are given and changed at will. In the affairs of men, ownership bestows the right to name. That, he reasons, is adequate evidence that names and nature have nothing in common.

Hermogenes: I have often talked over this matter, both with Cratylus and others, and cannot convince myself that there is any principle of correctness in names other than convention and agreement. Any name which you give, in my opinion, is the right one, and if you change that and give another, the new name is as correct as the old one - we frequently change the names of our slaves, and the newly imposed name is as good as the old. For there is no name given to anything by nature; all is convention and the habit of the users. (384d)

Here, explicitly, is the statement of the conventionalist theory and the unacceptable extreme to which one can push it. The latter gives Socrates something to argue against, but the former, it becomes clear, is his own view. He now has the opportunity to move toward a conventionalism which incorporates the necessity of community agreement. While Weingartner thinks it "misleading in the extreme" to call Hermogenes' theory conventionalism, it is nonetheless what Hermogenes calls it (7). Its distinction is that it is not a conventionalism which will satisfy Socrates. It must be altered somehow to square with the fact that in some significant and fundamental way it does matter what we call something. That is what Hermogenes leaves out, but his statement gives Socrates his opening to expand the issue. Plato has set the problem up to allow Socrates to discriminate between the
bond of nature and the bond of community code. To that end, Socrates frames a test case in which the bond of code is lacking.

Socrates: Well, now, let me take an instance. Suppose that I call a man a horse or a horse a man. You mean to say that a man will be rightly called a horse by me individually, and rightly called a man by the rest of the world, and a horse again would be rightly called a man by me and a horse by the world — that is your meaning? Hermogenes: He would, according to my view. Socrates: But how about truth, then? You would acknowledge that there is a sense in speaking of true and false statement? (385a-b)

There is such a thing as truth for Hermogenes, true and false statements and true and false propositions. Unlike his friend Cratylus, Hermogenes believes that language can name things which are not, in any sense of the word, "not." This is a crucial point. Cratylus' argument depends upon words being tied to what they name; a word's being tied to nothing is not possible in his schema. If a name is a true name, it has a counterpart of reference. Hermogenes extends conditions of true and false to propositions. False propositions are false in all their parts and true propositions are true in all their parts. Socrates has made it apparent here that there is something amiss in Hermogenes' theory of names. Nothing can be true or false if nothing is correct or incorrect. He asks Hermogenes to confirm his original thesis:

Socrates: And the name of anything is that which anyone affirms to be the name? Hermogenes: Yes.
Socrates: And will there be so many names of each thing as everybody says that there are? and will
they be true names at the time of uttering them?
Hermogenes: Yes, Socrates, I can conceive of no
correctness of names other than this; you give
one name, and I another; and in different cities
and countries there are different names for the
same things; Hellenes differ from barbarians in
their use of names, and several Hellenic tribes
from one another. (385d–e)

Socrates, in what to modern readers seems an extremely
gradual process, has brought Hermogenes to pronounce the
inconsistency in his own argument, and he has also artfully
brought forth another issue which he wants to address. The
first inconsistency is that a thing is what it is named,
according to Hermogenes, but nothing has a correct name. If
things were indeed what they were named, language could
name something into being. That would make names creators,
a theory extreme even for Hermogenes, who holds that names
are impermanent tags. On the other hand, if names are
correct or incorrect, as Socrates is now arguing, how does
one reconcile the fact that they change from one nation of
speakers to another and even from one dialect to another.
An object surely does not alter, or does it? To arrive at a
functional conventionalism, Socrates must reconcile these
two points. Quite apparently, what Socrates wants to do is
to arrive at a point where names are correct according to
some less than ultimate standard. He will deal here with
the relativism of Protagoras and the issue of the stability
of the thing named.

Socrates: But would you say, Hermogenes, that the
things differ as the names differ? and are they
relative to individuals, as Protagoras tells us?
For he says that man is the measure of all
things, and that things are to me as they appear to me, and that they are to you as they appear to you. Do you agree with him, or would you say that things have a permanent essence of their own? (386a)

The problem of the location of phenomenal reality plays a very important part in this discussion of naming. Socrates wants to get to his argument that names distinguish and classify things. In effect, names label things for future reference. The question contained in the passage is one that Socrates wants to confront: where do the things we name lie? He wants to deal with Protagorean relativity. If what we name is whatever anyone says it is, where does the reality lie? If the answer is that all is within our minds, it matters little what we name anything. If, on the other hand, there are things around us and we want to exchange observations about those things, if only to see if our observations agree with someone else's, the name must have a stable relationship with what it names. For discourse to occur, there must be some agreement about what it is exactly that we are talking about when we make something the subject of a statement. Subjective idealism, as it was later to be formulated, is not the issue here. The issue is, rather, the basis upon which we correctly call things by a name which another can apprehend and associate with the named. Socrates asks: how, if all is subjective, and "the truth is that things are as they appear to anyone, can some of us be wise and some of us foolish" (386). His point is that Protagoras' theory of
reality lacks distinguishable differences. Names sort out and differentiate. Difference is as significant to Socrates as it is to Saussure, who says language is all difference, and Derrida who renames it *differance*. Were there no difference, "wise" and "unwise" could not be conceived as contrary characteristics. In fact, we do speak of actions and people as wise and unwise and we do know the difference. But this is not the only school of thought about reality which Socrates wants to challenge here.

Socrates: Nor will you be disposed, I presume, to say with Euthydemus, that all things equally belong to men at the same moment and always; for neither on this view can there be some good and others bad, if virtue and vice are always equally to be attributed to all. . . . But if neither is right, and things are not relative to individuals, and all things do not equally belong to all at the same moment and always, they must be supposed to have their own proper and permanent essence. They are not in relation to us, or influenced by us, fluctuating according to our fancy, but they are independent, and maintain to their own essence the relation prescribed by nature. (386d-e)

In the structure which Socrates has set up, individuals are related to each other and to the world of phenomena through a system of language which names and differentiates. He will also argue that this same system can name what is not among those phenomena and it can differentiate between phenomenal and imaginary things. Such a system can exchange information about good and bad as well. Such a system can deliberately say that which is false.
Socrates: Does what I am saying apply only to the things themselves, or equally to the actions which proceed from them? Are not actions also a class of being? (386e)

Socrates is extending the subject of names to cover more than just an object/name relation. "Name" is quite apparently intended to cover anything which we identify through a code sign, a name. According to White, "Plato's term 'name' does not correspond to any single technical term in contemporary philosophical discourse" (131). Be that as it may, Socrates leaves little doubt that naming is the process of sorting out and classifying for the purpose of communicating and exchanging information through discourse. What White's argument does support is that there is more to naming than a one-to-one correspondence between object and sign and that is useful. However, White's thesis that the message of the Cratylus is that "only Forms can be strictly named," does not hold up, as we shall see (132, 154). Gail Fine maintains that the Greek word onoma, translated "name" in English, "does service for both 'name' and 'word' " (291). The use of these studies to the purpose here is that they point out that the term "name" is more inclusive than might be thought at the beginning of the Cratylus. It would be no error to interchange name and signifier. Future passages will confirm the expansion begun here.

Having established that actions are as real as objects and, therefore, qualify for names, Socrates wants to line
them up as activities which follow some sort of natural process. "We do not cut as we please, and with any chance instrument, but we cut with the proper instrument only, and according to the natural process of cutting, and the natural process is right" (387a). One important distinction to make here is that in this passage, "natural process" does not indicate only something which nature does spontaneously. The phrase also denotes human industry and its activities. Cutting with the correct instruments is clearly not the same as the activities of plants and animals; nor is it the same as the human systems which allow us to see, taste, think, etc. Human methods developed for tasks are also natural processes. And one of these human methods is the activity of speaking. For that reason, speaking in accordance with some established code or system is what Socrates is here calling "natural process."

Socrates: And will a man speak correctly who speaks as he pleases? Will not the successful speaker rather be he who speaks in the natural way of speaking, and as things ought to be spoken, and with the natural instrument? Any other mode of speaking will result in error and failure. (387c)

The natural instrument here is not the vocal apparatus, but the system of names and Socrates' natural way of speaking is speaking in accordance with codified norms of language. One cannot name one's own perceptions or observations according to whim and still engage in discourse with other speakers. One cannot change a code word by oneself, as Hermogenes theorizes. As Weingartner
points out, Hermogenes' verbal anarchy would render dialectic impossible (9). This observation of the individual's inability to rename his environment and still communicate with others on that topic is remarkably like Saussure's on the same matter.

The signifier, though to all appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it. The masses have no voice in the matter, and the signifier chosen by language could be replaced by no other. This fact, which seems to embody a contradiction, might be called colloquially "the stacked deck." We say to language: "Choose!" but we add: "It must be this sign and no other." No individual, even if he will it, could modify in any way the choice that has been made; and what is more, the community itself cannot control so much as a single word; it is bound to the existing language. (Course, 71)

Saussure goes on to compare language to other social institutions which are transmitted intact to each generation. Socrates compares the use of language to other activities which we conduct in the received, traditional manner, i.e., cutting, burning, speaking, weaving, piercing (387-88). The context of these passages does not suggest that Socrates is discussing Ideal Forms as he formulated them in other dialogues, but that he is discussing ordinary activities in the conduct of human affairs. Nevertheless, Socrates' comparison of names as instruments of speaking with shuttles as instruments of weaving is often read as Socrates' exposition of the theory of Forms. Close examination dispels that error.
Socrates and Hermogenes engage in an exchange in which Socrates establishes a pattern of question-response about instruments of human industry. The information elicited is that a shuttle is an instrument; when we use it we weave; when we weave we "separate or disengage the warp from the woof." Comparably, a name is an instrument; when we use it we give information and when we give information we "distinguish things according to their natures" (388a-b). We differentiate when we name. Here again, in its incipient form, is the theory of difference/differance presaging the work of Saussure and Derrida. It is another example of the consistent thread that binds these three together.

Socrates: Then a name is an instrument of teaching and of distinguishing natures, as the shuttle is of distinguishing threads of the web. (388c)

When the weaver weaves, he uses an instrument made by the carpenter; when the teacher teaches, he uses an instrument made by the legislator. Socrates infers that a lawmaker assigns names because the system of language seems a system of linguistics laws. The question then, about both shuttle and name, is where do the makers of the instruments obtain the models for the instruments they make?

Socrates: And how does the legislator make names? And to what does he look? Consider this in the light of the previous instances. To what does the carpenter look in making the shuttle? Does he not look to that which is naturally fitted to act as a shuttle?

Hermogenes: Certainly.
Socrates: And suppose the shuttle be broken in the making. Will he make another, looking to the broken one? Or will he look to the form according to which he made the other?
Hermogenes: To the latter, I should imagine.
Socrates: Might not that be justly called the true or ideal shuttle? (389b)

Among those which I read in preparation for this thesis I found more essays on the shuttle passage than any other single passage in the *Cratylus*. I want to include some of the interpretations of the passage as contrast and balance for my own. Contemporary readings fall into two categories: those which find it a reference to Forms and those who do not.

Jeffrey Gold and Brian Calvert are spokesmen for the first interpretation. Gold does not read the passage as straightforward analogy of tools with words, but as reference to theoretical Forms of reality. Gold uses it to support his argument that what Plato is talking about in the *Cratylus* is Forms. His presumption is that Plato is saying that "if two pieces of wood have the same function - if they both, for example, have the function of separating threads," they are both shuttles and if they are both shuttles, they "must have a share of the Form, The Shuttle Itself." His argument continues:

just as all shuttles have a share of the Form, The Shuttle Itself, all names have a share of the Form, The Name Itself. It is the burden of this section to show that for the Plato of the *Cratylus*, there are specific Forms under the common generic Form, The Shuttle Itself, e.g., the Forms, The Shuttle-Appropriate-for-Fine Linen and The Shuttle-Appropriate-for-Thick Wool.
Similarly, there are specific Forms under the common generic Form, The Name Itself, e.g., the Forms, The Name-Appropriate-for-Horse (Name-of-Horse) and The Name-Appropriate-for-Cow (Name-of-Cow). (233)

Apparently, Gold's theory is even more complicated than Plato's and would engage one endlessly in breaking Forms into Sub-Forms, and repeating that process. Aside from this weakness, there is another in his argument. He reads Socrates' argument here as a statement of his own theory of names and extends it thereby to be Plato's. This is not Socrates' theory as becomes manifestly clear by the end of the dialogue.

Brian Calvert offers a variation on the above, suggesting that what Plato is talking about is not really a Form but a subset of Form which Calvert dubs "Proper Form." The "Proper Form" is more specific than the Form and he reasons that as the Form of the Shuttle is in the shuttle the weaver uses, the Form of the name is "in letters and syllables" of the word which is the name (29).

These are the strongest statements that Plato is talking about Forms in the Cratylus. That is not to say that they are strong arguments. Add to them Whites' conviction that Plato is saying that only the Forms can be named, and one has the kind of reading of the Cratylus which Jowett warns against. Plato never thought for a moment that the Ideas could be put into words.

Of the names of the ideas he would have said, as he says of the names of the Gods, that we know nothing. Even the realism of Cratylus is not
based upon the ideas of Plato, but upon the flux of Heracleitus. (Introduction, 5).

There is a greater body of interpretation which argues against a metaphysical reading than for and these readings are instructive for my own reading of the passage. The chief spokespersons for this opposite argument are J. V. Luce, Erik Nis Ostenfeld, Rudolph Weingartner, and John Sallis. Luce doubts that there is justification for reading transcendence into the shuttle passage on the basis that the "phrases implying 'embodiment' are prominent, while none unambiguously implies transcendence," and she believes her opinion is supported by prevailing scholarship (30). Ostenfeld finds that the reference to an ideal shuttle in the Cratylus "not obviously transcendent. . . . One wonders, therefore whether what we have called 'the ideal Form' is more than an abstraction, a correctly formed idea or concept." He continues:

When the carpenter makes a shuttle he looks to something of such a kind "as is naturally fitted to act as a shuttle" . . . e.g., the Form (eidos) or that being which is just a shuttle (auth ho esti kerikis) (389ab). From this Form, which must be had by all shuttles, is distinguished the concrete shuttle Form which should be the one that is naturally best for each work. . . . This Form is largely determined by the given material conditions. . . .

It may seem as if the distinction is between generic and specific Form. But this obscures the fact that our knowledge of the two is derived from different sources. There is a realization of the necessity of an adaption of the intention (ideal shuttle) to specific material conditions (389d 1-2). The ideal shuttle is apparently conceived by looking at the purpose or function
entirely in the abstract, whereas the discovery of the concrete Form involves a study of the materials to be worked on. (41-2)

Furthermore, Ostenfeld says, the status which can be assigned to the ideal name or shuttle is a question which refers to "the 'proper and permanent being' of particulars, mentioned at the beginning of the dialogue," which was the differentiating factor of phenomena which we name (42-3). Ostenfeld's reading that the idea of the shuttle derives from the function of the shuttle and not from a metaphysical Form Shuttle is echoed by Weingartner's reading, which, in this passage and in its whole is most agreeable with my own:

... whatever that troublesome term (Form) may mean elsewhere in Plato's writings, both the spirit of this entire passage on the craft of weaving and the specific wording ... demand that we think of the "true or ideal shuttle" ... as the proper function of the shuttle in the process of weaving. (19)

Sallis' reading supports the position that the Cratylus is not about Forms by pointing out the error of confusing the use of the term eidos in the shuttle passage of the Cratylus with the use of the same term in Book X of the Republic:

The complication need not be regarded as simply a confused version of what is later put forth clearly in the Republic, for its context is drastically different from that of the discussion in the Republic. In terms of the peculiar problematic of the Cratylus it is perhaps most appropriate to regard this complication as exhibiting the complication into which Socrates is led by his adherence to the analogy between
naming and the arts — namely, the complication engendered by his speaking of the natural names as *eide*. (212)

I would be remiss not to acknowledge scholar Norman Gulley's reading here. Gulley maintains that talk of forms does not appear in the *Cratylius* until "the very end of the dialogue." And even there, he says, "the probability is that Plato has been led to exaggerate his concern to protest against the view that the nature of reality can be discovered through a study of language alone" (69). In the same passage, Gulley says that his reading finds other concerns to be the substance of the *Cratylius*. But, he does read references to the Forms in the end of the dialogue. My own reading of the *Cratylius* is at variance with Gulley's on this last.

My own sense of what Plato is writing about in the passages about true and false names and true and false statements and forms of shuttles depends upon a reading of the entire dialogue. Hermogenes has proposed that names may be subjectively and privately arbitrary. Using the two terms which Socrates and Hermogenes use, "horse" and "man," one can construct a command which will illustrate the absurd result of confusing these two terms, even if they were the only two which were linguistically unstable: "Shoot the man and set the horse's leg." Socrates has set up the extreme to illustrate that calling something by its conventional name is the only way one can communicate in a language system of names. Within the true and false
distinction, there are at least two possibilities: One can call something by a mistaken name, or one can call something by a deliberately inaccurate name. If one calls a mule a horse in an attempt to accurately identify the animal, it is a mistake. If one calls a zircon a diamond to purposely misrepresent its value, it is dishonesty. If one uses "horse" in a proposition which says all horses do not reproduce, one has made a false generalization. If one generalizes that mules do not reproduce, one makes a valid generalization. It becomes very complicated when one attempts to eliminate all the interacting possibilities between error and dishonesty. I read the passage to mean that to ensure accuracy to the greatest possible degree in communication, one must use the conventional names. That means that names differentiate. One sign signifies horse and another mule, and we know the difference. The function of difference is to eliminate all that a sign does not signify. The discriminating difference among names is what makes discourse work. In almost any proposition which predicates something about "horse," "man" will not do. Socrates is moderating Hermogenes' conventionalism into a conventionalism acceptable to himself. According to W. M. Pfeiffer's essay, Socrates is breaking new ground (94). The form of the shuttle is the ideal shuttle in the sense of the best idea for a shuttle, a tool which functions to go in and out of threads on a loom, dragging yarn after it. One is so accustomed to thinking Ideal Form for every
reference to idea that any invention of human industry in a
Platonic context seems to assume a double meaning. It is
far more probable that Plato's ever clear prose is more
straightforward about the subject of Ideal Forms than such
guesses presume.

But at last, Socrates settles the shuttle issue
decidedly through the use of the weaver, not the designer
of the shuttle. If one reads just a little further in the
dialogue, one finds that Plato has located the determinant
of the correct form of the shuttle unambiguously. It is not
a designer of shuttles who recalls his knowledge of the
Form of a Shuttle from his previous life among the Forms,
nor even the carpenter who makes the shuttle. It is the
weaver who knows what a shuttle must be to do its job.

Socrates: But who then is to determine whether
the proper form is given to the shuttle, whatever
sort of wood may be used? the carpenter who
makes, or the weaver who is to use them?
Hermogenes: I should say, he who is to use them,
Socrates. (390a)

Socrates backs up this conclusion with a long
recitation of users of instruments who are the authorities
on how to make them (390b-c). So what we have here is not a
serious discussion of the Ideal Forms of all that we make
and of all that is apparently made by nature, but an
analogy of the similarities between a tool for the
activities of industry and a tool for classification and
communication. Socrates wants there to be a correctness in
the two based upon functionality. One must use the right
instrument to do a proper job. Fe pairs the user of the shuttle as final authority on the form of the shuttle with the user of language as the final authority on the form of the name. It comes at the end of the passage showing users to be the arbiters of correctness for tools.

Socrates: The work of the carpenter is to make a rudder, and the pilot has to direct him, if the rudder is to be made well.
Hermogenes: True.
Socrates: And the work of the legislator is to give names, and the dialectician must be his director if the names are to be rightly given?
Hermogenes: That is true. (390d)

As Socrates challenges Hermogenes' theory of absolute arbitrariness, he comes persuasively close to convincing the reader that he is stating his own theory. One must bear in mind that his goal has been to dislodge Hermogenes' irresponsible conventionalism. He has wanted to effect a movement toward a more moderate view and his tactics have been to jar the foundations of Hermogenes' position. Hermogenes said that naming was not a serious matter; it was of little consequence. The code of a speaking community lay outside Hermogenes' consideration. He had observed only that some names were not permanent and that they were not descriptive and were not naturally attached to what they named. Socrates wants to keep some of this and get rid of the rest. Names are not necessarily descriptive and they are not natural. Hermogenes' sample of situations was too small. Socrates has expanded the sampling. Cratylus had not been able to change Hermogenes' mind, but Socrates has
taken it upon himself to do just that.

Socrates: Then, Hermogenes, I should say that this giving of names can be no such light matter as you fancy, or the work of light or chance persons; and Cratylus is right in saying that things have names by nature, and that not every man is an artificer of names, but he only who looks to the name which each thing by nature has, and is able to express this name in letters and syllables. (390e)

If the dialogue stopped at this point, or if the conversation with Hermogenes stopped here, one would have to accept that Socrates, in a very serious frame of mind, has set about bringing Hermogenes to his senses and to an understanding of the serious nature of the game of naming. One would concede, also, that Plato had succeeded in placing the philosopher in the position of furnishing civilization with the correct names for all that civilized man discusses. But the dialogue is barely begun, and it is as obvious to Plato as it is to us that some names are either accidents of nature or are descendents of earlier names, no longer accurate. In case Hermogenes, or a later reader, might be caught up too seriously in the game, Socrates begins to undercut his own arguments.

Hermogenes: I cannot see how to answer your arguments, Socrates; but I find a difficulty in changing my opinion all in a moment, and I think that I should be more readily persuaded, if you would show me what this is which you term the natural fitness of names.

Socrates: My goodness Hermogenes, I have none to show. Was I not telling you just now - but you have forgotten - that I knew nothing, and was I not proposing to share the inquiry with you? (391a)

Socrates accomplishes much of his ironic impact by
such sharp contrasts, and one must be always aware that he is here arguing for a theory he will soon discredit and abandon. This is, of course, a familiar pattern in the dialogues, and the exercise is rhetorically sound. He moves the discussion forward with an irony so patronizing of Hermogenes and the sophists that the path to contradiction is always open. For example, he advises that the sophists offer the way to wisdom in a tone which does not hold him to his advice:

Socrates: The true way is to have the assistance of those who know, and you must pay them well both in money and in thanks; these are the sophists, of whom your brother, Callias, has—rather dearly—bought the reputation of wisdom. But you have not yet come into your inheritance, and therefore you had better go to him, and beg and entreat him to tell you what he has learnt from Protagoras about the fitness of names. (391c)

Socrates, throughout the dialogues, has no faith and much contempt for the truth of the sophists, rhetoricians, the poets or for purchased reputation. They are convincing, but unreliable. Jowett makes elaborate supplemental reference to "the Sophist in Plato" in his Introduction to the *Sophist* which make the case for the irony in the passage above:

The Sophist in Plato is the master of the art of illusion; the charlatan, the foreigner, the prince of *esprits faus*, the hireling who is the opposite of the true teacher. He is the 'evil one,' the ideal representative of all that Plato most disliked in moral and intellectual tendencies of his own age; the adversary of the almost equally ideal Socrates. He seems to be always growing in the fancy of Plato, now boastful, now eristic, now clothing himself in
rags of philosophy, now more akin to the rhetorician or lawyer, now haranguing, now questioning, until the final appearance in the Politicus of his departing shadow in the disguise of a statesman. (Dialogues 327)

As for Protagoras, he has been challenged and dismissed but a few passages earlier. Socrates' recommendation that Hermogenes seek out a sophist as a teacher can be only ironic, and it is under Socrates' prodding that Hermogenes repudiates "Protagoras and his truth" (391e). Hermogenes' dismissal of Protagoras brings up the next witness, Homer.

Homer speaks of names, Socrates says, and he speaks "notably and nobly in the places where he distinguishes the different names which gods and men give to the same things" (392d). He finds Homers' references "surprising" and "profound." It is predictable that Homer's poetry will be another false lead, but these lines call attention to any poet's claims of direct access to the minds of the gods. The passages about poets in other dialogues, the Republic X and the Ion among them, leave little doubt that the divine madness of the poet is less than satisfactory testimony, on just about any subject, to Socrates. But here, as elsewhere, a part of the irony is in the respect for the poet. It is perhaps unavoidable that one see Plato's aversion to the poets spring from an inside look, one poet to another, at the games words can play.

Plato cannot resist making an issue of poets' claim to speak the truth, a claim which he steadfastly denies on the
grounds that either they do not know their subject or they are crazed by madness, neither condition making for a reliable source. He uses irony to cite Homer's claim to know divine secrets, but he clearly questions his authority. Socrates recalls to Hermogenes references Homer makes to a river and a bird and "many other observations of the same kind in Homer and other poets," in which two names are given: the one which the gods call something and the other which men call the same thing (392b). The implicit objection is that the poet claims to know which is which by divine disclosure. Such reading of divine minds is beyond such mortals as he and Hermogenes, Socrates says, but perhaps they can find the correctness of names, which Homer apparently knows, in other examples.

Socrates demonstrates the tortuous line of thinking one must follow to unravel the poet's claimed truth. Homer records in the Iliad that Hector's son was called Astyanax and Scamandrius. He gives no direct indication which of the two names was the "correct" name, but perhaps they can reason it out. Socrates reasons this way with the credulous Hermogenes agreeing with every statement and conclusion. The wise would surely be more apt to call something by the right name and "men, taken as a class," are wiser. The men of Troy called the boy Astyanax "king of the city," so that must mean that the women called him Scamandrius. Homer would surely agree with the wise and so he must have preferred the name Astyanax (392c–d).
Socrates: And what is the reason of this? Let us consider. Does he not himself suggest a very good reason, when he says, "For he alone defended their city and long walls"? This appears to be a good reason for calling the son of the savior king of the city which his father was saving, as Homer observes.
Hermogenes: I see.
Socrates: Why, Hermogenes, I do not as yet see myself, and do you? (392e)

Of course, Hermogenes does not see, not if Socrates does not. Socrates' irony is wasted on Hermogenes, but the reader understands that what Socrates is undermining is the reliability of messages from sources claiming to speak for the gods. Socrates' efforts to unravel the mystery of Homer's choice is deliberately hit and miss, an almost and maybe guessing game about the correctness of the name of a king's son. But what veridical evidence can come from a discussion of the correctness of such a name when the father's name, Hector, meaning "ruler," was also given by the poet? If each name depends for correctness upon its ancestor name, then each name's source will be ultimately unavailable from the regress into obscurity. All messages from supernatural sources are suspect to Socrates. Socrates is deliberately following a false lead in his search for a standard against which he can measure correctness. It is not poetry, as we could have guessed. Even if Homer knew something "correct" about names, and even if he included his opinion in his poetry, there is no sure way to elucidate it accurately and the reader would fall into the snarl of competing interpretations, some as foolish as
Socrates' own here. Interpretation is the other side of the poetry problem.

Socrates expresses his ironic self-doubt humorously, but the ever-serious Hermogenes is certain that he is "on the right track," as he pursues another avenue to find correctness. This time he looks to language used to refer to creatures. He cautions Hermogenes to "watch me and see that I do not lead you astray" (393d). But Hermogenes' willingness to be led allows Socrates to move on. There are names for the offspring of animals and we use those names in what is a seemingly correct way. A lion's whelp is a lion and a horse's foal is a horse. But, the name and the creature must match. Socrates moves closer to some sort of codification.

Socrates: If contrary to nature a horse have a calf, then I should not call that a foal but a calf; nor do I call any inhuman birth a man, but only a natural birth. And the same may be said of trees and other things. Do you agree with me? Hermogenes: Yes, I agree. Socrates: Very good, but you had better watch me and see that I do not play tricks with you. For on the same principle the son of a king is to be called a king. (393d)

Once a name is assigned to something in nature, it cannot be altered. A horse is not a horse because it is named a horse, but its name applies to no other animal, even one born to a horse unnaturally. Homer, by contrast, called a manchild a king only because his father was a king. Socrates doubts that the heredity extends that far. There is something predictably specific about species
classification that will not hold when carried over into human affairs. The species we have named "horse" begets horses, and the "human" begets humankind. But the human king does not necessarily beget a king. The question he raises is whether we can know the person by the name. Is a name which is given a man because of what his father is a predictably accurate name?

Socrates: And what of those who follow out of the course of nature, and are prodigies? For example, when a good and religious man has an irreligious son, he ought to bear the name not of his father, but of the class to which he belongs, just as in the case which was before supposed of a horse foaling a calf. (394d)

What becomes clear here is that a name does not necessarily identify its owner. Neither does it determine what its bearer will be. It may well be that time will prove a name to be in error. "Then the irreligious son of a religious father should receive the proper class name" and not be called Theophilus on the basis of the fact that he has a religious father (394e). But who knows that until many years after the child's birth? Homer had an advantage in giving names; he knew the destinies of his characters. But names themselves, even if appropriate, are not easy to decode. Even when "in the regular course of nature," the child is like the parent and should have a name which reflects that fact, "the syllables may be disguised until they appear different to the ignorant person" (394b). There are many names, such as Archepolis, which are like Astyanax, but the letters have little in common. Meaning
does not lie in letters or syllables. And names do not automatically disclose their meanings; ignorant people do not become informed people by knowing names.

Socrates, in arguing for a correctness of names, has undertaken to demonstrate that naming is a serious business and that names have a significance which will not allow Hermogenes' private, arbitrary conventionalism. But, ironically, he has just eliminated two possible authorities on correctness. Parentage does not decide correctness and poets do not tell us what is correct. And as for letters and syllables, said to hold meaning, they may be disguised so that they indicate nothing of significance. Wherein, then, does the significance of a name lie?

Socrates: And whether the syllables of the name are the same or not the same, makes no difference, provided the meaning is retained; nor does the addition or subtraction of a letter make any difference so long as the essence of the thing remains in possession of the name and appears in it. (393d)

For this part of the correctness argument, Socrates wants to set aside imitation of essence by letters. He will pursue the question of whether names imitate things through the medium of letters later in his discourse with Cratylus, but Socrates is moving toward the longest portion of the dialogue, an analysis of the argument for correctness by etymology. Letters are unreliable clues, even the names of the letters themselves, he says, are not the same as the letters (393e). It is necessary with almost all of them to add a letter. The point which Socrates makes here is that
letters function well despite their inability to stand alone. They do so, he says, because the name giver, the legislator, knew so well "how to give the letters names" (393e). That letters pre-existed their names is a point contrary to the Platonic position which Derrida presses in "Plato's Pharmacy," in Dissemination. According to that argument Plato believed that writing followed oral speech by some time. In the Phaedrus letters were invented by Theuth, to transcribe oral speech. That is the basis of Derrida's argument that Plato privileged oral language. Here in the Cratylus, letters were among those aboriginal phenomena to be sorted and named by the aboriginal legislator. The true note of caution is against taking too seriously, in either argument, the time sequence of speaking and writing.

From their search for correctness in inherited names and in the code of letters and syllables, Socrates and Hermogenes will move to analysis through etymologies. Anyone who has read the essays in Derrida's Dissemination is aware of the importance in his argument of definition of terms and names through etymological assignment to that writer. He uses the term paleonymy for his study of "the question of the preservation of names" (3). Words like "preface" become impossible significations because they cannot do what their names' parts mean. The importance in that same text of filial significance in names marks yet another parallel between the concerns of Derrida and Plato.
This parallel becomes increasingly interesting to remember in the next chapter which is an analysis of Plato's pursuit of correctness through a maze of etymology. Plato again relies upon deliberate irony and humor to undermine his grave findings.

At this point, Socrates has tested the logos, the discourse or argument, of the philosophers, the logos of the sophist, the logos of the poet. He is skeptical of them all; they are all part of the logos of Cratylus' representationalism. They are all logocentric. He has begun his testing of the logos of Hermogenes' thesis that names are frivolous and follow no system. The argument has an appeal which rests in its lack of word-centeredness. Socrates' conviction is that names do indeed have a correctness. The way to discern the correctness of names eludes him, but there is a sizeable territory to cover as he sets out to test the logos of the names themselves by breaking them into their smallest elements of meaning.

One point of this portion of the Cratylus is that Socrates is not talking about Ideal Forms. Another crucial point is the observation that in the Cratylus, as it has unfolded thus far, Plato has guided Socrates to undertake a search for the locus of power in signification. It seems impossible to deny that this enterprise presages the linguistics and semiology of later linguists and semiologists. It certainly is an effort to unlock the mystery of "how" words mean, the problem which occupies
contemporary French semiologists. Every step Socrates takes seems to further demythologize names (signs) as possessors and communicators of truth. The closer the examination moves from the outside of the name to its core, the less there seems to be in the physical sign itself a stable core beyond substitution. If there is correctness in names themselves, there must be some way to tease it out. If not, the correctness must lie elsewhere. The notion of a Form of Name seems to hinge upon whether there is anything in a name.
Notes to Chapter Three

1 This is Derrida's definition of the sign before Derrida. See "Structure, Sign, and Play," for his discussion of the sign with a metaphysical referent.

2 The father/son relationship of Hermes and Hermogenes is overlooked by Derrida who makes much of father/son in the Phaedrus. In Dissemination, Derrida reads Plato as saying that the father/god rejects writing in favor of spoken language. In the Cratylus, it is spoken language which is unreliable. A comparison of the two dialogues along the father-god/son relationships should prove fruitful.

3 The horse by another name is also the example Socrates uses to illustrate deceit in language in the Phaedrus which I have referred to as a companion piece to the Cratylus. See the Phaedrus 260b ff.

4 See W. M. Pfeiffer's essay "True and False Speech in Plato's CRATYLUS 385b-c" for an indepth study of the problem of true and false statements. One of his most interesting conclusions is that this passage "does comprise a formulation - probably the first articulate one in the history of Western thought - of a correspondence theory of truth for discourse generally, and it establishes that names can be spoken as true or false within the context of discourse" (88). He also takes care to point out that Plato departs from the "old, traditional, view which formed the background for Plato" in formulating a new correspondence theory. Before this, he says, "truth and falsity were regarded not so much as dependent on the occurrence, or lack, of correspondence between discourse and reality, but rather as a measure of the degree of reality revealed, or concealed, in an action or utterance" (96). The departure supports my argument that Plato's Cratylus is not about essence revealed in names.

5 See de Man's Allegories, p. 5.
Chapter Four

Praxis

The etymology section of the *Cratylus*, the last part of the discourse between Socrates and Hermogenes, is tedious to read and seems at first glance to be only humorous word games. In the pattern of dramatic action, Socrates decodes a name in seeming seriousness, Hermogenes enthuses at Socrates' wisdom, Socrates ironically makes fun of his accomplishments and his sources of inspiration. It is very tongue-in-cheek, but it is a pivotal part of Plato's argument and a crucial part of my own. It is Plato's Praxis, a practical test for the theory of natural representationalism which Socrates has heretofore defended. It signals the beginning of Socrates' turn toward a synthesis which will amount to his own brand of conventionalism, including arbitrariness of the sign, but shorn of Hermogenes' absolutism. I shall be arguing that Plato rejects any possibility that names refer to metaphysical referents which are stable, unchanging centers of meaning. Granting that, one finds that it is no longer possible to say that Plato's theory of language has a metaphysical basis. Plato's discovery that names are human inventions with no literal force is doubly important when it applies to the names of the gods, for Socrates says that those are the names given "to things which are eternal and
immutable," (397). What he argues is that those names are man's names for what they speculate is real and eternal. Clearly, when Socrates comes upon multiple and/or contradictory meanings in names, and he does this repeatedly, he undermines and discredits any possibility that names refer to fixed presence.

Within my overall argument stated above, I want to develop three points in my argument that Plato rejects stable, metaphysical referents for signs. The first is that although Socrates' announced intention is to find a natural correctness in names, he proceeds to reveal that even in their most primary parts, names have no natural correctness; they are not naturally bound to a fixed center which they name. My second point intensifies the first. The analyses of names of the gods, which reveal multiple, paradoxical, humorous and/or self-contradictory meanings, amount to a rejection of faith in divine disclosures, either through the poets or the Sophists or, by implication, the priests. This action equates to the same rejection of metaphysical presence which Derrida manifests in *Speech and Phenomena* when he rejects Husserl's argument for disclosure of being as presence in solitary mental life. The last point that I want to make is that Plato's theory of language has been misrepresented or misread by Derrida. In *Dissemination*, Derrida uses the same technique of name analysis that Plato uses in the etymology section of the *Cratylus* and he traces out a Platonism which
privileges speech, logos, over writing. Derrida reads the
legend of Thoth from the Phaedrus to say that Plato rejects
the god of writing but not the god of speech. Socrates'
analysis of the names of the god of speech, Hermes, and his
offspring Pan, god of dramatic tragedy, show that Derrida
is only half right.

The search for natural correctness in names does not
immediately make known the discrepancies between the
various possible translations of names. The first
translations, of names in the House of Atreus, seem to fit,
but further on names lose their tight focus. Agamemnon and
his son Orestes seem to have fit names. Agamemnon's name
signifies his patience in the battle for Troy and Orestes'
name signifies the "brutality and fierceness and mountain
wildness of his hero's nature" (394e). Atreus' name means
"stubborn," "destructive," and "fearless," characteristics
in keeping with his brutality in the murder of his brother,
Chrysippus, and his "exceeding cruelty to Thyestes" (395c).
Atreus' name is not perfectly transparent to its referents,
however, insofar as "the name is a little altered and
disguised so as not to be intelligible to everyone" (395c).
This observation is a hint that natural correctness is not
reliable and changes according to interpretation by the
individual, which cannot be consistent if the name is
disguised so that only some readers can decode it. Atreus'
father, Pelops, seems to be pretty much what his name
indicates, that is, one who sees only immediately or close
at hand. He murdered Myrtilus in his short-sighted eagerness to win Hippodamia for his wife and thereby incurred a curse upon "his whole race in remote ages" (395d). Pelops' father is Tantalus and Socrates says his name has two slightly different meanings. His name does signify that "he had the stone suspended . . . over his head in the world below," but some want his name to signify "the most weighed down by misfortune," and they have insisted upon that meaning. The fact is, Socrates says, that "by some accident of tradition, it has actually been transmuted" (395e). Plato has thus introduced another variable in correctness of names: change through accidental and time.

Socrates notes further inconsistencies as he continues with the names in the House of Atreus. Zeus, father of Tantalus, has a sort of split name. His name translates "Zena and Dia, which is one name, although divided. Translated, it means the God through whom all creatures always have life" (396a). There is one thing which seems amiss, Socrates says, when one considers the name of Zeus and that comes from its association with the name of Zeus' father, Cronos.

Socrates: There is an irreverence, at first sight, in calling him son of Cronos (who is a proverb for stupidity), and we might rather Zeus to be the child of a mighty intellect. (396b)

But, Socrates ironically rationalizes, one must reconcile the discrepancy by reading the empty-headedness
reconcile the discrepancy by reading the empty-headedness as signifying "the pure and garnished mind" (396b). Socrates' point here is that names are adjusted with readings which satisfy the desire to have them mean what one needs them to mean. For example, Uranus, name of the father of Cronos, is doubtless a correct name if one understands it to come from the god's habit of "looking upward; which, as astronomers tell us, is the way to have a pure mind" (396c-d). Hesiod is Socrates' source, he says, but his recollections are exhausted. Socrates proceeds to undermine all his wisdom which "has come to me all in an instant" (395d).

Socrates: I believe that I caught the inspiration from the great Euthyphro, of the Prospaltian deme, who gave me a long lecture which commenced at dawn: he talked and I listened, and his wisdom and enchanting ravishment has not only filled my ears but taken possession of my soul. I think that this will be the right course - today I shall let his superhuman power work and finish the investigation of names; but tomorrow, if you are so disposed, we will conjure him away and make a purgation of him, if we can only find some priest or sophist who is skilled in purgations of this sort. (396e)

Socrates wants to indicate, ironically, that he does not trust any superhuman or divine disclosure of truth or the inspiration of a sophist. Leaving the House of Atreus, he and Hermogenes will continue their quest for meaning and correctness in names and will look at the names "demon," "gods," "hero," and "man." An example of the instability of meaning in names lies in the metaphorical versus the literal meaning in the name "demon," which Hesiod gives to
for "a golden race of men who came first" (397e). That is the literal meaning, Socrates says, but one must infer that Hesiod did not mean literally golden men, but good and wise men. Good and wise men, according to the poets, he says, receive "honor and a mighty portion among the dead," and they become demons, a name "signifying wisdom" (398b). Names, then, are open to a sort of literary interpretation.

The names of the gods are "names of things which are eternal and immutable" and may have been given by "a more than human power" (397). Socrates says, in effect, that men try to name the Forms, but can only speculate and name their own theories and guesses. The whole idea of gods, Socrates speculates, came from men's theories about the planets.

Socrates: My notion would be something of this sort: - I suspect that the sun, moon, earth, stars, and heaven, which are still the gods of many barbarians, were the only gods known to the aboriginal Hellenes. Seeing that they were always moving and running, from their running nature, they were called gods or runners. . . . and when men became acquainted with the other gods, they proceeded to apply the same name to them all. Do you think that likely? (397d)

The name, then, for gods is something men made up to fit their observations of a reality which eluded their understanding. The planets which spun around and ran across the heavens represented the most remote sensory information they could collect, and they had no intellectual grasp of that spectacle. So they named the planets "gods," a name which fit their limited knowledge of extra-terrestrial
phenomena. The names did not define or identify the actual superhuman power behind the movement. That power was beyond language because it was beyond empirical knowledge. And Socrates implies another point to which he will return: aboriginal namers name things according to their best knowledge, but later observations prove those names inadequate. Therefore, any presumed knowledge based upon what the traditional name says is liable to error discovered or recognized by later generations, which will have their own conclusions questioned by succeeding generations. Man's best guesses, even educated guesses, are insufficient and transient.

The name "heroes," Socrates says, furnishes an interesting study. Heroes are demigods born of the union between mortal and human. Thus the word "eros" forms the basis for the name, with "only a slight alteration." That is one possible translation of the word "hero," but there is another, deviant, translation.

Socrates: Either this is the meaning, or if not this, then they must have been skillful as rhetoricians and dialecticians, and able to put the question. . . . And therefore, as I was saying, in the Attic dialect the heroes turn out to be rhetoricians and questioners. All this is easy enough; the noble breed of heroes are a kind of sophists and rhetors. (398e)

Translation of names is affected by geographical and dialectical shifts. The implication is clearly that names have no natural correctness. If they did, "hero" would be the same term in all dialects and have only one
translation.

The name "man," is equally slippery. Man got that name, Socrates conjectures, by shifting letters around. The name was once a phrase, Socrates says. (He does not elaborate.) By moving letters and adjusting accents, the phrase became a noun. The phrase implies that man is the only animal who examines, considers, and "looks up at what he sees." The Greek word which has compressed the phrase is the ancient antecedent of the English stem "anthropo." The suggestion is that names, far from being natural, are the products of men's manipulation of language. Assembling letters and accents, man makes his own name and calls himself what he aspires to be. The two parts of man, Socrates says, are named "body" and "soul." There are two possible translations of soul (psyche).

Socrates: If I am to say what occurs to me at the moment, I should imagine that those who first used the name . . . meant to express that the soul when in the body is the source of life and gives the power of breath and revival . . . and when this reviving power fails then the body perishes and dies, and this, if I am not mistaken, they call the psyche. (399e-400a)

The other definition is the poetic one.

Socrates: The Orphic poets were the inventors of the name, and they were under the impression that the soul is suffering the punishment for certain sins, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is incarcerated, kept safe . . . as the name implies, until the penalty is paid; according to this view, not even a letter of the word need be changed. (399d)

"Body" has another possible definition. While it could be the grave of the soul, it may be the index of the soul.
All in all, the knowledge contained in the names "soul" and "body" is inconsistent. The names are appended according to experience or speculation, but they do not tell what it is, exactly, that the names signify.

Socrates and Hermogenes consider next the personal names which the gods give one another and the inherent presumption that man can ever know such names affords Plato the opportunity to make a key speech. Its importance to this thesis lies in the fact that it undermines all of the speculation about names of eternal and immutable things. It may well be the most crucial speech thus far, and, in other ways, Socrates expresses the same thought throughout the dialogue. It supports my argument that Plato believes that if there are supernatural, extra-phenomenal Forms, they are beyond the capacity of language to define.

Socrates: There is one excellent principle which, as men of sense, we must acknowledge—that of the gods we know nothing, either of their natures or of the names which they give themselves; but we are sure that the names by which they call themselves, whatever they may be, are true. And this is the best of all principles; and the next best is to say, as is customary in prayers, that we will call them by any sort or kind of names or patronymics in which they rejoice, because we do not know of any other. That custom is, in my opinion, a good one. Let us, then, if you please, in the first place announce to them that we are not inquiring about them; we do not presume that we are able to do so, but we are inquiring about the meaning of men in giving them these names—in this there can be small blame. (400e–401a)

Socrates has skated close to impiety, speculating about the names of Zeus, Cronos, and Uranus, and his
disclaimer is not unlike the one in the *Phaedrus*, either in circumstance or content. The point that is important to my argument is that Socrates makes language a human invention reaching out to classify by name what humans want to talk about. Language is part of human invention, experience, and interpretation, and as such, has no actual access to a metaphysical reality, or probability. Clearly, Socrates is guarding against any concession that language reaches any further than interpretation of experience and observation. The passage above is most important for its direct contradiction of any notion that assigns Plato's work to a logocentrism. It is impossible for Plato to wonder and consider without language, just as it is for Derrida, but here Plato makes clear his own conviction that language stops short of reaching any ultimate reality and he thereby denies the claims of any other language users that it can. Words are necessary to communicate and gossip and argue about views of reality, but words are not themselves reality, either in their letters, syllables, sounds, or etymologies.

The first "personal" name of a god which Socrates translates is Hestia's. Socrates says that in naming Hestia, the first name giver was trying to name being itself, in itself. Hestia was the firstborn of Cronos and Rhea and she was the chaste, virgin goddess of the household. Unlike many of the Olympians, Hestia did not
give birth to any heroes, and her form was not in a state of flux, as Socrates implies of the others. Socrates effectively says in this enterprise that man cannot name being itself, in itself. Actually, Jowett says, Socrates is making fun of "the endless power of the mind to spin intricate arguments about nothing at all." Specifically, Socrates is ridiculing the etymologists and one suspects that his case would hold up well today. Texts on literary theory are replete with words hyphenated (re-present, present) and supported with etymological analysis. Dictionaries explain how a word serves to express something by showing where it came from and how long it has meant what it means. Such anchors in past time do give certain words great value as marks of continuity. But Socrates is not idly reminiscing; he is challenging the authority of etymologists and sophists who preach the power of the word and offer to sell its mastery.

Socrates says he is following custom and fashion in starting this personal name section with Hestia in that her name, translated, is the form of an old word which means the first principle of things. He says that some etymologists read her name to be a form of the word that means "pushing," which suggests favor for the Heraclitean theory of flux that "all things flow and nothing stands; with them the pushing principle is the cause and ruling power of all things" (401d). Again, Socrates stops to mock his own insight. "But I dare say that I am talking a great
nonsense," he says, in spite of having "discovered a great hive of wisdom" (401e). He suspects Heracleitan influence. The conjecture may be "absurd in description," yet it is, he says, "quite plausible" (402a). How else can one explain the fact that the names of Hestia's parents are the names of streams of water. Homer, he says, tells us that Ocean was the origin of the gods, including Tethys. And Tethys was one of the first twelve and mother to all of the three thousand Oceanids and all rivers. Oceanus was husband and brother to Tethys. How, he asks in a humorous tone, in the face of evidence like that, seeing as how water is always moving and that Heracleitus compares all things to "a stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same water twice," could anyone doubt that the first namer was a follower of Heracleitus? Socrates' irony is heavy and it is consistent with this wandering, humorous translation of the name of the goddess, Hestia. The explanation fits in nicely with the one he offers for information on how Tethys' name came about:

Socrates: Well that is almost self-explained, being only the name of a spring, a little disguised; for the expressions strained and filtered . . . are meant to describe a spring and the name Tethys is made up of these two words. (402c)

Hermogenes' praise of Socrates' cleverness is interjected at this point, and at many others, to afford Socrates the opportunity of making fun of the silly translations he offers. His point is that one can always
find a connection between names and what they name if one stretches the possibilities. There are tangential translations which will connect any name to any thing. Such an activity, he adds, is not an exact science, but is full of conjecture, speculation, and interpretation. It is a literary activity.

The meanings of the names of the gods grow steadily more tangential and problematical, as if Socrates were illustrating his point that sophistic explanations and translations are always possible. Poseidon means "chain of the feet," and that surely makes the origin of his name obvious.

Socrates: . . . the original inventor of the name had been stopped by the water element in his walks, and not allowed to go on, therefore he called the ruler of this element Poseidon. (402).

So what if there is an extra "e," it was probably added later. But maybe not. Maybe the original name was spelled with a double "l" and maybe it meant that "the god knew many things." Of course, Socrates adds, his original name could have meant shaking because the god is a "shaker of the earth." That would explain the few added letters. That muddle past, Socrates moves on. Pluto's name is easy. He gives wealth and his name means "the giver of wealth, which comes out of the earth" (402e). People do seem to think that Hades is tied to the invisible and they fear that, so they call the god Pluto. Socrates' own opinion, he
says, is that Pluto keeps souls tied by the great chain of desire.

Socrates: And, according to this view, he is the perfect and accomplished sophist, and the great benefactor of the inhabitants of the other world; and even to us who are upon earth he sends from below exceeding blessings. For he has much more than he wants down there; wherefore he is called Pluto (or the rich). Note also, that he will have nothing to do with men while they are in the body, but only when the soul is liberated from the desires and evils of the body. Do you not think that this marks him as a philosopher, who is well aware that in their liberated state he can bind them with the desire of virtue, but while they are flustered and maddened by the body, not even his father Cronos himself would suffice to keep them with him in his own far-famed chains.

Hermogenes: There is a great deal of truth in what you say. (404a)

And so, Socrates concludes in mock logic, the first namer called him Hades, not to suggest invisibility, but because he has such great knowledge of noble things. What this exercise illustrates is not the instability of permanent reality, but the instability of language in its effort to name that reality. Socrates' romp through the etymological explanations of the names which men give to gods makes broad comedy of the chancy reliability of the analyses he offers.

Apollo, in whose service Socrates frequently claims himself to be, has a name which people dread because it is "supposed to have some terrible signification" (403e). Apollo's name has four meanings. It stands for harmony, for purification, for archery, for divination. If one puts a letter in here and shifts one there, it is quite easy to
find these meanings and their expanded implications of meaning, Socrates explains. One must incorporate the Thessalian dialect to decode the full meaning of archer. And harmony means more than music: "he is the god who presides over that harmony, and makes all things move together, both among gods and among men" (405d). As for the second "l," it is added "in order to avoid the ill-omened sound of destruction" (405e). That "l" does not, however, dispell the "suspicion of destructive power" for all, and Apollo's name is frequently misunderstood.

There are two names, Dionysus and Aphrodite, which interest Hermogenes. Socrates, making his humor more and more broad, admits there are serious explanations and facetious ones; only the facetious ones are available through him. After all, he says, the gods like a good joke, too. Look at Dionysus' name and think about the effects of wine. Part of the name suggests quasi-intelligence and wine does make its users think that they have a mind. As for Aphrodite, Socrates says, leave her to Hesiod. Here the two have come upon the name of the goddess of love and Socrates wants to limit speculation to her being "born of the foam." This erotic goddess who figures so large in the work of Spenser and Shakespeare is not one Socrates wants to dwell upon. She certainly was one of the most adventurous and faithless of the immortals. Plato may have been influenced by Homer's lack of attention to this goddess or it may be that her immorality and sensuous nature were the antitheses
of Platonic moral concern, with its emphasis upon mind. Whatever the reason, she is given only one sentence and no personal opinion in the Cratylus.

Hephaestus, who was husband of Aphrodite, wanted Pallas Athene for his wife, Socrates explains, and it is to that goddess that he devotes a long analysis. "Pallas," he says, probably comes from "armed dances." The movements of shaking or dancing are signified (406e). The "Athene" part is more serious and Socrates turns to "the modern interpreters of Homer" for help.

Socrates: . . . most of these in their explanations of the poet, assert that he meant by Athene "mind" . . . and "intelligence" . . . and the maker of names appears to have had a similar notion about her; and indeed calls her by a still higher title, "divine intelligence" . . . as though he would say: This is she who has the mind of God. (407b)

As usual, one must make a few adjustments, switching letters and using a dialectical variety to make it all come out right. Socrates speculates that the original giver of names wanted to identify Athene with moral intelligence, and did so, but altered the name to a "nicer form."

There are few other gods whose names interest Socrates and after a brief look at Hephaestus and Ares, he is ready to leave that field of names. What concerns us here is that Socrates has uncovered the fact that names have a very tenuous relationship with what they name. It is the solid indication that he is headed for a turnaround from natural representationalism, or re-presentationalism, to
conventionalism. He will not endorse Hermogenes' absolute arbitrariness, but that is because arbitrary signification as Hermogenes presents it has no home base; there is no codification of signs. The names of the gods and heroes prove that theories of inherent meaning depend upon the same subjectivity, upon how the individual breaks the name apart. Socrates is ready to escape literal meaninglessness of the names men make up when they name gods. Only Hermogenes holds them on the topic.

Hermogenes' interest in his own name's history affords Socrates the opportunity to make a crucial statement about the reliability of the god of speech. His discussion of Hermes, his name, his function, his character, makes a companion piece with his discussion of the god of writing in the Phaedrus. Hermes' name signifies that the god interprets the messages he delivers. He is a messenger, a thief, a liar, and a bargainer. Homer, Socrates says, describes him as a contriver of speeches. The parts of his name stand for "inventor of language and speech." In the Phaedrus, Theuth is the inventor of writing. These passages afford an opportunity to see how Derrida arrives at his interpretation of Plato's theory of language based only on the Phaedrus. Derrida concludes that Plato valorizes spoken language, logos, over written. However, parallel to Plato's portrayal of a god of writing in the Phaedrus is his portrayal of a god of speech in the Cratylius which casts doubt upon Plato's regard for spoken language.
Derrida reads the *Phaedrus* as saying through the myth of Theuth that written language is more suspect than spoken. In "The Father of Logos," in *Dissemination*, he wants to set up a comparison of Hermes to Thoth, the Egyptian god of writing. His apparent argument is that the god of writing is unfaithful to the father, logos or speech. Socrates tells a fable about Theuth, the Egyptian inventor of writing. Derrida rightly sees Socrates' Theuth as the Egyptian Thoth. Socrates presents him as a lesser deity, scribe of the gods. Plato's purpose in the *Phaedrus* is to have Socrates discredit writing in order to discredit pre-written speeches. He is contrasting prepared, ghost-written speeches to spontaneous, extemporaneous speech which comes directly from the mind of the speaker. In the context of the *Phaedrus*, writing and ghost-written speeches are dishonest, affected, and less open to questions from listeners. Derrida's analysis compares Theuth to Thoth and Thoth to Hermes. Thoth is logos and logos "is a son" (*Dissemination* 77). Logos is also a *zoom*, a living being, "an organism: a differentiated body proper with a center and extremities, joints, a head, and feet" (*Dissemination* 79). Derrida makes of the terms for composition of a speech more than Plato's analogy for organization. Logos, according to Derrida, is "indebted to a father." And further, the father is the good. "Logos represents what it is indebted to: the father who is also chief, capital, good(s). Or rather the chief, the capital, the good(s)"
(Dissemination 79). All this, according to Derrida, is Platonic and it is this Platonism as root of Western metaphysics that Derrida seeks to outstrip. Instead of a model for a well-constructed speech, Derrida sees the speech as body and an organism. It is a son of Logos and it is logos itself. He sees the model as the basis for labeling Plato's philosophy *logocentric*.

Even if we did not want to give in here to the easy passage uniting the figures of the king, the god, and the father, it would suffice to pay systematic attention — which to our knowledge has never been done — to the permanence of a Platonic schema that assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of *logos*, to the paternal position. Not that this happens especially and exclusively in Plato. Everyone knows this or can easily imagine it. But the fact that "Platonism," which sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality, should not escape the generality of this structural constraint, and even illustrates it with incomparable subtlety and force, stands out as all the more significant. (Dissemination 76)

What evolves from extending the mythology of Thoth to include his fuller role in Egyptian mythology and then insinuating that extension upon Plato's allusion to him as Theuth, inventor of writing, is a father/son relationship that is hauntingly suggestive of the Christian tradition. In Christian theology, the Word is God, is with God and becomes man. In the Christian structure, truth is unmediated, the son has access to the Father/Word. If Derrida can insinuate the god Thoth for Theuth and make him the word of the god, unmediated, he can place it in Plato's philosophy, Plato's so-called logocentric philosophy. There
appears then the legitimate father, spoken speech, and the illegitimate son, written speech. Spoken speech, according to the god, does not legitimately generate written speech. Derrida builds Thoth up to a god of apparently equal power to Ammon, a power derived from filial ties. The difference, of course, is that Thoth contrives to overthrow his father, logos/Ammon, in a plot more like *Paradise Lost*.

Derrida overextends the myth of Theuth. Plato's allusion is intended to vitiate ghost-written speeches and cannot carry the weight of a Christian, Incarnate Word reading. The problem with Derrida's never really firm argument is that that particular theological development is not a part of Plato's philosophy. Supporting evidence is strong to the contrary. Never does Plato, through Socrates or other spokesmen, present any word, any logos, as unmediated message from the gods. Nowhere in Plato is word sacred; nowhere is reality word-centered. Always, words are tools, instruments, not things in themselves. Plato does not offer or accept word as thing. More importantly, words are consistently viewed with suspicion. Because all accounts of experience must pass through the editorship of human understanding, all are, at best, hearsay evidence. Beyond this inherent flaw, which corrupts the best efforts to say truth, poetry and rhetoric are even more unreliable because they are not, according to Plato, products of direct experience. The *Cratylius* reinforces the Platonic
theme that always it is possible to use language persuasively, to say that which is not. Here, in his search through the etymologies of the gods' names, he does not bestow upon Hermes, messenger of the gods, any power of truth. Rather, he does quite the opposite. Plato discredits as a thief and a liar the messenger who tampers with the words he delivers.

What a reading of the *Cratylus* makes clear is that writing, for Plato, is not the real saboteur, it is language itself. Therefore, Derrida's presumption that Plato advances a theory that the word could convey the mind's encounter with being, or that such encounter was the word, is untenable.

The whole structure of the *Cratylus* calls to mind another myth and illustrates its futility—the myth of the Tower of Babel. Like the message of that myth, the message of the *Cratylus* is existential in its separation of man from gods. Human effort is insufficient to reach the gods. And if the philosopher, in the solitude of thought, should sense encounter with being, that encounter cannot be communicated with precision through language, for words mean with imprecision. Plato's own distrust of language antedated Derrida's. The long section of etymologies in the *Cratylus* shows that Plato, before Derrida, finds that there are "traces" of many words in every single one.

Socrates is not through with the unreliability and deceptiveness of language in human affairs. Hermes has a
son, a "double-formed son," and men call him Pan. "Pan" is the word for "things," Socrates says, and speech signifies things. Like its god, Pan, speech is of two forms, Socrates says. The truth is the "smooth or sacred form which dwells above among the Gods," always out of reach of man. The other form of speech is "rough like the goat of tragedy; for tales and falsehoods have generally to do with the tragic or goatish life, and tragedy is the place of them" (408c). Here, Socrates makes Pan the deity of speech, but if he is a god who knows truth, he does not communicate it to man. The identification and characterization of a god with speech does not, again, valorize speech.

Socrates: And as the son of Hermes, he is speech or the brother of speech, and that brother should be like brother is no marvel. (408d)

The linguistic identification here is speech with Hermes and Pan and speech is as thoroughly discredited in the Cratylus as writing is in the Phaedrus. Plato distrusted language in any form. It is because of this distrust that Plato puts Socrates through the elaborate exercise of the Cratylus.

Socrates and Hermogenes leave the names of the anthropomorphic gods and concentrate on the planets and the elements. The tentativeness and uncertainty in the examination of the gods' names persist and there are qualifications and contradictions. A name means this or maybe that; one dialect is clearer than another. Names must be "hammered into shape" (409a). Plodding through fire,
water, air and season, Socrates makes his first critical generalization about aboriginal name givers.

Socrates: By the dog of Egypt, I believe the notion which came into my head just now was not ill founded; that is, that the primeval givers of names were undoubtedly like too many of our modern philosophers, who, in their search after the nature of things, are always getting dizzy from constantly going around and around, and then they imagine that the world is going around and around, and moving in all directions; and this appearance, which arises out of their own internal condition, they suppose to be a reality of nature; they think that there is nothing stable or permanent, but only flux and motion, and that the world is always full of every sort of motion and change. The consideration of the names which I mentioned has led me into making this reflection. (411c)

This is not the first time Socrates has expressed skepticism of the name givers, and it is not to be the last. But it is here that he turns away from the philosophy of natural representationalism in language. He turns his face toward conventionalism, his own modified conventionalism, so like Saussure's. Subjective individual caprice does not work because it lacks efficiency and efficacy. The point that becomes ever more obvious in the etymology section of the Cratylus is that if names signify, they do so in some way other than meaning. In this section, Plato clearly presages the thought of the semioticians Paul de Man so admires in Allegories of Reading. They ask, according to de Man, not "what words mean but how they mean" (5). Plato exhausts the possibility that there is meaning inherent in names and pushes on to the question how indeed they can mean something which they cannot define.
Language works, in the sense that it functions in discourse, but not because any sign that it uses has a stable, unchanging center. In his essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida heralds the downfall of the theory of a stable center, "the point at which the substitution of contents, elements or terms is no longer possible" (279). In the Cratylos Plato denies the notion that words had stable referential cores, metaphysical or otherwise. In the etymology section he breaks the words apart to demonstrate that there is no inherent meaning hiding within the primary segments of meaning. Behind the parts, he too finds traces of many other names.

The slippery discrepancy between sign and signified is well demonstrated in Socrates' analysis of the name "justice." He professes perplexity at the inexactitude of the term.

Socrates: I, Hermogenes, being an enthusiastic disciple, have been told in a mystery that the justice of which I am speaking is also the cause of the world. Now a cause is that because of which anything is created, and someone comes and whispers in my ear that justice is rightly so called because partaking of the nature of the cause. (413a)

If one reads Form for cause, a legitimate substitution, one can see that this analysis is important here. The general perception of Platonic thought is that it holds to the point that name participates in Form. Socrates' experience, which he recounts here, demonstrates
how far separated a term, here "justice," is from an ideal Form. He continues with a comment in response to any suggestion that such a relationship exists.

Socrates: And I begin, after hearing what he has said, to interrogate him gently: Well, my excellent friend, say I, if all this be true, I still want to know what is justice. Thereupon, they think that I ask tiresome questions, and am leaping over the barriers, and have been already sufficiently answered, and they try to satisfy me with one derivation after another, and at length they quarrel. For one of them says that justice is the sun and that he only is the piercing . . . and burning . . . element which is the guardian of nature. And when I joyfully repeat this beautiful notion to another, he answers with the satirical remark, What, is there no justice in the world when the sun is down? (413b)

This clever sophistry is what Plato cannot tolerate. It comes under ironic attack in dialogue after dialogue. It is particularly relevant here because Socrates is attacking a notion which many believe is Platonic. This kind of "philosophical" reasoning is quite likely what Derrida objects to when he calls for a theoretical end of Western metaphysic. Socrates shows how the honest inquirer fares in such a quest.

Socrates: And when I earnestly beg my questioner to tell me his own honest opinion about the same point, he says, Fire in the abstract. But this is not very intelligible. Another says, No, not fire in the abstract, but the abstraction of heat in fire. Another man professes to laugh at all this, and says, as Anaxagoras says, that justice is mind, for mind, as they say, has absolute power, and mixes with nothing, and orders all things and passes through all things. At last, my friend, I find myself in far greater perplexity about the nature of justice than I was before I began to learn. (413c)
What Socrates very effectively illustrates is that the name "justice" cannot represent (re-present) what justice is. What names denote is still subject to opinion and the names themselves resolve nothing. They can name only the theory of the individual. The basic difference between Derrida's theories of the relationship between signifier and signified now becomes apparent. Plato says that there is "something" which names cannot reach, such as justice. Derrida replaces the "something" with "nothing." In effect, the "something" which words cannot reach is a "nothing." The difference is in what term one uses for the concept. But in neither is that concept "in" the word. Neither believes the thing, or the nothing, is itself the name.

Words are impressive and make a great show of standing for things, but, in the new slant of his argument, Socrates calls that very show into question, basing his challenge upon the well-prepared soil he has already tilled in the etymology field. He repeats the unreliability of knowledge based upon inherited language.

Socrates: . . . the original names have been long ago buried and disguised by people sticking on and stripping off letters for the sake of euphony, and twisting and bedizening them in all sorts of ways: and time too may have had a share in the change. . . . And the additions are often such that at last no human being can possibly make out the original meaning of the word. (414d)

He is leading up to an acknowledgement that the sign, name, is arbitrary.
Socrates: And yet, if you are permitted to put in and pull out any letters which you please, names will be too easily made, and any name may be adapted to any object. (414d, emphasis mine)

What he has just expressed is the notion of the arbitrary sign, adaptable to any signified. And, Socrates challenges the stability of words with the observation that they mean different things in different languages. Words, which are just a pronounceable collection of letters in one language, have roots which have prior meanings in another language (416e). Moving to the end of the etymology section, Socrates cites another mitigating circumstance of language — context. The word "profitable," he says, was used by the legislator to describe "that which being the swiftest thing in existence, allows of no stay in things and no pause or end of motion, if there begins to be any end, lets things go again . . . and makes motion immortal and unceasing." The retailer uses the same term to describe "that which pays" (417c). One name serves two purposes, or maybe more. If words had stable centers in which the thing itself resided, such multiple use would not be.

It seems quite contemporary to challenge the literal denotation of words as Derrida does in Dissemination. The purpose is to demonstrate that they cannot really mean what their parts say they do. A "preface" is actually written after a text and so it is not "pre" text, it is a separate text. But neither Derrida nor Hegel before him was saying anything new in their observations that a word is more or
less than the sum of its parts. Hermogenes would say that it does not matter what one names a preface, he could just as well call it the index. Socrates could not agree with that, but his analysis of the names of the gods, broken down into their component parts, their etymologies, proved to him that etymologies were also conventions, signs men had agreed upon. We inherit them and we cannot change them, but while they serve to keep our myths and legends intact, they cannot be opened like eggs to spill out real life.

The function of the etymology section in the Cratylius is to furnish Plato with the vehicle to test the theory of natural representationalism and find it unworkable. My argument is that in rejecting the notion that names can reach beyond human culture, Plato effectively rejects the notion that words have Forms as their eternal, stable referents. Using the same technique of analysis which Derrida would use after him, Plato destabilized the names men give to immutable reality. He also arrives at the same conclusion about speech in the Cratylius as he does about writing in the Phaedrus. A reading of the Cratylius is necessary to complete Derrida's interpretation of Plato's theory of language. Convinced that words do not carry meaning in their primary parts, Socrates will move on to articulate his own conventionalism in his discourse with Cratylius when they take up such questions as whether names imitate what they name.
Notes to Chapter Four

1 In his essay "Structure, Sign, and Play," Jacques Derrida labels an "event" his own conclusion that signs are structures without stable centers of meaning. Speaking of the center as heretofore metaphysically conceived, he says, "As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained interdicted. . ." (279). In a rhetorical question, he asks when and how the decentering which he is announcing as an event occurs and he answers that it is in our era (280). I maintain that it has its origin in the etymology section of the Cratylus.

2 An example of Derrida's analysis through etymology is his study of the name of Pharmacia, referred to briefly in the opening of the Phaedrus, which he translates as "signifying the administration of the pharmakon, the drug: the medicine and/or poison" (70). Contradictory and tangential translations of "Pharmacia" continue throughout the section of Dissemination entitled "Plato's Pharmacy," and constitute the point of departure for his reading of the Phaedrus. He does the same with the reference to Thoth and I deal more fully with that dissemination in this chapter.

3 For a further study of mythology in the Greek period and the mythographic use made of it by the pre-Socratics, Stoics, and Sophists, see Jane Chance's essay, "Medieval Mythography," in Mapping the Cosmos, pp. 35-64. See also Chance's The Genuis Figure in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

4 Saussure documents transmutations through time and calls the study of such transmutations diachronic linguistics. That is the subject of Part Three of the Course (140-82). Part Three also contains a chapter entitled "Folk Etymologies" (172).

5 Saussure makes exactly this same point in the Course: "If words stood for pre-existing concepts, they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to the next; but this is not true" (116). He then gives examples here and elsewhere throughout the Course to
prove the point. He also makes the point that what is true about words is true of all grammatical entities (116).

6

Saussure deals with the phenomenon of words welding together to make one of many in two sections of the Course. One is under the heading "Grammatical Consequences of Phonetic Evolution," p. 152. The second consideration is under the heading "Agglutination," p. 176.

7

See the Phaedrus 237a-b.

8

Saussure makes the same point: "Language . . . is a self-contained whole and a principle of classification" (9). He is contrasting language with speech. Language is "a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty (speech)" (9).

9

The passage from the Cratylus quoted for this discussion is used in Berger's essay "Plato's Cratylus as Revision" to make the point that Plato was not operating within the perimeters of self-limiting faith which are the cultural heritage of thinkers of the Judeo-Christian era. According to Berger, the passage makes "an absolute division between reality and interpretation so that human experience is permanently consigned to a realm of illusion" (220). It would be impossible, Berger says, for Plato to formulate a theory about language without its being, in part anyway, a theory of reality (219). As a theory of reality, it is still linguistically constructed speculation.

10

According to J. E. Zimmerman in his Dictionary of Classical Mythology, there are few stories about Hestia because she was not supposed to be gossiped about (127). This statement is consistent with the treatment Plato accords her in the Cratylus.

11

See the Introduction to the Cratylus in Hamilton and Cairns' The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters, p. 421.

12

The practice of intensifying meaning by etymology is currently in vogue in literary theory texts. A probable
influence is Derrida's texts, such as Dissemination, which use the technique to an extended degree to show that words are not employed literally. A good introduction to Derrida's practice can be found in the first chapter of Dissemination.

13 His identification here is somewhat like Derrida's reading of Socrates' description of Thoth in the Phaedrus. See Dissemination p. 84-94 for his reading which compares Thoth to Theuth.

14 Christian theology with its Incarnate Word doctrine is reminiscent of word/god or word-god in Greek mythology because of its association of the god with language. Prophets and sibyls and oracles may be a necessary part of any mythology, but, there is a difference between this god of the word and the Word of God in Christian theology. This difference is what Harry Berger is talking about in his essay, "Plato's Cratylus as Revision," in which he develops his argument that Plato had to think about reality without the benefit of the solution offered by Judeo-Christian theology which included doctrines of divine revelation and creation. In the Greek mythology of Plato's era, there is no infallible messenger of the words of gods. The Greek gods do not incarnate themselves for the purpose of informing man about matters of creation and the nature of the godhead. Without the mechanism of ensured truth, there is no veracity in Hermes' messages.

15 In his book Being and Logos: The Way of Platonic Dialogue, John Sallis works his way through this passage on the name of Hermes and arrives at a conclusion with which I agree:

... it should be noted in what way the conclusion that logos is both truthful and deceptive is reached by Socrates. It is reached by means of an etymology of the name "Hermes," by taking the name as indicative of the nature of the thing named by it. Yet, if this is so, then the result recoils upon the very means by which it was reached: if logos has the power both of revealing and of deceiving, then what guarantee is there that the part of logos used to establish this result, i.e., the name "Hermes," is not itself deceptive so as to vitiate the result? Would it, in other words, be possible in examining the name "Hermes" we are being deceived about the deceptive power of logos? Clearly not, for then we would be in the impossible situation
of being deceived by *logos* by thinking that deception on the part of *logos* is impossible. . . . What is significant about this peculiar self-referential establishment is that it exemplifies precisely that which it denies, namely that logos can guarantee its own truthfulness without a mediation being exercised between the *logos* and an appropriate measure. (252)
Conclusion

One cannot argue from a single dialogue that one has found Plato's last word, or definitive statement on any subject. Because the dialogues are not presentations of unalterable notions reached in finally forged shape from the crucible of dialectic, none contains a position so inflexibly stated and held that nothing earlier or later contradicts it. Such openendedness is symptomatic of language which functions in a manner consistent with the imprecision attributed to it in the Cratylus. Indeed, throughout the dialogues, again and again, Plato decries the unreliability of wordsmiths and the texts they produce. He makes the point repeatedly that language is potentially false. That potential for falseness compromises its potential for truth. It is irreconcilably inconsistent, therefore, to maintain that Plato relies upon language for a true representation of ineffable Forms of reality which manifest themselves in a dimension beyond time and space. This inconsistency has fueled this dissertation and it challenges any argument which maintains that Plato holds a metaphysical theory of language.

In the Phaedo, and in other dialogues as well, Plato uses the concept of pure forms as a way to contrast justice, piety, etc., with the incomplete, provisional, and temporal knowledge men have of those abstractions. It becomes clear in the instances where they are implied or
stated that men cannot define with finality the abstract states of pure piety, justice, etc. They cannot, in fact, agree among themselves what these terms mean in their limited discussions.

My reading of Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* and Derrida's *Dissemination, Of Grammatology,* and "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" is that they write against and seek to overturn a metaphysical theory of language which is held by Plato. Saussure contradicts any notion that language refers to pre-existing concepts. Derrida challenges a generalized Western metaphysic which originates in Platonism, "the dominant structure of the history of metaphysics." He finds in Saussure, and in Rousseau before him, a re-edition of "what seems to inaugurate itself in Western literature with Plato." My point here is that in order for Saussure and Derrida to argue for a system of language reference freed from pre-existing ideas or metaphysical referents, there first has to be a system of language which is not thus freed. I argue that the metaphysical system of reference which they react against is Platonism misread. I also argue that much of what they say in contention is first said by Plato.

The evidence which I offer to support my argument comes principally from my reading of Plato's *Cratylus.* The pattern of my argument has been to first acknowledge the powerful suggestion from the *Phaedo,* among others, that
words do commerce with the Forms. I maintain, however, that inferences drawn from such texts that language represents pure Form are not justified by the purpose of the dialogues from which they are taken. Next, I have set forth the theory of language which Plato, through Socrates, synthesizes out of the two opposing views within the Cratylus. In the process, and to support my argument, I have examined quotations from the Cratylus which form a collage used by Derrida in Dissemination. My point in doing so is that the quotations as they are construed misrepresent the Cratylus. The synthesis which I attribute to Socrates implies a thesis and an antithesis within the dialogue. I find that Plato, through his spokesman, Socrates, examines the thesis, held by Cratylus, that language is tied naturally, intrinsically, to what it stands for. Socrates defends that thesis against the antithesis presented by Hermogenes that language is absolutely arbitrary and subject to the whim of the individual. The examination of the thesis and antithesis of the dialogue lead to a test of the theory of natural language. I have considered that test as it takes place in the etymology section of the dialogue. It is this complex, tedious section of the Cratylus which shows what we could expect of language if it had any bond to what it refers. The section effectively does away with any expectation of truth or accurate information contained in a name. The section also employs a method which Derrida uses for the
same purpose in his *Dissemination*.

My conclusion is that Plato's primary theory of language is to be found in the *Cratylus*. Language signs are arbitrary, but fixed by convention. The theory is complemented in the companion dialogue, the *Phaedrus*, which Derrida explicates at length. Derrida's point is that Plato privileges spoken language over written on the basis that it is closer to thought. I maintain that such privilege is overcome in the *Cratylus*. The *Cratylus* presents Socrates' theory of language which says that language functions through difference and abides by the conventions of a speaking community. The signs it employs are arbitrary in that they have no natural tie to what they signify. The points are made in prescient anticipation of what Saussure and Derrida say.

The vehicle for the study of language signs in the *Cratylus* is a study of names, but, as I have shown, Plato includes all words in language in that category. Perhaps the most complete study of the *Cratylus* would be Derrida's deconstructive reading, one which would serve as a companion to his reading of the *Phaedrus*. But even without that reading, my argument has demonstrated the influence of Plato in modern language theory. The *Cratylus* is a vital study for the understanding of contemporary movements in the study of language.

The implication of my study is that literary
criticisms which study "how" words mean in preference to "what" they mean are only apparently new. They are, in reality, a reworking of Plato's methods in the Cratylus. Most specifically, my research has shown that the exposé of language as less than transparent to being was initiated and documented by Plato.
Notes to Conclusion

1 See Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 65.

2 See Derrida's *Dissemination*, pp. 149 and 191.

3 See Derrida's *Dissemination*, p. 158.
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