

Plato as the Demiurge: Director of the Dialogues

By,

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Each time I return to Plato's *Cratylus*, my mind partakes in an entirely new process, altogether enabling me to gain something different from the same set of words with every reading. As Socrates, Plato's main character, advises, "For at that moment when he who seeks to know it approaches, it becomes something else and different," (*Cratylus* 440a). Socrates means that we cannot actually ever attain knowledge of a thing which is in constant flux, because once we reach out to grasp it, it fluxes into something other than that which was sought. So of course one would feel something different for every new experience felt if things are constantly changing. We are inclined to be puzzled by Socrates or disagree with him rather than taking what *Plato* says as a process instead of an opinionated claim.

Regardless of whether the reader is well versed in Plato or not, it is easy to get caught up in Plato's well-directed series of dialectical traps put forth through Socrates. Plato's artful deceptions become increasingly layered and complex. As the dialogue proceeds, the reader uncovers Plato's plausible intentions and reasons for writing his many accounts of Socrates' conversations in this way. He trains the reader to be a better thinker and to have a better idea of the process of moving towards an answer as opposed to being told specifically what something is. Plato acts as his own invented Demiurge,¹ as his aim functions to help the reader help himself. As fully portrayed in *Cratylus*, Plato's Socrates also acts as his own self-acclaimed and conceptualized Demiurge. According to Plato's description in

¹ Plato's *Timaeus*

the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge symbolizes the Creator, Director, and Guide. In this way, Plato acts as a Demiurge by guiding the reader rather than promoting rigid instruction as a form of teaching. He wants the learned reader to apply the dialectic as a way of learning and teaching in every aspect of life. Plato urges the active philosopher to apply this method to everyone and everything, which includes questioning his own wise teachings!

This paper's purpose will serve as a tool to illuminate to reader the three distinct planes that Socrates, through the mind and hand of Plato, juggles simultaneously from start to finish in this discourse of the *Cratylus*; 1) his dichotomy discussing the initial subject on the correctness of names to the first time reader, 2) his aligning the conversation with his own agenda in the pursuit of truth, and consequently, 3) the purposeful role Socrates serves as a vessel, carrying wisdom, as an indirect voice from Plato, the silent stage director behind the curtain.

Teachers and fellow Platonists alike often attempt to warn new readers of Socrates' tricks when they decipher his arguments. His tricks are actually a common theme whispered among the many groups who discuss Plato's stories about him. More importantly for the sake of this paper, many students, or new readers as mentioned above, are prematurely made aware of this scheme behind Socrates' words prior even to reading the dialogue. This is a potential danger to a reader at any level. With his mighty voice, Socrates warns his fellow comrades of falling into the pit of deception--any sort of deception. Who can judge the

correctness of someone else's words without a full investigation of all those who so graciously inform others on what *is* true? This includes questioning even the figures popularly regarded as the most omniscient.

A much richer, and greater hidden message is buried in the midst of the exterior quarrel on the authority of names. Plato emphasizes his own beliefs when Socrates consistently avoids giving absolute answers to questions asked of him and instead angles questions for the purpose of enlightenment, especially by inquiring about the unanswerable. Though Socrates is willing to respond, question, and exert a great deal of effort with both Hermogenes and Cratylus to examine the matter at hand, he consistently avoids claiming to have knowledge himself of any kind. While on the surface, Socrates appears to climb in and out of sight of the original question asked, further analysis points to a much deeper, paralleled message. Always steadfast in his practices, Socrates continues to ask questions on matters of fact but he does not claim to have full knowledge of them. Because of the nature of Socrates' continuous questioning, readers are liable to abandon their focus, on Hermogenes' primary concern regarding the correctness of names. Despite the fact that his point for partaking in the dialogue mostly concerned his own name, he *still* acceptingly shifts his attention to what appears as Socrates' endless patronization of his interlocutors, implementation of loopholes in his argument, and even his haughtiness.

Socrates often mockingly admits, "I do not know the Truth." This seems absurd to most readers, because Socrates also appears the wisest. And, of course,

as the expert on names, he knows so many things about language in the *Cratylus*! Even more dangerous still, when Socrates discloses his unfamiliarity with the topic, both those who some deem as the fools in the dialogues and those readers who are fooled into disregarding Socrates' remarks here, rely solely on a superficial sense of Socrates' speeches of grandeur rather than conducting any of their own personal inquiries and examinations. In this dialogue, the previous example showed the problem with an object's 'Truth' constantly changing. This is to claim that it is the truth of that thing that is always in flux. So how again could one possibly know the absolute Truth of anything if by the time they believe they have found it, the thing's Truth, or correctness, or being, or time, has already changed and moved on?

This completely aligns with Socrates' initial admittance of not knowing. The path of the journey towards wisdom can only be taken by the individual himself. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates stresses further that this journey must be an active one: "However I am ready to join you and Cratylus in looking for [the correctness of names]" (384c). However, upon zooming out from these multifaceted language puzzles which Plato has scattered within the dialogues, he parallels the group's inquiry on the correctness of names to yet another separate, universal plane, an inquiry which manifests itself in a completely unprecedented way. It is true that Cratylus, Hermogenes, and Socrates discuss the correctness of names. Nevertheless, while this complex conversation is taking place, Plato's agenda, to inquire into knowledge itself, reveals itself as Socrates' own ulterior argument

becomes apparent: Just as the dialogue shows that we should not trust the assignment of all names to be exactly in accordance with each thing's essence, we should not simply expect to receive from someone else a completed, unchanging piece of knowledge as our own in the most simple, and therefore most correct form. We should also apply this line of doubt towards the information we are receiving from any source. Yes, this includes information from Socrates and the calculative mastermind behind him.

Plato, acting as the Demiurge, uses Socrates as the medium through which in many parts of the dialogues readers can see allusions to Plato's own motivations for writing them. Deeper readings develop a deeper relationship between the reader and Plato. Depending upon this relationship and the reader's willingness to question, there will be different results as to what each reader takes from Plato's intended message, or to what each sees. Just like in every other Socratic dialogue that deals with the truth of matters, there exists in the dialogue a refined level of subtext that reveals itself to a keen mind well-versed in Plato. Each level can perplex and entrap idle thought, but for the active and direct mind, levels of subtext in the *Cratylus* engage the reader to consider Plato's reasoning. A reader can choose what subject relates best within the active dialogue to Plato's views elsewhere and to the reader's own thought process. Socrates insinuates that we must all actively enter the dialectic to determine the correctness of a thing. The Demiurge ultimately aims for the individual's own execution of participating in the active dialectic. Plato's subtext is revealed only through the active process of

conversation. Acting as the Demiurge himself, Plato reminds us that Homer uses “contrivances” of his own. From this, Socrates affirms that the lawgiver imposes the name of Hermes as the causer of contrivance and Father of deception (408a). All must enter the dialectic of the *Cratylus* to untangle the tangled web of myths, metaphors, allegories, and most terrifyingly, the sophists’ potential contrivances that result in finding euphony victorious once again. Its possible negative effects on determining the correctness of names include deciding a thing’s correctness simply based on what sounds nice (403).

The original topic at hand, the correctness of names, serves as the basis for the roots of more difficult and vast pursuits including the consideration on the correctness of the authoritative informer—whether that informer is a name-giver or a pseudo-knowledge-giver. Perhaps Plato carefully indicates that through the veil of the specific topic on the correctness of names, Socrates urges us to listen, confer, and then question, while learning during the whole process about any topic we encounter. Through Socrates, Plato tells us that there must be an active movement for one to attain knowledge. This means actions of engaging and moving through thoughts and ideas. This before-mentioned process describes the flow of the movement necessary during the quest to further one’s knowledge. Not only does Plato display the value of intellectual curiosity, he also clearly advocates for the curious to question the worth of the subject; in this case, the correctness of names. Plato brilliantly constructs the opening scene to highlight Hermogenes’

eagerness to pluck the answer from Socrates' mind rather than understand how to arrive at his own answer.

As frequently in Plato's works, Socrates stays true to his character and does not oblige the request to simply give an answer. Instead, he encourages all of his protégés to begin their own self-thought ideas, questions, and concepts. Socrates admits to his companions, "I've heard only the one-drachma course, I don't know the truth about it. Nonetheless, I am ready to investigate it along with you and Cratylus," (383c). He says this because, "People have many false notions about the power of this authority" (403b). This interaction at the very start of the dialogue provides explicit insight into Plato's mind. Socrates, sounding either rude, funny, or tangential, depending upon the reader's extent of prior experience with Plato, tells Hermogenes that he doesn't know anything since he only received one drachma worth of knowledge and not fifty. Socrates is subtly but incredulously asking how one could be "thought of being a better man by association" (403d) of another. This example shows how Socrates mocks and exaggerates, exemplifying why he thinks this kind of apparent bettering oneself is ridiculous. Though this jab goes far over the heads of Socrates' two friends, it enables Plato immediately to signify to the reader the utter ridiculousness of possibly equating the amount of money one shells out to the amount of knowledge received, and more importantly, retained.

The reader gains further insight into the inner workings of the author's purpose as Plato uses Socrates' sarcasm to illustrate his uncanny ability to set

underlying tones by alluding to the need for an active dialectic. Such dialectic functions as the sole force to forward the movement in one's journey to learn. Socrates continues to restate this idea for the whole of the conversation. Over and over Plato voices through Socrates or implies on his own for readers to question, question, and question the assertions of others. He urges us to bring out the skeptic in ourselves and push those who claim to give knowledge to their limits for the sake of a better understanding. Plato's message stays the same: "There is no impiety inquiring on the thought of men," (401a). "There is no impiety" means that there is nothing wrong with questioning an authority no matter how high atop the pedestal he sits. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates outrightly encourages both Hermogenes and Cratylus to question and reevaluate the authority of names and name-givers in particular. Despite his efforts, his fellow interlocutors remained at the first two levels corresponding to those of the new and familiar readers. In other words, even though Socrates bids his friends to review his own words and the words of others' carefully, Plato portrays the two respondents as stagnantly passive learners. Plato intends this last quote, recited from the mouth of Socrates, to embolden the timid, passive learners to inquire unapologetically about others' views.

Socrates catches Hermogenes in a complete contradiction within seconds of entering the scene. The fact that Hermogenes is precisely where Socrates wants him does not give the new reader a chance to expect or comprehend the existence of a trap. Even a familiar reader congratulating himself on his astounding recollection of a past Platonic theme uncovered can prematurely proceed to

elevate himself up onto a pedestal sitting right there next to Socrates. Even a correct judgment by the familiar reader can impede his acknowledgment of his own limited perspective. This prematurity precisely describes why even a practiced reader of Plato overlooks the very subject of questioning authority, on which Plato intends to advise his audience. Cornered, Hermogenes admits that man is the measure of all things despite the fact that he does not even agree with Protagoras' claim himself. Socrates instead says that things "Are not in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature" (386e).

Socrates contemplates that if there is no such thing as an array of individual truths, each dependent upon each person, there must necessarily be some fixed, true essence of things. This means that the True Nature of a thing must not be dependent simply on what any individuals perceive that thing's nature to be according to their own judgments. In addition, Hermogenes now can accept the separation and distinction between our individual perceptions and universal Truth, unlike Protagoras and Euthydemus, whom Socrates suggests, argue that all human perceptions are correct. Consequently, we must admit that human judgments may create falsehoods. We might call this a problem of illusion: which anticipates how, by the end of the dialogue, we will still be unable to tell the real thing from an imitation (432d). Those who claim to possess knowledge have what it represents to *themselves* (433e). Plato cautions readers, by Socrates' warning to his comrades, "For the worst of all deceptions is self-deception" (428d). Upon accepting

the inevitability of falsehoods arising, the possibility of incorrect judgments forces us to acknowledge the very likely possibility of correct and incorrect judgments on the part of the name-giver himself.

Authority figures need to grasp a name's "essential" nature and mimic it. The "name maker grasps...the reality of things named and imitates their nature" (424b). If we can neither trust completely the name-giver as True nor the names themselves as expressive of the things' true essences, then necessarily, the ability to simply recall a thing's name in no way equates to an actual understanding of that thing. Just as it is rare for the names of objects or ideas to perfectly match their true essences or meanings, it is equally unusual for an indirect source to produce for someone else the desired information that equates to Knowledge. The speech that Hermes represents providing a likeness of things, can't possibly be the exact same as Knowledge (408d). Socrates points out that every name or definition is likened to something else (419c). If not, we must indeed think the likened thing is the exact same as the essential thing that it is in likeness to. But that would be blasphemous! Luckily, Socrates is conveniently prepared with an immediate follow up, a more than rhetorical question asking how we could possibly be so bold as to equate ourselves to the Gods (432b). Claiming to know, or really, claiming to know above all others and all else what Truth is, would elevate us to the ultimate level of authority—The Divine.

By obtaining all this insight thus far, I shall now describe the three levels of readers. Uncertainty and confusion are most prominently felt at the first level reading. Socrates even leaves behind uncertainty in the reader,

Artemis appears to get her name from her healthy (ἀρτεμής) and well-ordered nature, and her love of virginity; or perhaps he who named her meant that she is learned in virtue (ἀρετή), or possibly too, that she hates sexual intercourse (ἄροτον μισεῖ) of a man and woman; or he who gave the goddess her name may have given it for any or all of these reasons (406b).

This uncertainty mostly affects the new reader. The new reader struggles to grasp the elaborate metaphors, keep up with the many famous authoritative references, and most tiresomely, find any sort of solution within the cryptic nonsense apparent in the dialogue. However, this sense of unfulfilled closure creates the restrictive bounds of the new reader. The new reader is very likely to lose, in his first time around, this game of language that Socrates is playing. Names can show the truth of things but aren't necessarily *the* Truth, "Some of them claim that they are like the truth, and others that they are [the Truth]." (438d) This refers both to names and to the users of names, or speakers. Socrates arrives at one of many seeming conclusions, "we must look for something else, not names," (438d) to show a correctness of a thing. He says realities are sought "much better through themselves than through names," if one is to learn or discover things. He calls it "worthwhile to have reached even this conclusion" (439b). He reminds Hermogenes and Cratylus, "Nor can it be known by anyone [if it is not in any state to be known] (440a). "Surely no man of sense can put himself and his soul under the control of names, and trust in names and their makers to the point of affirming

that he knows anything?” (440c), Socrates asks, landing on yet another statement phrased as a leading question.

Socrates continually refers to Homer to confirm approval of his own words and also palms off the responsibility of the words he chooses to use onto some other indirect, yet trusted, source for the Greeks. This attribution of authority takes place throughout the whole of the dialogue. Socrates rhetorically replies, “Indeed? I do not yet understand about it myself, Hermogenes. Do you?” (392e), thereupon catching Hermogenes in a trap because Hermogenes already thinks he understands the topic. Socrates repeatedly cites and references Homer precisely because he is an acclaimed author and renowned poet, the greatest epic poet. Not only does this make his listeners more doe-eyed with each euphonic word he speaks, but it also firmly, yet only apparently, imprints the stamp of Truth onto whatever statement, no matter how illogical or uninvestigated it may be. In this particular instance, Socrates angles his inquiry to reach the subject of his next premeditated question: Must Homer, the ultimate authority, in fact be a name-giver if he gave Hector his name? (393a). Many passages complicate the confirmation of exactly what Socrates discusses with Cratylus. For example, he most often confuses Cratylus and Hermogenes too, by persistently changing the language within an etymological inquiry through dissecting various words of Socrates’ choosing. The *Cratylus* introduces allusions and references to other works by Plato that bear on the characters’ desires for an answer, or in this dialogue, lust for the answer to the question about what the correctness of a name is. A person

simply lusting for the answer desires someone to tell him *what* a particular piece of knowledge is (408e), as opposed to learning by oneself *how* to come to that knowledge.

Plato demonstrates this connection with Socrates serving as his magnificent, and accredited, mouthpiece. Plato reveals to his own admirers that they are themselves the ones liable to put full trust of what is true into another's hands. "How true my words are," (418a) Socrates proclaims ironically. As readers, we are likely to completely disregard Socrates' outright confessions to us, such as his blatant claim, "this is another invention of mine," (415d). The word here for invention is *πλάττειν*, which can mean "to form, shape or mold," or as a metaphor, "to make up, create, invent." This can be interpreted as forming or shaping a speech to be fantastically gripping whether the content is worth that or not. In addition, the word metaphorically means to fabricate or forge. Is this an example of Plato speaking directly to us, mocking the fact that we do not realize this *πλάττειν* is his own carefully shaped fabrication? So what does this mean for the misfortunate souls' of his readers? How are we to know what is true?

Plato informs his readers that Socrates' and, heaven forbid, even his own prophetic utterances, are inventions originated and expanded upon through the ideas of others. Plato suggests this by portraying Socrates as pointing out that his friends' conclusions are founded only upon Socrates' own aims and opinions. Further, he shows even his own are built upon others' interpretations. He tells us this criticism is caused by "your derivations" developing solely from

“contrivance[s] of mine,” (415e). By becoming aware of Plato’s manipulations, the familiar readers can interpret: 1) Plato’s message or apparent answer for the reader; 2) our own derived answers; 3) the need to delay our decision about Plato means when Socrates claims ‘X’, ‘Y’, or ‘Z’, and to contemplate further *how* to ask the questions and not simply accept *what* other answers are. But Plato wants us to act: Our “function is to instruct” (435d). To this purpose, Plato functions as a Demiurge—to guide us on our own journey by instructing us how to ask the right questions, not necessarily how to attain the right answers.

In this way, the argument shows devout Platonists that they are in the exact whirlwind which they are prone to criticizing in others. By subtly capturing the questioners in the midst of analysis of the ignorance of others, Plato directs each mind—both his naïve and slow interlocutors in dialogues, *and* his devoted and uncritically compliant readers.

All of Plato’s respondents reply in a very similar fashion. Plato sheds light on the possibility that even pursuing the “correct method” of the dialectic may not necessarily be the best way to dialogue with another person. Although logical arguments follow in sequential order, such an order alone by no means establishes a case's soundness. He says that this is due to “clever evasions of rational theory” (426a) on behalf of the supposed logician. Socrates says, “Just note the contrivance I introduce in all cases like this which are too much for me.” (409d). For this reason, “since words get twisted in all sorts of ways,” (421d) here, Plato reminds the reader

that one must always examine things himself, otherwise you cannot know whose aims used which devices that helped contrive that piece of knowledge.

Upon further investigation, an inexactitude in conversation plays a huge role in the deterioration or the impossibility to even begin engagement in an active dialectic. Inexactitude in discussion means that one or more parties misunderstand one another and therefore fail to communicate; hence any possible movement forward ceases within the conversation. While these examples perhaps show us how to perform the dialectic tangentially, it does not mean that that which comes from the conversation, questions or answers, are correctly aimed or true. Through Socrates, Plato uses these rhetorical devices for purpose of teaching. Here, he demonstrates how inexactitude during the use of language, spoken or written, destroys the dialectic. This dialectic is a process whereby Plato trains us to, “examine [the thing] within itself” to travel “far along on the road of wisdom” (410e). When something is brought to light it is as an “activity within itself” necessary to the birth or growth of an idea. The process of this activity is the dialectic.

Socrates professes, I “Have been told in secret teachings,” (413a) when asked how he attains such wisdom. In this very first case, Plato gives us Socrates as an example of someone taking an easy way out by handing over authority and therefore power to someone else rather than work through the problem by oneself. We “must play the game and investigate these questions vigorously” (421e). He

urges us not to cease our questioning by yielding to the supposed expert until we push on our own towards this limit of knowledge.

Plato's focus resurfaces as Socrates emerges through his words, urging the reader to give great care and attention to the origin of any information one obtains, not only to the correct origin of a name (436d). He wants us to pay attention to how the source attained his sources. In one instance, Socrates counters, "Then the teacher, when he uses a name, will be using the work of a lawgiver?" (388e). This leading question is a response to contradictions regarding the original name-maker, which arise towards the end of the *Cratylus*. Surely the first-time reader can no longer remember a seemingly innocent rhetorical question from over 40 Stephanus numbers prior.

Socrates refers to κερκίζοντες (416c), shuttling, as he makes his way through his tangled web of argumentatively driven threads. Upon revisiting, he directly instructs us to διακρίνομεν, or to separate the tangled threads of naming from one another. While those who possess this craft are the ones who can give names, "the power" which gave the name is the real causer of naming (416c). This means that not only must we trust that the name in front of us is correct, but by necessity, we must accept that every other name which led to its derivation can also be trusted. This trust includes relying on the convention and design of every name-giver and the presumed correctness of each word given prior to investigating any word.

Although agreement and convention involve handing power over to some enigmatic figure, still each individual can consider the correctness of names. The correctness of the very first names, or the “element” names is indeterminable; hence they put into question any other name created thereafter. This lack of understanding is proved by asking the wrong question: Is this name correct? Or, what is this name’s “correctness”? What if one also believes that a name’s correctness is equal to its ultimate essence, its Truth? In this circumstance the logical order leads only forwards and not backwards. Given the unavoidable fact, the establishment of our inability to interpret Absolute Truth while still in our bodily form, we must admit that if we are to believe that knowing a thing’s name is knowing the thing itself, then we necessarily mean that we believe the name to be True. But humans cannot know if a name expresses the absolute. “Must he not make and give all his names with his eye fixed upon the absolute or ideal name,” like the Platonic forms, “if he is to be an authoritative giver of names?” (389d). This question applies to all investigation (424d). How then are we to distinguish parts of knowledge from the whole of the knowledge? Plato and Socrates leave new readers especially bewildered and uncertain about how *we* must break each thing down.

Plato meticulously writes and controls each action, response, and subject matter in his renowned dialogues in such a way that in the *Cratylus* we are encouraged to ask the right question. First we must aim at the right thing to ask the right question about it (420c). Socrates instructs, “Do not you cease from asking questions” (420e). Unsurprisingly, this discovery takes us to the aforementioned

point of understanding that Plato has his own intentions separate from those of his fabricated actors. We then should not view Socrates and Plato as certain authority figures and experts on a vast number of subjects. If we believe that knowing a thing's name equates to a True understanding of that object or subject, then that belief is equivalent to saying that to know a name of a thing is to know a thing's very nature and essence.

The “correctness” of a thing holds the intention of showing its nature (422d). Socrates argues that an expression of anything as an imitation equates to our bodily imitation of what we intend to represent of the desired idea being conveyed (423b). Socrates admits that such a perfect language immaculately designating things would be quite convenient—practically a set DNA in each word to give us a comprehensive understanding of all necessary information about that said thing.”Therefore you must consider courageously and thoroughly (ἀνδρείως τε καὶ εὖ) and not accept anything carelessly (μὴ ῥαδίως) (440d). However he warns his audience that our system of language was not constructed perfectly. Instead we must investigate. In other words, a wise man questions so as to not be easily tricked (394b). A person cannot just know the name or even the definition of a word and magically proclaim to hold Truth in their palms as Cratylus argues late in the dialogue (453d and 440e). “I myself have been marveling at my own wisdom all along, and I cannot believe in it. So I think we ought to re-examine my [prophetic] utterances [from earlier]” (428c). “Then, if after investigation you find truth, impart (μεταδιδόναι) it to me” (440d).

This entire dialogue delivers a different outcome to each reader depending upon his or her prior experience with Socratic dialogues. For the new reader this can leave one feeling awestruck. Socrates' seemingly intimidating etymological background comes across as overwhelming, as Plato intends. Socrates' incredibly impressive apparent wisdom, which he spews out endlessly, signifies his perceived authority over all other characters in the dialogue. The virgin reader can progress from feelings of awe and admiration to feelings of inferiority and a desire to submit and hold Socrates' voice in high esteem. What does his voice really mean? The *Cratylus* is a dialogue at least *told* by Plato. What remains up to the dedicated philosopher depends on his ability to question where this supposed knowledge is coming from before concluding its correctness. Because we are "subject to such assumptions" (411c) we are liable to fall for any information given to us. During one of Socrates' long sequences of leading questions to which Hermogenes compliantly answers, 'yes' or 'perhaps': (392c). Hermogenes' passiveness shows up throughout the conversation. He shows the opposite of what Plato, through Socrates, is instructing us as readers to do! We must be active, rather than passive, in our pursuit of knowledge.

The familiar reader enters each work advantageously recognizing Plato's sarcasm, his clever yet subtle use of irony, and Socrates' intended condescension in his responses to his fellow truth-seekers, those "able to ask questions." Socrates asks if they were heroes or just clever? (398d). What does cleverness mean to Plato? Clearly an attribute falling below that of a hero's. Continuing this order of

thought, perhaps Plato hints to the familiar reader to instead ask if he is playing the role of a hero or a clever fool in the discussion. Plato warns us that if we are not careful we will wind up wiser than we ought to be (399a). The real question is how wise should *any* expert be? Again, this includes but is not limited to Socrates, Plato, and ourselves. However, one's vantage point turns into a hindrance, if the reader becomes overly prideful of his own apparent knowledge concerning the father of western philosophy, Plato himself. The familiar reader, too, can have unexamined information and therefore jaded thoughts on Plato. The returning reader has a great sense for Socratic themes, for he has developed a keen eye to catch Socrates employing these themes. The reader, too, can become his own archetypical authority figure. Socrates expresses the misunderstanding of even the "acclaimed" expert with such a retort as to possess knowledge, "claiming to have some special knowledge" (384a). The shakiness of this claim consequently causes this mid-level Platonist to not have to deal with the typical singular influence, the author, but with *three* authoritative figures on the text as a whole, Socrates, Plato, and the reader himself. This multiple authority does not begin to account for several other voices we hear praised or presently speaking on any enlisted topic as acclaimed professionals².

Hermogenes, Socrates, and Cratylus each consent that a name was given for certain reasons dependent upon the interest, nature, or judgment of the respective authority figure comprising each of them. Hermogenes responds to Plato's main

² *Sophist; Symposium*

point, that each authoritative voice tells facts in his own perceived way by nonchalantly commenting that Socrates must have heard this “knowledge” from someone else and is not inventing it himself. To this, Socrates incredulously exclaims, “And how about the rest of my talk?” (413d). This insinuates that Plato wants the reader to understand that any piece of knowledge one receives has been passed around, passed down, altered, added to, embellished, and molded over time. Plato points to the obviousness of this dilemma. Socrates has clearly been dropping the names of renowned poets and philosophers throughout his speeches. So when Hermogenes asks for help, Socrates replies again, “Listen then; perhaps I may deceive you into thinking that all I am going to say is my own.” But his words are by no means all his own! There are countless voices we hear as in every single dialogue, as cleverly planned by Plato. Plato anticipates different levels of philosophical readers interpreting his texts. He understands that every person is at a different, yet ever-moving pace in their individual journey towards knowledge. Here, Plato signals every reader to ponder this idea for any ‘wisdom’ they receive, and in addition, to question the sources in which this said expert is to have derived his own ‘wisdom’.

Finally, upon much investigative research of the patterns drawn from among Plato’s expansive dialogues, the third level reader is able to question Socrates’ opinion, Plato’s motives, and his own reasoning for believing he can possibly be certain one way or another. If Plato has taught the careful and experienced reader anything by this point, there should be a few steadfast,

repetitive axioms ingrained into such a reader's memory. "It is impossible to learn or discover things except by learning or ourselves discovering the names," (438b). A person desires and learns *better* when using his own imagination prior to open discussion with an 'authority' on the subject. No time is allowed for the pupil to understand the process by which these truths have come to be thought as such, if he merely is instructed to accept them. Blind acceptance brings an abrupt halt to both students' and teachers' learning. However, wrestling with an idea yourself creates such a stir in the imagination, capable to break the bounds of the most powerful outside constraints, namely, the accepted answer. Socrates tries to explain this method of teaching through learning, and learning through teaching, essentially, the dialectic, by continuously omitting any direct answer or unauthorized knowledge to his friends and to the readers. Once again, this is displayed when Socrates does not take responsibility for his words. He defends himself by avowing that it was, "Not I," but "those who gave the name" (418a). This further cements Plato's learning process of *asking questions for the purpose of teaching and thoughtfully answering and asking in return for the purpose of learning*.

What lovers of Plato claim as his greatest virtue, his critics label his biggest downfall: Time and time again, Socrates, through Plato, surrenders his own wisdom aloud—"The only thing I know is that I know nothing³." The experienced third level reader remembers this lesson from and about Plato, and not just the

³ Socrates. *Apology*

current subject matter. “You forget what I said a while ago, that I did not know, but would join you in looking” (391a). He acknowledges that he is the author of the story, as the Zeus-like demiurge is the “author of life” (396a).

Both inactive and active participants must comprehend when entering into the dialectic of the *Cratylus* that he or she has the possibility of receiving two types of knowledge: that which is derived through a direct source, and that which is obtained through an indirect source. Direct and indirect sources are not types of knowledge, but rather means through which wisdom is received. Through direct or indirect sources, Socrates urges the reader to follow the same process of constantly questioning, clarifying, actively listening, and learning by means of the Socratic method, but most importantly, he stresses how crucial it is never to give unwarranted authority or power to anyone. He does this by quoting and professing a vision of Heraclitus, “See how they agree with each other and all tend towards the doctrine of Heraclitus” (402a-c). Just because the two hypotheses appear to agree with one another does not confirm that they indeed do.

Serving as the “wise director” (414e), Plato encourages both the well-read and newfound Platonists to use the Socratic teaching and learning method as a guide, but not an authority. Learning to become your own wise director is also learning to become a teacher. This is not only in the sense of authority, but rather as someone continuing the journey themselves. But one cannot get there unless he first recognizes this from Plato, that his “authority” is not a kind of knowledge we should rely on, or take away without further thought of our own.

The goals of the dialectic are not singular. Depending on the level of reader you are at any point, you grasp different goals of the dialectic. *You are* as a reader going along in the process, but depending on what level you are, you don't always recognize that this is a process. One of the greatest lessons one can learn from reading Plato does not lie in memorizing every idea and piece of information written, but rather to contemplate and implement the process of this experience towards other experiences. In recognizing that not even Plato is an ultimate authority, we learn to become our own "wise director" for ourselves and perhaps even more carefully so, for others.

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