Cratylus

PLATO

c. 428–348 BC

Cratylus

Κρατύλος

Translated from the Greek with AI (Claude) and edited



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Cratylus · Plato (c. 428–348 BC)

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INTRODUCTION

Are names correct by nature or only by agreement? Cratylus says every thing has a naturally correct name. Hermogenes says a name is whatever people agree to call something. They ask Socrates to settle it.

Socrates first argues against Hermogenes that a name is a tool, made by a skilled "name-maker" to fit what it names. To show it, he launches into a long and dazzling string of etymologies—of heroes, gods, the heavens and the words for wisdom and justice. Much of it is plainly playful, and Socrates says he is "inspired."

Then he turns on Cratylus. Names are imitations, and imitations can be bad; custom plays a part after all. And if the first name-makers thought that everything flows, their names may mislead us. The dialogue ends with the question of whether anything stays the same long enough to be known. It is the first sustained Western inquiry into language.

Cratylus

Athens.
Hermogenes asks Socrates to settle his argument with Cratylus: are names correct by nature or by convention?

HERMOGENES 383a Shall we let Socrates here in on our discussion too?

CRATYLUS If you like.

CONVENTION OR NATURE?

Hermogenes says names are correct by agreement, Cratylus by nature; they ask Socrates to decide.

HERMOGENES Socrates, Cratylus here says that each of the things that are has a correctness of name that belongs to it by nature. A name, he says, isn't whatever some people agree to call a thing, uttering a bit of their own speech at it. Rather, there is a natural correctness of 383b names, the same for everyone, Greeks and non-Greeks alike. So I ask him whether his name really is Cratylus or not, and he agrees that it is. "And what about Socrates?" I said. "Socrates," he said. "Then for everyone else too, is the name we call each person by that person's name?" And he said, "Well, yours isn't Hermogenes, at any rate, not even if the whole human race calls you that." And when I keep asking him and am eager to know what on earth 384a he means, he makes nothing clear. He's ironic with me instead, pretending he has something in mind, as if he knew something about it which, if he cared to say it plainly, would make me agree and say just what he says. So if you can somehow interpret Cratylus' oracle,

I'd be glad to hear it. Or rather, I'd be even gladder to learn what you yourself think about the correctness of names, if you're willing.[1]

SOCRATES Hermogenes, son of Hipponicus, there's an old proverb that 384b fine things are hard to learn about. And the subject of names happens to be no small subject. Now if I had already heard Prodicus' fifty-drachma lecture, which, as he tells it, gives anyone who hears it a full education on this topic, nothing would have stopped you from knowing the truth about the correctness of names right away. As it is, I haven't heard it. 384c I've only heard the one-drachma version. So I don't know what the truth about such things is. But I'm ready to look into it together with you and Cratylus. As for his saying that Hermogenes isn't really your name, I suspect he's teasing you. He probably thinks that you're always going after money and failing every time.[2] But, as I was just saying, knowing such things is hard. We have to put the question before us in common and examine whether it's as you say or as Cratylus says.

HERMOGENES Well, Socrates, I've often discussed this with Cratylus here and with many others, and I can't be persuaded 384d that there's any correctness of name other than agreement and convention. It seems to me that whatever name someone gives to a thing, that is the correct one. And if he changes it again for another and stops using the first, the later one is no less correct than the earlier. It's like when we change the names of our household slaves: the new name is no less correct than the one given before. No name belongs to anything by nature. It belongs by the custom and habit of those who establish the usage and do the calling. But if it's some other 384e way, I'm ready to learn and to listen, not only to Cratylus but to anyone at all.

1 The name Hermogenes means "offspring of Hermes," the god of luck and profit; Hermogenes was poor, though his brother Callias was very rich.

2 Prodicus of Ceos was a well-known sophist who lectured for fees and was famous for drawing fine distinctions between words.

SOCRATES 385a You may well have a point, Hermogenes. But let's look into it. Whatever someone calls a thing, you say, that's its name?

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES Whether a private individual calls it that or a city?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Well then: suppose I call one of the things that are—for example, what we now call "human being"—by the name "horse," and what we now call "horse" by the name "human being." Will the same thing then have the name "human being" publicly and "horse" privately? And the other one, again, "human being" privately and "horse" publicly? Is that what you mean?

HERMOGENES 385b I think so.

TRUE AND FALSE NAMES

Socrates argues that if statements can be true or false, so can names, their smallest parts.

SOCRATES Come now, tell me this. Is there something you call speaking truly and speaking falsely?

HERMOGENES Yes, there is.

SOCRATES So there could be a true statement and a false one?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And is the statement that says the things that are as they are true, and the one that says them as they are not false?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES So it's possible to say in a statement both the things that are and the things that are not?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES 385c And is a true statement true only as a whole, while its parts aren't true?

HERMOGENES No, its parts are true too.

SOCRATES Are the large parts true but not the small ones, or are they all true?

HERMOGENES All of them, I think.

SOCRATES Now is there any part of a statement you can mention that's smaller than a name?

HERMOGENES No, that's the smallest.

SOCRATES So the name that's part of a true statement is also something said?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And it's true, as you say.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And isn't a part of a false statement false?

HERMOGENES Yes, it is.

SOCRATES So it's possible to say a false name as well as a true one, since it's possible to say a false statement as well as a true one?

HERMOGENES 385d Of course.

SOCRATES So whatever each person says is the name of a thing, that is its name?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And however many names someone says a thing has, it will have that many, and for just as long as he says so?

HERMOGENES Yes, Socrates, because I know of no other correctness of name than this. I can call each thing by one name, the one I gave it, and you can call it by another, the one you gave it. In the same way 385e I see that individual cities have their own names established for the same things, and that Greeks differ from other Greeks, and Greeks from non-Greeks.

THINGS HAVE A NATURE OF THEIR OWN

Against Protagoras, things are not as each person sees them, and neither are the actions done to them.

SOCRATES Come then, Hermogenes, let's see whether you think the things that are are like this too, with their being private to each person. That was what Protagoras meant when he said that a human being is "the measure of all 386a things": that however things appear to me, that's how they are for me, and however they appear to you, that's how they are for you. Or do you think they have some stability of being of their own?[3]

HERMOGENES There have been times, Socrates, when I was so puzzled that I was swept along into exactly what Protagoras says. But I don't really think it's like that.

SOCRATES What? Have you ever been swept along so far that you didn't think 386b any human being was really bad?

HERMOGENES No, by Zeus. It's actually happened to me often that I've thought some people were very bad indeed—and quite a lot of them.

SOCRATES And haven't you ever thought that some people were very good?

HERMOGENES Very few.

SOCRATES But you have thought so?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Then how do you account for it? Like this: the very good are full of understanding, and the very bad are utterly foolish?

HERMOGENES 386c Yes, I think that's how it is.

SOCRATES Now if Protagoras was telling the truth, and the truth is that things are for each person just as they seem to him,

3 Protagoras of Abdera (fifth century BC) was the most famous of the sophists; the "measure" saying opened his book *Truth*.

is it possible for some of us to have understanding and others to be foolish?

HERMOGENES Certainly not.

SOCRATES And this too, I imagine, you're quite sure of: if there is such a thing as understanding and such a thing as foolishness, Protagoras can't possibly be telling the truth. For no one would really have any more understanding than anyone else if whatever seems so to each 386d person is going to be true for him.

HERMOGENES That's right.

SOCRATES But I don't think you agree with Euthydemus either, that all things belong to all people alike, at the same time and always. For in that case too, some people couldn't be good and others bad, if excellence and badness belonged to everyone alike and always.[4]

HERMOGENES That's true.

SOCRATES Then if it isn't the case that all things belong to all people alike, at the same time and always, and it isn't the case that each thing is private to each person, it's clear 386e that things have some stable being of their own. They aren't relative to us, and they aren't dragged up and down by us according to how they appear to us. They exist by themselves, in relation to their own being, just as their nature is.

HERMOGENES I think so, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then could the things themselves have this sort of nature, while the actions we perform on them don't? Or aren't actions also one kind of the things that are?

HERMOGENES Certainly they are, too.

SOCRATES 387a So actions too are performed according to their own nature, not according to our opinion. For example, if we set out to cut one of the things that are, should we cut each thing however we want and with whatever we want? Or will we cut it,

4 Euthydemus was a sophist whom Plato mocks, along with his brother Dionysodorus, in the dialogue *Euthydemus*.

and get something done, and do it correctly, if we're willing to cut each thing according to the nature of cutting and being cut, and with what is natural for it; while if we go against nature we'll fail and accomplish nothing?

HERMOGENES 387b That's how it seems to me.

SOCRATES And again, if we set out to burn something, we mustn't burn it according to just any opinion, but according to the correct one? And that's the one about how, and with what, it's each thing's nature to burn and be burned?

HERMOGENES That's right.

SOCRATES And the same goes for everything else?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Now isn't speaking also one kind of action?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Then will someone speak correctly by speaking however he thinks he should, 387c or will he get something done and actually speak only if he speaks in the way and with the means by which it's natural to say things and for them to be said? And otherwise will he fail and accomplish nothing?

HERMOGENES I think it's as you say.

SOCRATES Now isn't naming a part of speaking? For it's by naming things, surely, that people make statements.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then isn't naming also a kind of action, if speaking was a kind of action concerning things?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES 387d And we saw that actions aren't relative to us, but have a nature peculiar to themselves?

HERMOGENES That's right.

SOCRATES Then we should name things in the way and with the means by which it's natural to name them and for them to be named, and not however we want, if this is going to be consist-

ent with what we said before? And that way we'd get something done and actually name, but otherwise not?

HERMOGENES It seems so to me.

SOCRATES Come now: what has to be cut, we say, has to be cut with something?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES 387e And what has to be woven has to be woven with something? And what has to be drilled has to be drilled with something?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And so what has to be named has to be named with something?

HERMOGENES 388a That's right.

THE NAME AS A TOOL

Like a drill or a shuttle, a name is a tool: for teaching and sorting things as they are.

SOCRATES And what was it we had to drill with?

HERMOGENES A drill.

SOCRATES And to weave with?

HERMOGENES A shuttle.

SOCRATES And to name with?

HERMOGENES A name.

SOCRATES Well said. So a name is a kind of tool too.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Now if I asked, "What sort of tool was a shuttle?" wouldn't the answer be, the one we weave with?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES 388b And what do we do when we weave? Don't we separate the weft and the warp, which are tangled together?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And you'll be able to say the same sort of thing about a drill and the rest?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then can you say the same sort of thing about a name? When we name with a name, which is a tool, what are we doing?

HERMOGENES I can't say.

SOCRATES Aren't we teaching each other something, and separating things according to how they are?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES So a name is a tool for teaching, one that separates 388c being, as a shuttle separates a fabric.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And the shuttle is a weaver's tool?

HERMOGENES Of course.

SOCRATES So a weaver will use a shuttle well—and "well" means as a weaver should. And a teacher will use a name well—and "well" means as a teacher should.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Then whose work will the weaver be using well when he uses the shuttle?

HERMOGENES The carpenter's.

SOCRATES Is everyone a carpenter, or only the one who has the craft?

HERMOGENES The one who has the craft.

SOCRATES 388d And whose work will the driller be using well when he uses the drill?

HERMOGENES The blacksmith's.

SOCRATES And is everyone a blacksmith, or only the one who has the craft?

HERMOGENES The one who has the craft.

SOCRATES Very well. And whose work will the teacher be using when he uses a name?

HERMOGENES I can't say that either.

SOCRATES Can't you say this either: who gives us the names we use?

HERMOGENES No, I can't.

SOCRATES Don't you think it's the law—custom—that hands them down?

HERMOGENES It seems so.

THE NAME-MAKER

A lawgiver makes names by looking to the form of name, supervised by their user, the dialectician.

SOCRATES 388e So the teacher, when he uses a name, will be using the work of a lawgiver?

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES And do you think every man is a lawgiver, or only the one who has the craft?

HERMOGENES The one who has the craft.

SOCRATES So it isn't every man's business, Hermogenes, to give names. 389a It belongs to a name-maker. And this, it seems, is the lawgiver, who is the rarest of craftsmen among human beings.

HERMOGENES It seems so.

SOCRATES Come now, consider what the lawgiver looks to when he gives names. Examine it in light of what we said before. What does the carpenter look to when he makes a shuttle? Isn't it to something whose nature is to weave?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES 389b Well, if the shuttle breaks while he's making it, will he make another one by looking to the broken one? Or will he look to that form he was looking to when he made the one he broke?

HERMOGENES To that form, I think.

SOCRATES Then wouldn't we be entirely right to call that "what a shuttle itself is"?

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES So whenever he has to make a shuttle for a light garment or a heavy one, or for linen or wool or anything else, all of them must have the form of shuttle; but whatever nature is naturally finest for each kind, 389c that is the nature he must give to each product?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And the same goes for the other tools. He has to discover the tool that is naturally suited to each task and put it into the material he's making it from—not as he himself would like, but as its nature is. For it seems he has to know how to put into iron the drill that is naturally suited to each task.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And how to put into wood the shuttle that is naturally suited to each.

HERMOGENES That's right.

SOCRATES 389d For each shuttle, it seems, is naturally suited to a particular kind of fabric, and the same holds for the rest.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Then, my excellent friend, mustn't that lawgiver of ours also know how to put into sounds and syllables the name that is naturally suited to each thing? And mustn't he make and give all his names while looking to what a name itself is, if he's going to be a genuine giver of names? And if different lawgivers don't put names into the same syllables, we mustn't 389e let that confuse us. After all, not every blacksmith puts the tool into the same iron, even when he's making the same tool for the same purpose. Still, so long as he gives it the same form, even if 390a it's in different iron, the tool is correct, whether someone makes it here or among non-Greeks. Isn't that so?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then you'll judge the lawgiver in the same way, whether he's here or among non-Greeks. So long as he gives each thing the form of name that fits it, in whatever syllables, the lawgiver here is no worse than one anywhere else?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES 390b Now who will know whether the right form of shuttle has been put into a given piece of wood? The one who made it, the carpenter, or the one who'll use it, the weaver?

HERMOGENES More likely the one who'll use it, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then who will use the lyre-maker's work? Isn't it the person who'd know how best to supervise the making of it, and who'd recognize, once it was made, whether it had been made well or not?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Who is that?

HERMOGENES The lyre-player.

SOCRATES And who will use the shipwright's work?

HERMOGENES 390c The helmsman.

SOCRATES And who would best supervise the lawgiver's work and judge it once it was done, both here and among non-Greeks? Isn't it the one who'll use it?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And isn't this the person who knows how to ask questions?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And the same person knows how to answer them?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And the person who knows how to ask and answer questions—do you call him anything but a dialectician?

HERMOGENES No, that's what I call him.

SOCRATES 390d So it's a carpenter's job to make a rudder, under a helmsman's supervision, if the rudder is going to be a fine one.

HERMOGENES So it seems.

SOCRATES And it's a lawgiver's job, it seems, to make a name, with a dialectician as his supervisor, if names are going to be given well.

HERMOGENES That's right.

SOCRATES So it looks, Hermogenes, as if giving names isn't a trivial matter, as you think, or a job for trivial people or for just anyone. And Cratylus is right when he says that it's by nature 390e that things have their names, and that not everyone is a craftsman of names. Only the one who looks to the name that belongs to each thing by nature, and can put its form into letters and syllables, is one.

HERMOGENES I don't see how I can 391a argue against what you're saying, Socrates. But perhaps it isn't easy to be persuaded so suddenly. I think I'd be more readily persuaded if you showed me what you say this natural correctness of a name is.

SOCRATES My dear Hermogenes, I'm not saying it's anything. You've forgotten what I said a little while ago: that I didn't know, but would look into it with you. But now that we've been looking into it, you and I, this much at least is already clear, contrary to what we thought before: a name has a kind of natural correctness, and it isn't 391b every man's business to know how to give a name well to anything whatever. Isn't that so?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then the next thing we have to look for, if you really want to know, is what its correctness actually is.

HERMOGENES Well, I certainly do want to know.

SOCRATES Then look into it.

HERMOGENES How should I look into it?

SOCRATES The most correct way to look into it, my friend, is with people who know, by paying them money and doing them

favors. These are the sophists. Your brother [391c] Callias paid them a lot of money, and now he has a reputation for wisdom. But since you don't have control of your inheritance, you should plead with your brother and beg him to teach you the correctness about such things that he learned from Protagoras.[5]

HERMOGENES That would be an odd request for me to make, Socrates, if I reject Protagoras' *Truth* entirely but then welcomed what's said in such a *Truth* as if it were worth something.

SOCRATES Well, if you don't like that either, then you should learn [391d] from Homer and the other poets.

HOMER ON NAMES

Socrates turns to Homer's names for rivers, birds and the son of Hector.

HERMOGENES And what does Homer say about names, Socrates, and where?

SOCRATES In many places. But the greatest and finest are the passages where he distinguishes between the names human beings and gods give to the same things. Don't you think he says something great and wonderful about the correctness of names in those passages? For clearly the gods, at any rate, call things by the names that are correct by nature. [391e] Or don't you think so?

HERMOGENES I know perfectly well that if they call things anything, they call them correctly. But which passages do you mean?

SOCRATES Don't you know that he says of the river at Troy that fought in single combat with Hephaestus, "whom the gods call Xanthus, but men Scamander"?[6]

HERMOGENES I do.

SOCRATES [392a] Well then, don't you think it would be an impressive thing to know why it's more correct to call that river

5 Callias, son of Hipponicus, was reputedly the richest man in Athens and a lavish patron of the sophists.

Xanthus than Scamander? Or, if you like, take the bird of which he says, "the gods call it *chalkis*, but men *kymindis*": do you think it a trivial lesson, how much more correct it is for the same bird to be called *chalkis* than *kymindis*? Or Batieia and Myrine, [392b] and many other examples from this poet and others? But perhaps these things are too big for you and me to figure out. Scamandrius and Astyanax, though, which he says were the names of Hector's son, are more within human reach, I think, and easier to examine: what correctness does he say these names have? You surely know the lines that contain what I mean.[7]

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then which of the two names do you think Homer considered more correctly given to the boy, "Astyanax" or "Scamandrius"?

HERMOGENES [392c] I can't say.

SOCRATES Look at it this way, then. Suppose someone asked you who you think give names more correctly, the more intelligent or the less intelligent.

HERMOGENES The more intelligent, obviously, I'd say.

SOCRATES And do you think the women in our cities are more intelligent than the men, taking each sex as a whole?

HERMOGENES The men.

SOCRATES Then you know that Homer says Hector's little boy [392d] was called Astyanax by the Trojans. So obviously it was by the women that he was called Scamandrius, since the men, at any rate, called him Astyanax.

HERMOGENES So it seems.

SOCRATES And Homer, too, considered the Trojans wiser than their wives?

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6 In the *Iliad* the river god Scamander attacks Achilles and is beaten back by Hephaestus' fire; the quoted line is *Iliad* 20.74.

7 The bird line is *Iliad* 14.291. Batieia ("thicket hill") is the human name for a mound before Troy that the gods call the tomb of Myrine (*Iliad* 2.813–814).

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES So he thought "Astyanax" was more correctly given to the boy than "Scamandrius"?

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES Then let's look into why. Or does he himself show us the reason, and beautifully? He says: 392e "For he alone defended their city and long walls." That, it seems, is why it's correct to call the savior's son Astyanax, "lord (*anax*) of the city (*asty*)"—lord of the very thing his father was saving, as Homer says.[8]

HERMOGENES It seems so to me.

SOCRATES But why, exactly? I don't understand it myself yet. Do you, Hermogenes?

HERMOGENES No, by Zeus, I don't.

SOCRATES 393a Well, my good friend, didn't Homer give Hector his name too?

HERMOGENES Why do you ask?

SOCRATES Because it seems to me that this name is pretty much like Astyanax, and both look like Greek names. The word *anax* ("lord") and the name Hector mean almost the same thing: both are kingly names. Whatever a man is *anax* of, he is surely also *hektōr* ("holder") of, since obviously he rules 393b it, possesses it, and holds (*echei*) it. Or do you think I'm talking nonsense, and fooling even myself when I imagine I've come upon a trace, as it were, of Homer's view about the correctness of names?

HERMOGENES By Zeus, I don't think you're fooling yourself. You may well be onto something.

SOCRATES It seems only just to me, at any rate, to call a lion's offspring a lion and a horse's offspring a horse. I don't mean if something other than a horse is born from a horse, like a monster. 393c I mean whatever is by nature the offspring of its kind. If

8 The line (*Iliad* 22.507) is said of Hector, Astyanax's father.

a horse, contrary to nature, gives birth to a calf, the natural offspring of a cow, it should be called a calf, not a foal. Nor, I think, if what is born from a human being isn't human offspring, should it be called human; only if the offspring is human. And the same goes for trees and everything else. Don't you agree?

HERMOGENES I agree.

SOCRATES Good. But keep an eye on me, in case I trick you somehow. By the same reasoning, if some [393d] offspring is born of a king, it should be called a king. Whether the same thing is signified in these syllables or in others makes no difference. Nor does it matter if a letter is added or taken away, so long as the essence of the thing, as revealed in the name, still prevails.

HERMOGENES What do you mean?

SOCRATES Nothing complicated. You know that when we speak of the letters, we say their names, not the letters themselves—except for four: e, u, o and ō. To the [393e] other vowels and the consonants, as you know, we add other letters when we say them, and so make names. But as long as we include the letter's own power, plainly shown, it's correct to call it by the name that will reveal it to us. Take "beta." You see that adding eta, tau, and alpha did no harm: it didn't stop the whole name from revealing the nature of the letter the lawgiver wanted to name. That's how well he knew how to give the letters their names.[9]

HERMOGENES I think what you say is true.

SOCRATES [394a] Doesn't the same argument hold for a king? From a king, sooner or later, there'll be a king; from a good man, a good one; from a fine one, a fine one; and so with everything else—from each kind another offspring of the same sort, unless a monster is born. So they should be called by the same names. But the syllables can be varied, so that to the layman names that are the same seem different from each other. It's like doctors' drugs: dressed up with various colors and smells, they look dif-

9 In Plato's day these four vowels were named simply by their sounds; the names epsilon, upsilon, omicron and omega came later.

ferent to us though they're the same, while to the 394b doctor, since he looks at the power of the drugs, they look the same, and he isn't thrown by the additions. In the same way, perhaps, someone who knows about names looks at their power, and isn't thrown if a letter is added, or transposed, or taken away, or even if the power of the name lies in entirely different letters. Take what we were just saying: "Astyanax" and "Hector" have none of the same 394c letters except tau, and yet they signify the same thing. And what letters does "Archepolis" ("ruler of the city") share with them? Yet it reveals the same thing. There are many other names that signify nothing but king. Others again signify general, such as "Agis" ("leader"), "Polemarchus" ("war-leader"), and "Eupolemus" ("good at war"). And others are doctors' names, such as "Iatrocles" ("famed healer") and "Acesimbrotus" ("healer of mortals"). We could probably find a great many others that differ in their syllables and letters but say the same thing in their power. Does it seem so or not?

HERMOGENES 394d Absolutely.

SOCRATES So those born according to nature should be given the same names.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And what about those born contrary to nature, who come out as a kind of monster? For example, when an impious son is born to a good and god-fearing man. Isn't it just as in our earlier example, where a horse gave birth to a cow's offspring? Surely it ought to bear the name not of the parent but of the kind it belongs to?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES 394e So the impious son of a pious father should be given the name of his kind.

HERMOGENES That's right.

SOCRATES Not "Theophilus" ("dear to the gods"), it seems, or "Mnesitheus" ("mindful of the gods"), or anything of that sort,

but something that signifies the opposite—if names are to be correct.

HERMOGENES Absolutely, Socrates.

NAMES OF HEROES

Orestes, Agamemnon, Atreus, Pelops, Tantalus and Zeus each seem named for what they were.

SOCRATES Just as "Orestes," too, Hermogenes, may well be correct, whether it was chance that gave him the name or some poet. It shows the brutishness of his nature, his savagery, his wild mountain (*oros*) side.

HERMOGENES 395a So it seems, Socrates.

SOCRATES And his father's name also seems to accord with nature.

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES "Agamemnon" is likely to be the sort of man who toils and perseveres at whatever he has resolved, bringing his resolutions to completion through excellence. The sign of this is his staying (*monē*) at Troy, with all the suffering and endurance it took. So the name "Agamemnon" indicates that this man is admirable (*agastos*) for his 395b staying power (*epimonē*). And perhaps "Atreus" is correct too. His murder of Chrysippus, and the cruelties he committed against Thyestes—all these were damaging and ruinous (*atēra*) to excellence. So the name's meaning is slightly bent and veiled, so as not to reveal the man's nature to everyone. But to those who understand names, "Atreus" reveals well enough what it means. For whether you take it from the stubborn (*ateires*), 395c the fearless (*atreston*), or the ruinous (*atēron*), the name is correctly given to him in every way.[10] And I think Pelops, too, has a fitting name. It signifies that someone who sees only what is near deserves to be called by it.

10 Atreus killed his half-brother Chrysippus, and served his brother Thyestes the flesh of Thyestes' own sons.

HERMOGENES How so?

SOCRATES It's like what they say of him: when he murdered Myrtilus, he was quite unable to foresee or take thought for the distant consequences for his whole family, how much 395d misfortune he was filling it with. He saw only what was near and immediate—that's what *pelas* ("near") means—when he was so eager to win Hippodamia's hand by any means. As for Tantalus, anyone would think his name was given correctly and according to nature, if what they say about him is true.[11]

HERMOGENES What do they say?

SOCRATES The many terrible misfortunes that befell him while he was still alive, which in the end overturned his entire homeland. And then, after his death, in Hades, the swaying of the stone over his head—its *talanteia*— 395e which is remarkably in tune with his name. It's exactly as if someone wanting to call him *talantatos* ("most wretched") had disguised the word and said "Tantalus" instead. Something like that is the name chance and legend seem to have supplied for him. And his father, said to be Zeus, 396a also seems to have a superbly given name, though it isn't easy to grasp.[12] The name of Zeus is really just like a whole phrase. We divide it in two, and some of us use one part, some the other—some call him "Zēna," others "Dia." But put together into one, they reveal the god's nature, which is exactly what we say a name should be able to do. For there is no one more responsible for life (*zēn*), for us and for everything else, than the ruler and king of all things.[13] So it turns out that this god is correctly 396b named, as the one through whom (*di' hon*) all living things always have life (*zēn*). But the name, though it is one, has been split in two, as I say, into "Dia" and "Zēna." That he

11 Pelops bribed the charioteer Myrtilus to sabotage the chariot of Hippodamia's father in a race for her hand, then killed him; the dying Myrtilus cursed Pelops' house.

12 In one version of the myth, Tantalus is punished in Hades by a boulder hanging over his head, forever about to fall.

13 *Zēna* and *Dia* are both forms of Zeus's name in Greek; Socrates hears in them *zēn* ("to live") and *di' hon* ("through whom").

is the son of Cronus might sound like an insult to someone hearing it for the first time, but it's reasonable that Zeus should be the offspring of some great intelligence. For *koros* here signifies not "boy" but the purity and unblemished clarity of his mind (*nous*).[14] And Cronus is the son of Uranus, as the story goes. Now, sight directed upward is well called by this name, 396c *ourania* ("heavenly"), because it looks at the things above (*horōsa ta anō*). And from there, Hermogenes, the students of the heavens say, comes a pure mind, and so the heavens (*ouranos*) were correctly given their name. If I remembered Hesiod's genealogy, and which still earlier ancestors he gives them, I wouldn't have stopped explaining how correctly their names were given until I'd tested what this wisdom will do—whether it will give out or not. It has fallen on me so suddenly just now, 396d from I don't know where.

HERMOGENES Really, Socrates, you seem to me exactly like someone possessed who suddenly starts chanting oracles.

SOCRATES Yes, Hermogenes, and I mostly blame Euthyphro of Prospalta for its falling on me. I was with him for a long time this morning, lending him my ears. So it looks as if, in his possessed state, he's not only filled my ears with his superhuman wisdom but taken hold of my soul as well. So I think 396e this is what we should do: for today, make use of it and examine the rest of the names; but tomorrow, if you two agree, we'll exorcise it and purify ourselves, once we've found someone who's good at that sort of 397a purification, whether one of the priests or one of the sophists.[15]

HERMOGENES I'm all for it. I'd be very glad to hear the rest about names.

SOCRATES Then that's what we must do. Where would you like us to begin our examination, now that we've hit on a kind of out-

14 Socrates reads Kronos (Cronus) as *koros* ("pure") plus *nous* ("mind"); since *koros* normally means "boy," he adds the disclaimer.

15 Probably the self-styled religious expert of Plato's *Euthyphro*; Prospalta was his deme, or local district, in Attica.

line? We want to find out whether the names themselves will bear witness for us that each was not given just at random, but has [397b] some correctness. Now, the names of heroes and human beings might well deceive us. Many of them were given after the names of ancestors, and sometimes don't fit at all, as we were saying at the start; and many are given as if in prayer, like "Eutychides" ("lucky"), "Sosias" ("safe and sound"), "Theophilus," and plenty of others. I think we should leave names of that sort alone. We're most likely to find correctly given names among the things that always are and exist by nature. For it's here [397c] most of all that the giving of names ought to have been done with care. Perhaps some of them were even given by a power more divine than human.

HERMOGENES I think you're right, Socrates.

GODS, SPIRITS, HEROES AND HUMANS

Socrates explains the words for gods, spirits, heroes, human beings, soul and body.

SOCRATES Then isn't it only right to begin with the gods, and look at how the gods ever came to be correctly called by this very name, *theoi*?

HERMOGENES That makes sense.

SOCRATES Well, here's what I suspect. It seems to me that the first human beings in Greece believed only in those [397d] gods that many non-Greeks believe in now: the sun, the moon, the earth, the stars, and the heavens. Since they saw them all always on the move, running (*theonta*) their course, they named them *theoi* from this nature of theirs, running (*thein*). Later, when they came to know the other gods, they addressed them all by this name too. Is there anything true in what I'm saying, or nothing?

HERMOGENES There certainly seems to be.

SOCRATES Then what should we look at after this?

HERMOGENES Obviously spirits, heroes, and human beings.

SOCRATES [397e] Yes, truly, Hermogenes—what could the name *daimones* ("spirits") mean? See whether you think there's anything in what I say.

HERMOGENES Just tell me.

SOCRATES Do you know who Hesiod says the spirits are?

HERMOGENES I can't think.

SOCRATES Not even that he says the first race of human beings was a golden one?

HERMOGENES That much I do know.

SOCRATES Well, he says of it: "But since fate has covered over this race, [398a] they are called holy spirits beneath the earth, noble, warders-off of evil, guardians of mortal human beings."[16]

HERMOGENES Well, what of it?

SOCRATES I think he means that the golden race wasn't made of gold, but was good and fine. My evidence is that he says we are an iron race.

HERMOGENES That's true.

SOCRATES So don't you think that if anyone among people today [398b] is good, he'd say that person belongs to that golden race?

HERMOGENES Very likely.

SOCRATES And are good people anything other than people of understanding?

HERMOGENES People of understanding.

SOCRATES Then this, I think, is above all what he means by spirits. Because they had understanding and were knowing (*daēmones*), he named them *daimones*. And in fact in our old dialect this very word occurs. So he's right—he and the many other poets who say that when a good man dies he has a great portion and honor, and becomes a [398c] spirit, in keeping with the name

16 Hesiod, *Works and Days* 121–23.

for understanding. So I too lay it down that every man who is good is knowing (*daēmōn*), is divine (*daimonios*) both in life and in death, and is correctly called a spirit (*daimōn*).

HERMOGENES And I think, Socrates, I'm entirely with you on this. But what would "hero" (*hērōs*) be?

SOCRATES That's not very hard to grasp. Their name has been altered only slightly, and it shows that they were born from love (*erōs*).

HERMOGENES What do you mean?

SOCRATES Don't you know that the heroes are demigods?

HERMOGENES So what?

SOCRATES [398d] Surely they were all born when a god fell in love with a mortal woman or a mortal man with a goddess. If you consider this, too, in the old Attic dialect, you'll understand better. It will show you that the name has been only slightly altered from the name of love, from which the heroes were born, for the sake of making a name. Either that's what "heroes" means, or else that they were wise, skilled speakers (*rhētores*), clever, and dialecticians, good at asking questions (*erōtan*)—for *eirein* means "to speak." So, as we were just saying, when they're named in the Attic dialect, [398e] the heroes turn out to be speakers and questioners of a sort, so that the heroic tribe turns out to be a race of orators and sophists. But that's not the hard one to grasp. Harder is the name of human beings: why in the world are they called *anthrōpoi*? Or can you say?

HERMOGENES How could I, my good friend? Even if I were able to find something, I wouldn't strain myself, because I think you're more likely to find it than I am.

SOCRATES [399a] You're putting your faith in Euthyphro's inspiration, it seems.

HERMOGENES Obviously.

SOCRATES And you're right to. Even now I seem to have had a clever idea, and if I'm not careful, I'll be in danger of becoming wiser than I ought to before the day is out. Look at what I'm say-

ing. First, we need to bear in mind this point about names: we often insert letters and take others out, so that the name departs from what we mean, and we change the accents. Take *Dii philos* ("dear to Zeus"). So that [399b] it would become a name for us instead of a phrase, we took out one of its iotas and pronounced the middle syllable with a low pitch instead of a high one. With other names, conversely, we insert letters, and pronounce low-pitched syllables higher.[17]

HERMOGENES That's true.

SOCRATES Well, the name of human beings has undergone one of these changes, I think. It has become a name from a phrase, with one letter, alpha, taken out and the ending lowered in pitch.

HERMOGENES What do you mean?

SOCRATES [399c] This. The name *anthrōpos* ("human being") signifies that the other animals don't examine, or reason about, or look up at (*anathrei*) anything they see, whereas a human being, as soon as he has seen—that's what *opōpe* means—both looks up at and reasons about what he has seen. That's why the human being, alone among the animals, was correctly named *anthrōpos*: *anathrōn ha opōpe*, "one who looks up at what he has seen."

HERMOGENES What comes next, then? May I ask you something I'd be glad to find out?

SOCRATES Certainly.

HERMOGENES [399d] Well, it seems to me there's something that comes right after these. We speak, I suppose, of a human being's "soul" (*psychē*) and "body" (*sōma*).

SOCRATES Of course.

HERMOGENES Let's try to take these apart too, the way we did the earlier ones.

SOCRATES You mean examine how reasonably the soul has come by this name, and then the body?

17 *Dii philos* thus becomes the personal name Diphilus (*Diphilos*).

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Well, speaking off the cuff, I think those who named the soul had something like this in mind: that when it's present in the body, it is the cause of the body's living, supplying it with the power to 399e breathe and refreshing it (*anapsychon*), and that as soon as this refreshing force fails, the body perishes and dies. That, I think, is why they called it *psychē*. But if you like—wait a moment. I think I can make out something more persuasive than this, 400a at least to Euthyphro and his circle. They would scorn this one, I think, and consider it crude. But look at this one and see whether you like it too.

HERMOGENES Just tell me.

SOCRATES What do you think holds and carries the nature of the whole body, so that it lives and moves about, if not soul?

HERMOGENES Nothing else.

SOCRATES Well then, don't you believe Anaxagoras that the nature of everything else, too, is ordered and held by mind and soul?[18]

HERMOGENES I do.

SOCRATES 400b Then it would be a fine name to give this power, which carries (*ochei*) and holds (*echei*) nature (*physis*): *physechē*. And one may also, to be elegant, say *psychē*.

HERMOGENES Absolutely. And this one seems to me more expert than the other.

SOCRATES So it is. All the same, it does sound truly ridiculous when it's pronounced the way it was originally given.

HERMOGENES Well, what shall we say about the next one?

SOCRATES You mean the body?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES In many ways, I think—and if you bend it even a little, 400c in every way. Some people say it is the *sēma* ("tomb") of

the soul, as though the soul were buried in its present life. And because it is through the body that the soul signifies (*sēmainei*) whatever it signifies, on that ground too it is correctly called a *sēma* ("sign"). But I think it was most likely the followers of Orpheus who gave it this name. Their idea is that the soul is paying the penalty for whatever it is paying for, and has the body around it as an enclosure to keep it safe (*sōzētai*), like a prison. So the body is, just as its name says, the *sōma* of the soul until the soul has paid off what it owes, and there's no need to change even a single letter.[19]

THE NAMES OF THE GODS

Disclaiming knowledge of the gods, Socrates explains Hestia, Rhea, Cronus, Tethys, Poseidon, Pluto and Hades.

HERMOGENES 400d That seems to me well enough said, Socrates. But what about the names of the gods, like what you were saying just now about Zeus? Could we examine them the same way, and see on what principle of correctness their names were given?

SOCRATES Yes, by Zeus, Hermogenes, we could—if we had any sense. There is one way, the finest: to say that we know nothing about the gods, either about them or about the names they call themselves, whatever those may be. For clearly they, at least, call themselves by the true ones. 400e Then there's a second kind of correctness. In our prayers it's our custom to address the gods by whatever names, and from whatever origin, they like to be called. In the same way we should call them by those names ourselves, since we know nothing else. 401a That seems to me a fine custom. So, if you like, let's investigate as though we had first announced to the gods that we won't investigate anything about them, since we don't consider ourselves capable of it. We

18 Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (fifth century BC) taught that mind (*nous*) set the whole cosmos in order.

19 The Orphics were a religious movement that claimed the legendary singer Orpheus as its founder and taught that the soul is punished by being confined in the body.

will investigate human beings instead, and what opinion they held when they gave the gods their names. No god could resent that.

HERMOGENES Well, Socrates, I think you're being reasonable. Let's do that.

SOCRATES 401b Then shouldn't we begin with Hestia, as custom requires?

HERMOGENES It's only right, at any rate.

SOCRATES Then what would anyone say the person who named Hestia had in mind when he named her?

HERMOGENES By Zeus, I don't think that one's easy either.

SOCRATES Well, my good Hermogenes, it looks as though the first people to lay down names were no simpletons. They were some sort of stargazers and babblers.

HERMOGENES Why do you say so?

SOCRATES It's quite plain to me that the giving of names was the work of people like that, 401c and if you look closely at foreign names, you find what each one means just as well. Take what we call *ousia* ("being"). Some people call it *essia*, and others again *ōsia*. First, then, going by one of these names, *essia*, it makes sense that the being of things should be called *Hestia*. And since we say that whatever partakes of being *estin* ("is"), on this ground too it would be correctly called *Hestia*. It seems that we too called *ousia essia* in the old days. Moreover, if you think about the sacrifices, 401d you'd conclude that the name-makers understood things this way. For it's natural that people who called the being of all things *essia* should sacrifice to Hestia first, before all the other gods. Those who say *ōsia*, on the other hand, would pretty much hold, with Heraclitus, that all the things that are are on the move and nothing stays still. So the cause and origin of things is what pushes (*to ōthoun*), and that's why it's rightly named *ōsia*. Well, 401e let that much be said, coming from people who know nothing. After Hestia it's right to look at Rhea

and Cronus. And yet we've already gone through the name of Cronus. But maybe I'm talking nonsense.[20]

HERMOGENES Why do you say that, Socrates?

SOCRATES My good friend, I've just noticed a whole swarm of wisdom.

HERMOGENES What sort of swarm?

SOCRATES 402a It sounds quite ridiculous to say it, but I think it has a certain plausibility.

HERMOGENES What is it?

SOCRATES I seem to see Heraclitus saying some ancient pieces of wisdom, straight out of the days of Cronus and Rhea, things Homer said too.

HERMOGENES What do you mean?

SOCRATES Heraclitus says somewhere that "everything gives way and nothing stays put." He likens the things that are to the flow of a river and says, "You cannot step into the same river twice."

HERMOGENES So he does.

SOCRATES 402b Well then? Do you think that whoever gave the names "Rhea" and "Cronus" to the ancestors of the other gods had anything different in mind from Heraclitus? Do you suppose it was by chance that he gave both of them names of streams? Homer, likewise, speaks of "Ocean, origin of the gods, and mother Tethys," and so does Hesiod, I think. And Orpheus says somewhere, "Fair-flowing Ocean was the first to marry; 402c he wed his sister Tethys, born of the same mother." See how these agree with one another, and how they all point toward Heraclitus' views.[21]

HERMOGENES You seem to me to be onto something, Socrates. But I don't see what the name of Tethys means.

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20 Heraclitus of Ephesus (active around 500 BC) held that all things are in constant flux; Cratylus is presented as his follower.

21 Socrates hears *rhein* ("to flow") in *Rhea* and *krounos* ("spring") in *Kronos*.

SOCRATES That one practically tells you itself: it's the name of a spring in disguise. For what is sifted through (*diattōmenon*) and 402d what is strained (*ēthoumenon*) are images of a spring, and the name *Tēthys* is put together from both these words.

HERMOGENES That's clever, Socrates.

SOCRATES How could it not be? But what comes next? We've talked about Zeus.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Then let's talk about his brothers, Poseidon and Pluto, and the other name people call Pluto by.

HERMOGENES By all means.

SOCRATES Well, it seems to me Poseidon got his name 402e from the first person to name him because the nature of the sea held him back as he was walking and wouldn't let him go any further. It became a kind of fetter on his feet. So he named the god who rules over this power *Poseidōn*, as being a *posidesmos* ("foot-fetter"). The epsilon was perhaps put in to make it sound better. Or perhaps that isn't what it means. Perhaps at first it was pronounced with two lambdas instead of the sigma, 403a because the god knows many things. Or perhaps he was named "the shaker" from *seiein* ("to shake"), with the pi and the delta added.[22] Pluto got his name from his giving of wealth (*ploutos*), because wealth comes up out of the earth from below. As for *Haidēs*, most people seem to me to assume that the name refers to the unseen (*aides*), and because they fear the name they call him "Pluto."

HERMOGENES 403b And how does it look to you, Socrates?

SOCRATES I think people are mistaken in many ways about this god's power, and they fear him when they have no reason to. They're afraid because, once any of us has died, we stay there forever. And they're terrified, too, that the soul goes off to him

22 With two lambdas the name would be *Polleidōn*, suggesting *polla eidōs*, "knowing many things."

stripped of the body. But to me all of this seems to point the same way, both the god's office and his name.

HERMOGENES How so?

SOCRATES 403c I'll tell you how it looks to me, at any rate. Tell me: of the bonds that keep any living creature in any place, which is stronger, necessity or desire?

HERMOGENES Desire, by far, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then don't you think many people would escape from Hades if he didn't bind those who go there with the strongest bond?

HERMOGENES Obviously.

SOCRATES So it seems he binds them with some desire and not with necessity, if he binds them with the greatest bond.

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES Now, there are many desires, aren't there?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES 403d Then he binds them with the greatest of all desires, if he's going to hold them with the greatest bond.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And is there any desire greater than the one you feel when you're with someone and believe that through him you'll become a better man?

HERMOGENES By Zeus, none at all, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then let's say, Hermogenes, that this is why no one there wants to come back here, not even the Sirens themselves. 403e They and all the others have been put under a spell, so beautiful, it seems, are the words Hades knows how to speak. And by this account the god is a perfect sophist and a great benefactor to those who are with him. He even sends up so many good things to us here. That's how much he has to spare down there, and that's how he got the name "Pluto." Then again, he refuses to keep company with human beings while they still have their

bodies, and associates with them only 404a once the soul is pure of all the evils and desires that belong to the body. Doesn't that seem to you the mark of a philosopher? Of someone who has thought it through and seen that this way he can hold them by binding them with the desire for excellence, whereas if they still had the body's agitation and madness, not even his father Cronus could keep them with him, bound in those famous bonds of his?

HERMOGENES You may be onto something, Socrates.

SOCRATES 404b And the name *Haidēs*, Hermogenes, is far from coming from "the unseen." It's much more likely that the lawgiver called him *Haidēs* from his knowing (*eidenai*) all fine things.

APOLLO, ATHENA AND THE REST

Demeter, Hera, Persephone, Apollo, Artemis, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Athena, Hephaestus, Ares, Hermes and Pan.

HERMOGENES All right. And what do we say about Demeter, Hera, Apollo, Athena, Hephaestus, Ares, and the other gods?

SOCRATES Demeter seems to have been called *Dēmētēr* from her giving of food (*edōdē*), giving it like a mother (*mētēr*). Hera is a kind of *eratē* ("lovely one"), 404c just as Zeus is in fact said to have married her out of love. Or perhaps the lawgiver, with his head in the heavens, named the air (*aēr*) *Hēra* in disguise, putting the beginning at the end. You'd see it if you said Hera's name over and over. Then there's *Pherrephatta*. Many people are afraid of this name too, and of "Apollo," out of inexperience, it seems, in the correctness of names. They change it and look at the form *Phersephonē*, and it seems frightening to them. But in fact it reveals 404d that the goddess is wise. Since things are in motion (*pheromena*), what grasps them, touches (*epaphōn*) them, and is able to keep up with them would be wisdom.[23] So because

23 *Pherrephatta* is the Athenian form of Persephone's name. *Phersephonē* suggests *pherein phonon*, "bringing death."

of her wisdom and her touching of what is in motion, the goddess would correctly be called *Pherepapha*, or something like that. That's why Hades, being wise, keeps company with her, because she's like that. But nowadays people bend her name, valuing a pleasant sound above the truth, and so they call her *Pherrephatta*. The same has happened with 404e Apollo, as I say: many people are frightened of the god's name, as though it signified something terrible. Or haven't you noticed?

HERMOGENES Of course I have, and you're right.

SOCRATES But in fact, as I see it, the name is beautifully suited to the god's power.

HERMOGENES How so?

SOCRATES I'll try to explain how it looks to me. There's no 405a single name that could better suit the god's four powers, so as to touch on all of them and in a way make plain his music, his prophecy, his medicine, and his archery.

HERMOGENES Go on, then. It sounds like a strange name you're describing.

SOCRATES No, a harmonious one, since the god is a musician. First of all, purification and purifying rites, in medicine and in prophecy alike, and fumigations with sulfur, both with medicinal 405b drugs and with prophetic ones, and the baths that go with such things, and the sprinklings—all of these would have one effect: to make a person pure in both body and soul. Isn't that so?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And isn't this the god who purifies, who washes away (*apolouōn*) and releases (*apolyōn*) people from evils like these?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES So, with reference to his releasings and washings, 405c since he is the physician for such things, he would correctly be called *Apolouōn* ("the one who washes away"). With reference to prophecy, and to truth and simplicity—for these are the same

thing—he would be most correctly called by the name the Thessalians use for him: all the Thessalians call this god *Aploun* ("the simple one"). And because he is always (*aei*) master of his shots (*bolai*) in archery, he is *Aeiballōn* ("the ever-shooting"). With reference to music, we have to understand that alpha often signifies "together" (*homou*), as in *akolouthos* ("follower") and *akoitis* ("wife"). Here it signifies moving together (*homou polēsis*), both of the things around the heavens, the revolutions they call *poloi* ("poles"), and 405d of the harmony in song, which is called concord. For all these things, as the experts in music and astronomy say, revolve (*polei*) together by a kind of harmony. And this god presides over the harmony, making them all move together (*homopolōn*), among gods and among human beings alike. So just as we called the *homokeleuthos* ("fellow traveler") and the *homokoitis* ("bedfellow") *akolouthos* and *akoitis*, changing *homo-* to *a-*, so we called the one who was *homopolōn Apollōn*, 405e putting in a second lambda, because otherwise it would have sounded the same as an ill-omened word.[24] Even now some people suspect this, because they don't examine the meaning of the name correctly, and they fear it as if it signified some kind of destruction. 406a But in fact, as we said just now, the name was given so as to touch on all the god's powers: simple, ever-shooting, washing away, moving together. As for the Muses, and music generally, it seems the name-maker named them from *mōsthai* ("to strive after"), from inquiry and philosophy. The name *Lētō* comes from the goddess's gentleness, from her being willing (*ethelēmōn*) to do whatever anyone asks. Or perhaps it's as foreigners call her, since many call her *Lēthō*. In that case it seems she's called *Lēthō* 406b by those who use that name because her character has nothing rough about it but is mild and smooth (*leion*). *Artemis* seems to come from her being *artemes* ("sound, intact") and orderly, because of her desire for virginity. Or perhaps whoever named the goddess called her "expert in excellence" (*aretēs histōr*). Or maybe it's because she hated the plowing (*arotos*) of a woman by a man. Whoever gave the goddess

24 With a single lambda, *Apolōn* would sound like *apolōn*, "destroying."

this name gave it either for one of these reasons or for all of them.

HERMOGENES What about Dionysus and Aphrodite?

SOCRATES Those are big questions, son of Hipponicus. But in fact the names of these gods can be explained in two ways, seriously [406c] and playfully. For the serious explanation you'll have to ask someone else, but nothing stops me from going through the playful one, since the gods love a joke too. Dionysus would be the one who gives (*didous*) wine (*oinos*), playfully called *Didoinysos*. And wine, since it makes most drinkers think (*oiesthai*) they have sense (*nous*) when they don't, would most justly be called *oionous*. As for Aphrodite, it isn't worth contradicting Hesiod. [406d] We should agree that she was called *Aphroditē* because she was born from the foam (*aphros*).

HERMOGENES But you're an Athenian, Socrates, so you surely won't forget Athena—or Hephaestus and Ares either.

SOCRATES That would hardly be likely.

HERMOGENES No, it wouldn't.

SOCRATES Well, one of her names isn't hard to account for.

HERMOGENES Which one?

SOCRATES We call her *Pallas,* don't we?

HERMOGENES Of course.

SOCRATES We'd be right, I think, to suppose this name was given from the dance in armor. [406e] For lifting oneself or something else up, whether off the ground or in [407a] the hands, is what we call *pallein* and *pallesthai* ("to brandish" and "to leap"), or making something dance and dancing.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES So that's where *Pallas* comes from.

HERMOGENES And rightly too. But how do you explain her other name?

SOCRATES *Athena*?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES That's a weightier matter, my friend. It seems the ancients thought about Athena the way present-day experts on Homer do. 407b Most of them, when they interpret the poet, say that he made Athena mind (*nous*) and thought (*dianoia*) personified. And the maker of names seems to have had some such idea about her. Speaking of her still more grandly as god's intellect (*theou noēsis*), he says, as it were, that she is *ha theonoa* ("the mind of god"), using alpha in place of eta, the foreign way, and removing the iota and the sigma. Or perhaps not that. Perhaps he called her *Theonoē* because she understands divine things (*ta theia noei*) better than anyone else. And nothing rules out that he wanted to call the goddess *Ēthonoē*, as being understanding in character (*ēthos*). 407c Then either he himself or others later altered it to something finer, as they thought, and called her *Athēnaa*.

HERMOGENES And what about Hephaestus? How do you explain him?

SOCRATES You're asking about the noble "master of light" (*phaeos histōr*)?

HERMOGENES It looks that way.

SOCRATES Isn't it obvious to everyone that he is *Phaistos*, with an eta tacked on in front?

HERMOGENES Probably—unless, it seems, you come up with yet another idea.

SOCRATES Well, so that I don't, ask me about Ares.

HERMOGENES I'm asking.

SOCRATES 407d Well, if you like, he'd be *Arēs* from the male (*arren*) and the manly. Or again, from what is hard and unbending, which is called *arraton* ("rigid"), and on that ground too it would suit a god of war in every way to be called *Arēs*.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then, for the gods' sake, let's get away from the gods, since I'm afraid to discuss them. But put any other names you like to me, "so you may see what" Euthyphro's "horses are like."[25]

HERMOGENES 407e I will, but first just one more question, about Hermes, since Cratylus says I'm not Hermogenes. Let's try to examine *Hermēs* and see what the name means, so we can also find out whether he has a point.

SOCRATES Well, this name *Hermēs* seems to have something to do with speech. Being an interpreter (*hermēneus*) and a messenger, and 408a being thievish and deceptive in words, and good at bargaining—this whole business has to do with the power of speech. Now, as we were saying earlier, *eirein* ("to speak") is the use of speech, and *emēsato*, a word Homer uses in many places, means "he devised." From both of these, then, the lawgiver, as it were, instructs 408b us about this god who devised speaking and speech—and speaking is *eirein*: "Human beings, the one who devised speaking (*eirein emēsato*) would justly be called *Eiremēs* by you." Nowadays, prettifying the name, as we suppose, we call him *Hermēs*. And Iris too seems to have been named from *eirein*, because she was a messenger.

HERMOGENES By Zeus, then I think Cratylus is right when he says I'm not Hermogenes. I'm certainly no good at devising speeches.

SOCRATES And it makes sense, my friend, that Pan, the double-natured, is Hermes' son.

HERMOGENES 408c How so?

SOCRATES You know that speech signifies everything (*to pan*), and is always circling and revolving (*polei*), and that it is double, true and false.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

25 Adapted from Homer, *Iliad* 5.221–222; Socrates has earlier claimed to be inspired by the seer Euthyphro.

SOCRATES Then the true part of it is smooth and divine and dwells above among the gods, while the false part dwells below among most human beings, and is rough and *tragikon* ("goatish," but also "tragic"). For it's down here, in the tragic life, that most myths and falsehoods are found.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES So the one who reveals everything (*pan*) and is always moving it (*aei polōn*) would rightly be 408d *Pan aipolos* ("Pan the goatherd"), the double-natured son of Hermes, smooth in his upper parts and rough and goat-shaped below. And Pan is either speech or the brother of speech, if he really is Hermes' son, and there's nothing surprising in a brother resembling his brother. But as I was saying, my blessed friend, let's get away from the gods.

THE HEAVENLY BODIES

Sun, moon, month and stars, then fire, air, ether, earth, the seasons and the year.

HERMOGENES From gods like these, Socrates, if you like. But what's stopping you from going through things of another sort, such as the sun, the moon, the stars, earth, ether, air, fire, 408e water, the seasons, and the year?

SOCRATES That's a lot you're ordering me to do. Still, if it will please you, I'm willing.

HERMOGENES Oh, it will.

SOCRATES So what do you want first? Shall we go through the sun, as you said?

HERMOGENES By all means.

SOCRATES Well, it looks as though it would become clearer if 409a one used the Doric name, because the Dorians call it *halios*. So *halios* might come from its *halizein* ("gathering") people together in one place when it rises. Or it might come from its always *heilein* ("rolling") around the earth as it goes. Or it could

be because, as it goes, it *poikillei* ("makes many-colored") the things that grow from the earth, and *poikillein* and *aiolein* are the same thing.[26]

HERMOGENES And what about *selēnē* ("moon")?

SOCRATES Now this name looks as if it puts Anaxagoras in a tight spot.

HERMOGENES Why's that?

SOCRATES It seems to show that what he was saying only recently is actually much older, 409b namely that the moon gets its light from the sun.

HERMOGENES How so?

SOCRATES *Selas* ("gleam") and *phōs* ("light") are the same thing, I take it.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And this light around the moon is always *neon* and *henon* ("new" and "old"), if what Anaxagoras' followers say is true. As the sun goes around the moon in its circle, it's always casting new light on it, while the light from the previous month is still there as old light.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES And lots of people call it *Selanaia*.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Since it always has a *selas* that is *neon* and *henon*, *Selaenoneoaeia* 409c would be the most fitting of all names to call it. Squeezed together, it's been called *Selanaia*.

HERMOGENES That name belongs in a dithyramb, Socrates! But what do you say about the month and the stars?[27]

SOCRATES *Meis* ("month") would be correctly called *meiēs*, from *meiousthai* ("to wane"). The *astra* ("stars") seem to take their

26 The ordinary Attic word for "sun" is *hēlios*; the Dorians said *halios*. *Aiolein* is meant to echo *hēlios*.

name from *astrapē* (“lightning”). And because *astrapē anastrephei ta ōpa* (“turns the eyes upward”), it would be *anastrōpē*. Now it’s been prettified and is called *astrapē*.

HERMOGENES And what about fire and water?

SOCRATES 409d *Pyr* (“fire”) has me stumped. Either Euthyphro’s muse has deserted me, or this one is extremely difficult. So consider the device I bring in for all the cases like this that stump me.

HERMOGENES What device?

SOCRATES I’ll tell you. Answer me this: could you say in what way *pyr* gets its name?

HERMOGENES No, by Zeus, I couldn’t.

SOCRATES Then consider what I suspect about it. It occurs to me 409e that the Greeks, especially those who live under non-Greek rule, have taken many names from non-Greeks.

HERMOGENES So what?

SOCRATES If someone tried to work out how these names were fittingly given according to the Greek language, and not according to the language the name actually comes from, you know he’d be stumped.

HERMOGENES Naturally.

SOCRATES 410a Well then, see whether this name *pyr* isn’t something foreign as well. It isn’t easy to connect it with the Greek language, and the Phrygians plainly call it that, with a slight variation. The same goes for *hydōr* (“water”), *kynes* (“dogs”), and many others.[28]

HERMOGENES That’s so.

SOCRATES So we mustn’t force these, since one could still say something about them. That’s how I’m setting fire and water 410b aside. But air, Hermogenes: is it called *aēr* because it *airei*

27 A dithyramb was a choral song to Dionysus, notorious for its bombastic compound words.
28 The Phrygians were a people of west-central Asia Minor.

("lifts") things off the earth? Or because it *aei rhei* ("always flows")? Or because wind arises from it as it flows? After all, the poets call the winds *aētai*. So perhaps the name means *aētorrhoun* ("wind-flow"), as if one said *pneumatorrhoun*, and that's what the name-maker means when he says it is *aēr*. As for *aithēr* ("upper air"), I understand it something like this: because it always *thei* ("runs"), flowing around the air, it would rightly be called *aeitheēr*. And *gē* ("earth") shows what it means better if one 410c calls it *gaia*. *Gaia* would correctly be called "the one who gives birth," as Homer says, since by *gegaasin* he means "have been born." Very well. So what came next on our list?

HERMOGENES The seasons, Socrates, and the two words for "year," *eniautos* and *etos*.

SOCRATES Well, *hōrai* ("seasons") should be pronounced the old Attic way, if you want to know the likely explanation. They are HORAI because they *horizein* ("mark off") winters and summers, the winds, and the crops that come from the earth; and as things that mark off they would rightly be called *horai*. 410d *Eniautos* and *etos* are probably one thing. Take what brings to light each of the things that grow and come into being in its turn, and examines it within itself. Earlier we saw Zeus's name split in two, with some calling him *Zēna* and others *Dia*. In the same way, some here call this *eniautos*, because it does this *en heautōi* ("within itself"), and others *etos*, because it *etazei* ("examines"). The whole phrase is *en heautōi etazon* ("examining within itself"), and this single thing is addressed in two ways, so that two names, *eniautos* and 410e *etos*, have come from one phrase.[29]

HERMOGENES Well, Socrates, you really are making great strides.

SOCRATES I think I must already look as though I'm driving far down the road of wisdom.

HERMOGENES You certainly do.

29 Old Attic spelling used H for the rough breathing and O for both short and long o, so the word was written HORAI, which suits *horizein*.

SOCRATES You'll soon say so even more.

WORDS FOR WISDOM AND EXCELLENCE

Understanding, knowledge, wisdom and the good seem named by people who thought everything moves.

HERMOGENES 411a Well, after names of this kind, I'd be glad to see by what correctness those fine names concerned with excellence were given, such as *phronēsis* ("understanding"), *synesis* ("comprehension"), *dikaiosynē* ("justice"), and all the rest of that kind.

SOCRATES You're stirring up no trivial family of names, my friend. Still, since I've put on the lion's skin, I mustn't lose my nerve. It seems I have to examine *phronēsis*, *synesis*, *gnōmē* ("judgment"), *epistēmē* ("knowledge"), and all the other 411b fine names you mention.[30]

HERMOGENES We certainly mustn't give up before we start.

SOCRATES And, by the dog, I don't think the hunch that struck me just now is a bad one. The very ancient people who gave names were, more than anything, like most of our wise men today: from constantly spinning around as they search for how things are, they get dizzy, and then things seem to them to be going around and to be in motion in every 411c way. And they don't blame the condition inside themselves for this opinion. Instead they hold that things themselves are by nature like this: that nothing in them is stable or firm, but they are flowing and moving and always full of every kind of motion and coming-to-be. I say this because it occurred to me in connection with all the names we've just mentioned.

HERMOGENES How's that, Socrates?

30 The lion's skin was the emblem of Heracles; Socrates casts himself as a hero taking on a labor.

SOCRATES Perhaps you didn't notice that the names just mentioned are given entirely on the assumption that things are moving and flowing and coming to be.

HERMOGENES I hadn't really thought about it.

SOCRATES 411d Well, to start with, the first one we mentioned is given entirely as if to things of that sort.

HERMOGENES Which one?

SOCRATES *Phronēsis*. It is *phoras kai rhou noēsis* ("the understanding of motion and flow"). One could also take it as *onēsis phoras* ("the benefit of motion"), but either way it has to do with being in motion. And if you like, *gnōmē* plainly indicates *gonēs skepsis kai nōmēsis* ("the examining and pondering of begetting"), since *nōman* ("to ponder") and *skopein* ("to examine") are the same thing. Or if you like, *noēsis* ("thought") itself is *tou neou hesis* ("the longing for the new"). For things to be new signifies 411e that they are always coming to be, so the person who gave the name *neoesis* is indicating that the soul longs for this. In the old days it wasn't called *noēsis*: instead of the eta you had to say two epsilons, *noeesis*. And *sōphrosynē* ("moderation") is the *sōtēria* ("preservation") of what we've just examined, 412a understanding. And *epistēmē* indicates that the soul worth talking about *hepetai* ("follows") things as they move, neither falling behind nor running ahead. So we ought to insert the epsilon and call it *hepeïstēmē*. *Synesis*, in turn, might look like a kind of reckoning together, a *syllogismos*. But when it says *synienai* ("to comprehend"), it turns out to say exactly the same thing as *epistasthai* ("to know"), because *synienai* says that 412b the soul travels together with things. And *sophia* ("wisdom") signifies touching motion. This one is rather obscure and foreign, but we must remember from the poets that, again and again, when anything starts to move forward quickly, they say *esythē* ("it rushed"). There was even a famous Laconian named *Sous*, which is what the Spartans call a swift rush. So *sophia* signifies the touching of this motion, on the assumption that things are in motion. 412c And *agathon* ("good"): this name is meant to be given

to what is *agaston* ("admirable") in all of nature. Since things are in motion, there is speed in them and there is slowness. So it isn't everything fast but some part of it that is admirable. This name, *t'agathon,* then, is given to the admirable part of the *thoos* ("swift").

WHAT IS THE JUST?

Justice is named for what passes through all things, but no one can say what that is.

SOCRATES As for *dikaiosynē*, it's easy to guess that this name is given to the *synesis* ("comprehension") of the *dikaion* ("just"). But *dikaion* itself is difficult. In fact it seems to be agreed up to a point 412d by many people, and after that it's disputed. Those who think that the universe is in motion suppose that most of it is the kind of thing that does nothing but move along, and that through all of this passes something by means of which everything that comes to be comes to be. This, they say, is the swiftest and the finest thing there is. For it couldn't pass through all that is unless it were so fine that nothing could keep it out, and so swift that it treated everything else as if it were standing still. Since, then, it governs all the 412e other things by *diaïon* ("passing through") them, it was rightly given the name *dikaion*, taking on the sound of kappa to make it easier to say. Up to this point, then, many people agree that what we were just describing 413a is the just. But I, Hermogenes, being persistent about it, have learned all this in secret teachings: that this is the just and the cause, since the cause is that through which something comes to be. And someone told me that it was correct to call it *Dia* ("Zeus") for this reason. But after hearing all this, when I gently ask them all the same, "Then what on earth is the just, my excellent friend, if that's how things are?" they think I'm now asking more than is proper and jumping past the 413b landing pit. They tell me I've been told enough, and in trying to satisfy me they each start saying different things, and they no longer agree. One says that the just is the sun, since it alone governs the

things that are by *diaïon* ("passing through") them and *kaon* ("burning") them.[31] So when I happily pass this on to someone, as if I'd heard something fine, he laughs at me when he hears it and asks whether I think there's nothing just among human beings once 413c the sun has set. So I press him to say what he thinks it is, and he says it's fire. But that isn't easy to understand. Another says it isn't fire itself but the heat itself that is in fire. Another says he laughs at all of these, and that the just is what Anaxagoras says, namely mind. For he says that mind, being its own master and mixed with nothing, orders all things by passing through all of them. And at that point, my friend, I'm in much greater perplexity than before I tried to learn 413d what on earth the just is. Still, as far as the point of our inquiry goes, the name at any rate appears to have been given to it for these reasons.

HERMOGENES It seems to me, Socrates, that you've heard this from someone and aren't just making it up as you go.

SOCRATES And the rest?

HERMOGENES Not really.

SOCRATES Then listen. Perhaps I can trick you into thinking that I haven't heard the rest from anyone either. After justice, what's left for us? Courage, I think; we haven't gone through that yet. Injustice, 413e clearly, is a hindrance of what passes through. And *andreia* ("courage") signifies that courage got its name in battle; and battle in what is, if what is flows, is nothing but a counter-flow. So if you take the delta out of the name *andreia*, the name *anreia* itself indicates what it does. Clearly, then, courage isn't the counter-flow to every flow, but to the flow running contrary 414a to the just; otherwise courage wouldn't be praised. And *arrhen* ("male") and *anēr* ("man") refer to something close to this, to the *anō rhoē* ("upward flow"). And *gynē* ("woman") seems to me to mean *gonē* ("birth").[32] And *thēly* ("female") seems to be

31 "Jumping past the pit" is a long-jump image: overshooting the dug-out landing area, that is, going beyond the limits.

32 *Anreia* suggests *ana* ("up," "against") and *rhein* ("to flow"): a flowing against.

named from *thēlē* (“nipple”). And is *thēlē* so called, Hermogenes, because it makes things *tethēlenai* (“flourish”), as watered plants do?

HERMOGENES It looks that way, Socrates.

SOCRATES And *thallein* (“to bloom”) itself seems to me to depict the growth of the young, because it’s quick and sudden. 414b That’s just what the name-maker imitated with the name, putting it together from *thein* (“to run”) and *hallesthai* (“to leap”). But you aren’t watching me—I’m practically running off the track once I hit smooth ground. And we still have plenty left of the names that seem important.

HERMOGENES That’s true.

SOCRATES One of which is to see what on earth *technē* (“craft”) means.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Doesn’t it signify *hexis nou* (“possession of mind”), if you take away the tau 414c and put an omicron between the chi and the nu, and between the nu and the eta?[33]

HERMOGENES That’s quite a strain, Socrates.

SOCRATES My dear fellow, don’t you know that the primary names given have long since been buried by people who want to dress them up in tragic style? They add letters and take them out for the sake of euphony, and twist them in every direction, partly for embellishment and partly through the passage of time. Take *katoptron* (“mirror”): don’t you think it odd that the rho has been put in? I think this is the sort of thing done by people who care nothing for 414d truth and only for how the words feel in the mouth. By piling more and more onto the primary names, they end up making it impossible for a single human being to understand what the name means. That’s how they call the Sphinx *Sphinx* instead of *Phix*, and there are many other examples.

33 The result, *echonoē*, suggests *echein noun*, “having mind.”

HERMOGENES That's so, Socrates.

SOCRATES On the other hand, if you allow people to put into names and take out of them whatever they like, it will be all too easy, and anyone could fit any name to any thing.

HERMOGENES 414e That's true.

SOCRATES True indeed. But I think you, as our wise supervisor, must keep a watch on due measure and plausibility.

HERMOGENES I'd like to.

SOCRATES And I'd like that with you, Hermogenes. But don't be 415a too exacting, my good friend, "lest you sap me of my strength." I'm coming to the summit of what I've been saying, once we've looked at *mēchanē* ("contrivance") after *technē*. *Mēchanē* seems to me to be a sign of *anein epi poly* ("achieving a great deal"), since *mēkos* ("length") in a way signifies "a great deal." So the name *mēchanē* is made up of these two, *mēkos* and *anein*. But, as I was just saying, we must get to the summit of what has been said: we have to look into what the names *aretē* ("excellence") and *kakia* ("badness") 415b mean. One of them I can't yet make out, but the other seems to me perfectly clear, since it fits with everything that came before.[34] Since things are *ionta* ("going"), everything that is *kakōs ion* ("going badly") would be *kakia*. And when this going badly toward things is in the soul, it has the name for the whole, *kakia*, most of all. What going badly is, I think, is also shown in *deilia* ("cowardice"), which we haven't gone through yet but 415c skipped over, though we should have examined it after courage; and I think we've skipped over many others too. Well, *deilia* signifies that it is a strong *desmos* ("bond") of the soul, since *lian* ("too much") is a kind of strength. So *deilia* would be the excessive and greatest bond of the soul. Just as *aporia* ("having no way through") is an evil, and so, it seems, is everything that gets in the way of going and traveling. This, then, is apparently what going badly shows:

34 The quotation is from Homer, *Iliad* 6.265, where Hector refuses the wine his mother offers him.

traveling held back and hindered. And when a soul has this, it becomes full of *kakia*. If *kakia* is the name for things like this, *aretē* would be the opposite. It would signify, first, 415d *euporia* ("an easy way through"), and then that the flow of the good soul is always unbound. So this name, it seems, was given to what always flows unrestrained and unhindered. It would be correct to call it *aeirheitē* ("ever-flowing"), but perhaps it means *hairetē* ("choiceworthy"), since this is the most choiceworthy condition there is; and it's been squeezed together and is called *aretē*. And maybe you'll say I'm making things up again. But I say that if what I said before about *kakia* is correct, 415e then this name *aretē* is correct too.

HERMOGENES 416a And *kakon* ("bad"), which you've used to explain many of the earlier names: what could that name mean?

SOCRATES Something strange, by Zeus, it seems to me, and hard to make out. So I'll bring that device of mine to bear on this one too.

HERMOGENES Which one?

SOCRATES Saying that this one too is something foreign.

HERMOGENES And you may well be right. But if you agree, let's leave these and try to see how *kalon* ("beautiful," "fine") and *aischron* ("shameful") are reasonably named.

SOCRATES Well, it already seems to me 416b perfectly clear what *aischron* means, since it too fits with what came before. The name-maker seems to me to disparage, at every turn, whatever hinders things and *ischon* ("holds them back") from their flow. And here he gave the name *aeischoroun* to what *aei ischei ton rhoun* ("always holds back the flow"). But now they've squeezed it together and call it *aischron*.

HERMOGENES And what about *kalon*?

SOCRATES That's harder to understand. And yet it says it outright: it's been altered only in its accent and in the length of the omicron.

HERMOGENES How so?

SOCRATES This name seems to be a name for *dianoia* ("thought").

HERMOGENES What do you mean?

SOCRATES 416c Tell me, what do you think is the cause of each thing's being *klēthēnai* ("called") what it is? Isn't it whatever gave the names?

HERMOGENES Of course, I suppose.

SOCRATES And wouldn't this be the thought of gods, or of human beings, or of both?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And isn't what *kalesan* ("called") things and what *kaloun* ("calls") them one and the same thing, namely thought?

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES And whatever mind and thought produce is praiseworthy, and whatever they don't is blameworthy?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES 416d Now, what practices medicine produces works of medicine, and what practices carpentry produces works of carpentry? Or how would you put it?

HERMOGENES That's how I'd put it.

SOCRATES And so what *kaloun* ("calls") produces *kala* ("fine things")?

HERMOGENES It must, surely.

SOCRATES And this, we say, is thought?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES So this name *kalon* is rightly a name for the understanding that produces the sort of things we call fine and welcome.

HERMOGENES Apparently.

PROFIT, HARM AND THE PASSIONS

Words for profit and harm, then pleasure, pain, desire, love and opinion, are traced to flow.

SOCRATES 416e So what do we still have left of this kind?

HERMOGENES The ones connected with the good and the fine: *sympheronta* ("advantageous"), 417a *lysitelounta* ("profitable"), *ōphelima* ("beneficial"), *kerdalea* ("gainful"), and their opposites.

SOCRATES Well, by now you could probably find *sympheron* for yourself if you looked back at what we said earlier, since it seems to be a sibling of *epistēmē*. It shows nothing other than the soul's moving along together with things. And what is done by something like that seems to have been called *sympheronta* and *symphora* from *symperipheresthai* ("being carried around together"). And *kerdaleon* comes from 417b *kerdos* ("gain"). *Kerdos* shows what it means if you put a nu back into the name in place of the delta, since it names the good in another way. Because the good *kerannytai* ("is mixed") into everything as it passes through, the name-maker named this power of it when he gave the name. But by putting in a delta in place of the nu, he pronounced it *kerdos*.

HERMOGENES And what about *lysiteloun* ("profitable")?

SOCRATES It seems, Hermogenes, that he doesn't mean it the way tradespeople use the word, of something that pays back (*apolyē*) its outlay. That isn't the sense in which, 417c I think, he says *lysiteloun*. Rather, the good is the swiftest of all that is. It doesn't let things stand still, or let the motion of their being carried along reach an end (*telos*) and halt and stop. Instead it always releases (*lyei*) any end that tries to arise in that motion, and keeps it unceasing and immortal. That, I think, is why he applied the name *lysiteloun* to the good: he called what releases the end of motion *lysiteloun*. *Ōphelimon* ("beneficial") is a foreign name, from *ophellein*, which Homer uses in many places. It's a name for increasing and making.

HERMOGENES 417d And how do we stand with the opposites of these?

SOCRATES The ones that simply negate them don't need to be gone through, as far as I can see.

HERMOGENES Which ones are those?

SOCRATES *Asymphoron* ("disadvantageous"), *anōpheles* ("unbeneficial"), *alysiteles* ("unprofitable"), and *akerdes* ("ungainful").

HERMOGENES That's true.

SOCRATES But *blaberon* ("harmful") and *zēmiōdes* ("damaging") are another matter.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES Now, *blaberon* says that it is what 417e harms (*blapton*) the flow (*rhous*). *Blapton*, in turn, signifies what wants to fasten (*boulomenon haptein*). Fastening is the same as binding, and binding is something he finds fault with everywhere. So what wants to fasten the flow would most correctly be *boulapteroun*. But I think it has been prettied up and is called *blaberon*.

HERMOGENES The names certainly come out intricate when you handle them, Socrates! Just now, when you produced that name 418a *boulapteroun*, you sounded to me as if you were puffing out the prelude to the Hymn of Athena on the pipes.[35]

SOCRATES I'm not to blame, Hermogenes. The people who gave the name are.

HERMOGENES True. But then what would *zēmiōdes* be?

SOCRATES What on earth could *zēmiōdes* be? Look, Hermogenes, how right I was when I said that people change the meanings of names drastically by adding and removing letters. A very small twist is sometimes enough to 418b make a name mean the opposite. Take *deon* ("what is needful"), for example. It came to

35 The Hymn (*nomos*) of Athena was a famous solo piece for the aulos, a reed pipe. Hermogenes is joking that the long, puffed-out word sounds like its overture.

my mind just now, and this word reminded me of what I was about to tell you. This fine new pronunciation of ours has turned both *deon* and *zēmiōdes* around to indicate the opposite, obscuring what they mean. The old pronunciation, by contrast, shows what each name intends.

HERMOGENES What do you mean?

SOCRATES I'll tell you. You know that our ancestors made a great deal of use of iota and delta, and not least 418c the women, who more than anyone preserve the old way of speaking. Nowadays, though, people turn iota into epsilon or eta, and delta into zeta, on the grounds that these sound grander.

HERMOGENES How so?

SOCRATES For example, the very earliest people called day *himera*, later ones *hemera*, and people now say *hēmera*.

HERMOGENES That's so.

SOCRATES Then do you know that of these names only the old one reveals the thought of the person who gave it? Light came out of the darkness to 418d human beings who welcomed it and longed (*himeirousin*) for it, and so they named it *himera*.

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES But now that it's been dressed up in tragic grandeur, you couldn't even work out what *hēmera* means. Some people actually think day got this name because it makes things gentle (*hēmera*).

HERMOGENES I think so too.

SOCRATES And you know that the ancients called a yoke (*zygon*) a *duogon*.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES *Zygon* shows nothing. *Duogon*, though, was rightly named for binding two (*duo*) 418e together for hauling. Now it's *zygon*. A great many other words are like this.

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES In the same way, then, first of all *deon*, pronounced as it is now, means the opposite of all the names connected with the good. Though it is a kind of good, *deon* appears to be a bond (*desmos*) and a hindrance to motion, a sort of brother of *blaberon*.

HERMOGENES It certainly does look that way, Socrates.

SOCRATES But not if you use the old name, which is much 419a more likely to have been given correctly than the present one. If you put back iota in place of epsilon, as people did long ago, it will agree with the earlier names for good things. Then it signifies the good as *diïon* ("going through"), not as *deon*, and going through is precisely what he praises. That way the one who gave the names doesn't contradict himself. *Deon*, *ōphelimon*, *lysiteloun*, *kerdaleon* ("gainful"), *agathon* ("good"), *sympheron* ("advantageous"), and *euporon* ("resourceful") all turn out to be the same thing under different names. Each signifies what orders and goes, which is praised everywhere, 419b while what holds back and binds is found fault with. And *zēmiōdes*, too: if you restore delta in place of zeta, as in the old pronunciation, you'll see that the name was given to what binds (*dounti*) what goes (*ion*), and was named *dēmiōdes*.

HERMOGENES And what about *hēdonē* ("pleasure"), *lypē* ("pain"), *epithymia* ("desire"), and the like, Socrates?

SOCRATES They don't seem very hard to me, Hermogenes. *Hēdonē* seems to get its name from being the activity that tends toward benefit (*onēsis*). The delta has been inserted, so that it's called *hēdonē* 419c instead of *hēonē*. *Lypē* seems to have been named from the dissolution (*dialysis*) the body suffers in this condition. *Ania* ("distress") is what hinders going (*ienai*). *Algēdōn* ("suffering") looks to me like a foreign word, named from *algeinos* ("painful"). *Odynē* ("anguish") seems to be named from pain's putting itself on (*endysis*). As for *achthēdōn* ("vexation"), it's plain to anyone that the name is a likeness of the heaviness of motion. *Chara* ("joy") seems to be named for the spreading out (*diachysis*) and easy passage of the soul's flow. 419d *Terpsis* ("delight") comes from *terpnon* ("delightful"). *Terpnon* is so called because it is

likened to the creeping (*herpsis*) of a breath (*pnoē*) through the soul. By rights it would be called *herpnoun*, but over time it has been altered into *terpnon*. *Euphrosynē* ("cheerfulness") needs no explanation of why it's so called. It's plain to anyone that it got its name from the soul's moving well (*eu*) along with things (*sympheresthai*). By rights it would be *eupherosynē*, but we call it *euphrosynē* all the same. Nor is *epithymia* difficult. The name was obviously given to the power [419e] that goes toward (*epi*) *thymos* ("spirit"). And *thymos* would get its name from the raging (*thysis*) and boiling of the soul. And then there's *himeros* ("longing"), named for the stream (*rhous*) that draws the soul most strongly. [420a] It flows (*rhei*) with a rush (*hiemenos*), aiming at things, and so it pulls hard on the soul through the rushing of its flow. From this whole power it was called *himeros*. *Pothos* ("yearning"), in turn, is so called because it signifies a longing and flow directed not at what is present but at what is somewhere (*pou*) else and absent. That is why it's been named *pothos*. When what someone was aiming at was present, the very same thing was called *himeros*. When that had gone away, it was called *pothos*. *Erōs* ("love") is so called because it flows in (*eisrei*) from outside. This flow [420b] doesn't belong to the one who has it; it is brought in through the eyes. For this reason it was called *esros* in the old days, from "flowing in" (*esrein*), since we used to use omicron where we now use omega. Now it is called *erōs* because omicron was changed to omega. But what else do you say we should examine?

HERMOGENES How do *doxa* ("opinion") and words like that look to you?

SOCRATES *Doxa* has been named either for the pursuit (*diōxis*) the soul engages in as it makes its way in pursuit of knowing how things are, or for the shot from a bow (*toxon*). The latter seems more likely. [420c] *Oiēsis* ("belief"), at any rate, chimes with it. It seems to indicate the soul's motion (*oisis*) toward every thing, toward what each of the things that are is like. In the same way *boulē* ("counsel") somehow indicates a shot (*bolē*), and *boulesthai* ("to want") and *bouleuesthai* ("to deliberate") mean

aiming at something. All these words, following *doxa*, appear to be likenesses of a shot. And conversely, *aboulia* ("ill-advisedness") seems to be a failure to hit, as when someone has not shot at or hit what he was aiming at, what he wanted, what he was deliberating about, what he was striving for.

HERMOGENES [420d] You seem to me to be piling these on thicker and faster now, Socrates.

SOCRATES That's because I'm already racing for the finish. But I still want to get through *anankē* ("necessity"), since it comes next, and *hekousion* ("voluntary"). *Hekousion* would signify what yields (*eikon*) and doesn't resist, what yields, as I say, to what is going. That is what happens in accordance with one's will. *Anankaion* ("necessary"), on the other hand, is what resists and runs contrary to one's will, and so it would have to do with error and ignorance. It is likened to a journey through [420e] ravines (*ankē*), because they are hard to get through, rough, and overgrown, and hold one back from going. That may be why it was called *anankaion*, likened to a journey through a ravine. But while my strength lasts, let's not slacken it. And don't you slacken either: keep asking.

HERMOGENES [421a] Then I'm asking about the greatest and finest of them: *alētheia* ("truth"), *pseudos* ("falsehood"), *on* ("what is"), and the very thing our discussion is now about, *onoma* ("name"). Why does each have the name it has?

SOCRATES Is there something you call *maiesthai*?

HERMOGENES Yes, I do: searching.

SOCRATES Then *onoma* seems to be a name hammered together from a phrase that says: "this is a being (*on*) that happens to be the object of a search." You'd see it more clearly in the word *onomaston* ("nameable"). There it plainly says that this is a being of which there is a search (*on hou masma estin*). [421b] *Alētheia* also seems to have been hammered together like the others. The divine motion of what is seems to be addressed by this word, *alētheia*, as a divine wandering (*theia alē*). *Pseudos* is the opposite of motion. Once again, what is held back and forced to be at rest

comes in for abuse, and it is likened to people sleeping (*katheudousi*). But the added psi hides what the name means. *On* and *ousia* ("being") agree with *alēthes* ("true") once they lose the iota, since they mean *ion* ("going"). 421c And *ouk on* ("what is not"), in turn, means *ouk ion* ("not going"), and in fact some people call it that.

THE PRIMARY NAMES

Analysis must stop at primary names, which can only show things by imitating them in sound.

HERMOGENES You seem to me to have hammered these out very bravely, Socrates. But suppose someone asked you about this *ion* and *rheon* ("flowing") and *doun* ("binding"), and what correctness these names have—

SOCRATES "What would we answer him?" Is that what you mean?

HERMOGENES Exactly.

SOCRATES Well, we came up with one way just now to seem to be saying something when we answer.

HERMOGENES What was that?

SOCRATES To say that whatever we don't understand is something foreign. 421d Perhaps some of them really are like that. But it could also be that the primary names can't be discovered because they are so old. Names get twisted in every direction, so it would be no wonder if the old language were no different from a foreign one compared with ours today.

HERMOGENES There's certainly nothing unreasonable in what you say.

SOCRATES Yes, what I'm saying is plausible. But I don't think this contest allows excuses. We must be eager to examine these names thoroughly. Let's consider this. Suppose someone keeps asking about the words through which the 421e name is expressed, and then asks about the words through which those

words are expressed, and never stops doing this. Won't the person answering have to give up in the end?

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES 422a Then at what point would the one who gives up be right to stop? Wouldn't it be when he reaches the names that are like elements of the other phrases and names? Those, presumably, if this is how things stand, should no longer be shown to be composed of other names. For example, we said just now that *agathon* is composed of *agaston* ("admirable") and *thoon* ("swift"). Perhaps we'd say that *thoon* comes from other words, and those from still others. 422b But if we ever reach a name that is no longer composed of any other names, we'd be right to say we have now reached an element, and that we must no longer trace it back to other names.

HERMOGENES I think you're right.

SOCRATES So are the names you're asking about now in fact elements? And must we now examine their correctness, what it is, in some other way?

HERMOGENES That's likely.

SOCRATES Likely indeed, Hermogenes. At any rate, all the 422c earlier names appear to have led back to these. If that's so, as I think it is, come here and look into it with me again, in case I talk nonsense when I say what the correctness of the primary names must be like.

HERMOGENES Just go ahead. I'll look into it with you as far as I'm able.

SOCRATES Well then, there is one single correctness for every name, first and last alike, and none of them differs from the others in being a name. I think you agree with that too.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES 422d Now, the correctness of the names we went through just now was meant to be of this kind: to show what each of the things that are is like.

HERMOGENES Of course.

SOCRATES Then the primary names must have this no less than the later ones, if they are going to be names.

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES But the later ones, it seems, were able to accomplish this by means of the earlier ones.

HERMOGENES Apparently.

SOCRATES Very well. But the primary names, which have no others underlying them yet: how will they make the things that are as clear as possible to us, [422e] if they are going to be names? Answer me this. If we had no voice and no tongue, but wanted to show things to one another, wouldn't we try to signify them with our hands and head and the rest of the body, the way people who cannot speak do now?

HERMOGENES How else could we, Socrates?

SOCRATES [423a] If we wanted to show what is above and light, I imagine we'd raise our hand toward the sky, imitating the very nature of the thing. If we wanted to show what is below and heavy, we'd point toward the ground. And if we wanted to show a horse galloping, or some other animal, you know we'd make our own bodies and postures as much like theirs as possible.

HERMOGENES It seems to me it must be as you say.

SOCRATES That way, I think, the body would show something, [423b] by imitating, it seems, whatever it wanted to show.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES And since we want to show things with voice and tongue and mouth, won't what comes from these show us each thing when an imitation of anything at all is made through them?

HERMOGENES It must, I think.

SOCRATES A name, then, it seems, is a vocal imitation of what it imitates, and the person who imitates something with his voice names whatever he imitates.

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES 423c By Zeus, I don't think that's well put yet, my friend.

HERMOGENES Why not?

SOCRATES We'd be forced to agree that these people who imitate sheep and roosters and other animals are naming the creatures they imitate.

HERMOGENES That's true.

SOCRATES So do you think that's right?

HERMOGENES Not I. But then what sort of imitation would a name be, Socrates?

SOCRATES First of all, it seems to me, we won't be naming if we imitate things the way we imitate them in 423d music, even though there too we imitate with our voices. Second, we won't be naming if we imitate the same things music imitates. What I mean is this: does each thing have a sound and a shape, and many of them a color too?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Then it seems the art of naming isn't a matter of imitating these, and it isn't concerned with these imitations. Those arts are music in the one case and painting in the other. Isn't that so?

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES 423e And what about this? Don't you think each thing also has a being (*ousia*), just as it has a color and the other things we were just mentioning? To begin with, don't color itself and sound each have a being? And so do all the other things that are thought to deserve the description "being."

HERMOGENES I think so.

SOCRATES Well then, suppose someone could imitate exactly this about each thing, its being, with letters and syllables. Wouldn't he show what each thing is? Or not?

HERMOGENES 424a Certainly he would.

SOCRATES And what would you call the person who can do this? You called the earlier ones a musician and a painter. What would you call this one?

HERMOGENES This one, Socrates, seems to me to be what we've been looking for all along: the expert in naming.

SOCRATES If that's true, then it seems we must now examine the names you were asking about, *rhoē* ("flow"), *ienai* ("to go"), and *schesis* ("holding back"). Do they, by means of their letters and syllables, grasp 424b what is, so as to imitate its being, or not?

HERMOGENES Certainly.

SOCRATES Come on, then, let's see whether these are the only primary names, or whether there are many others too.

HERMOGENES I think there are others too.

SOCRATES That's likely. But what would be the method of division from which the imitator begins his imitating? The imitation of being happens to be made of syllables and letters. So isn't it most correct to divide up the letters first? That is what 424c people who take up the study of rhythms do: they first distinguish the powers of the letters, then those of the syllables, and only then come to examine rhythms, not before.

HERMOGENES Yes.

SOCRATES So mustn't we, too, first divide off the vowels? Then, among the rest, we must divide by kinds those that have neither voice nor sound (that, I believe, is what the experts in these matters call them), and also those that aren't vowels but aren't soundless either. And among the vowels themselves, mustn't we

divide all the kinds that differ from one another?[36] And 424d once we have divided these up, we must in turn divide up well all the things that are, to which names have to be given. We must see whether there are things to which they can all be traced back, as with the letters, things from which one can see both what they are and whether there are kinds within them, in the same way as among the letters. Once we have surveyed all this well, we must know how to apply each letter according to its likeness, whether one letter has to be applied to one thing or many have to be mixed together for one. Painters do the same when they want to make a likeness. Sometimes they apply only purple, sometimes 424e some other pigment, and sometimes they mix many together, as when they prepare a flesh tone or something else of that kind, according, I suppose, to which pigment each image seems to need. In the same way we too will apply the letters to things: one to one, where that seems necessary, and several together, making what people call syllables. Then we will combine syllables in turn, 425a and from these names and verbs are composed. From names and verbs, again, we will build something great and beautiful and whole. There, painting produces a picture of a living thing; here, the art of naming, or rhetoric, or whatever the art may be, will produce speech. Or rather, not we: I got carried away as I talked. It was the ancients who put names together the way they are composed. If we are going to know how to examine all of them with real skill, 425b we must divide them up in this way and then look to see whether the primary names and the later ones have been given properly or not. Stringing them together any other way would, I'm afraid, be shoddy work, and off the proper road, my dear Hermogenes.

HERMOGENES Quite possibly, by Zeus, Socrates.

SOCRATES Well then? Do you trust yourself to be able to divide these things up like that? I certainly don't.

36 Greek grammarians sorted letters into vowels, "mutes" (stops such as p, t, k), and "semivowels" (continuants such as l, r, s), which have sound but are not vowels.

HERMOGENES Then I'm very far from it myself.

SOCRATES So shall we give it up? Or would you like us to try as best we can, even if we can only make out a little of it? 425c We'd say first, as we did a little while ago with the gods, that we know nothing of the truth and are only guessing at what human beings believe about them. So now, too, let's tell ourselves before we go on: if anyone, whether someone else or we ourselves, were ever to divide these things up properly, this is how they would have to be divided; but as things stand we'll have to deal with them, as the saying goes, as best we can. Does that seem right, or what do you say?

HERMOGENES It certainly does, very much so.

SOCRATES 425d I expect it will look ridiculous, Hermogenes, for things to become clear by being imitated in letters and syllables. But there's no way around it. We have nothing better than this to fall back on for the truth of the primary names—unless, of course, you'd like us to do what the tragic poets do when they're stuck. They take refuge in the stage machinery and hoist up gods. We could do the same, say that the gods laid down the primary names and that's why they're correct, and be done with it. Is 425e that the best account for us too? Or the other one, that we got them from some non-Greeks, and non-Greeks are older than we are? Or that their antiquity makes it impossible to 426a examine them, just as with foreign words? All of these would be evasions—and very clever ones—for someone unwilling to give an account of how the primary names are correctly laid down.[37] And yet anyone who doesn't know how the primary names are correct can't possibly know about the later ones, which have to be explained by means of those he knows nothing about. Clearly, then, anyone who claims to be an expert on names must be able to explain the first 426b names above all and with the greatest clarity—or else he should know full well that what he

37 The *mēchanē* was a crane used in the theater to lift actors playing gods onto the stage—the origin of the phrase "deus ex machina."

says about the later ones will be so much nonsense. Or do you see it differently?

HERMOGENES Not in the least, Socrates.

WHAT LETTERS IMITATE

Rho for motion, iota for what is fine, lambda for smoothness: the sounds of speech as imitation.

SOCRATES Well, what I've perceived about the primary names strikes me as quite outrageous and ridiculous. I'll share it with you, if you like. And if you can get hold of something better anywhere, try to share it with me in turn.

HERMOGENES I will. Go ahead, speak boldly.

SOCRATES 426c First of all, then, rho seems to me to be a kind of tool for all motion. We haven't even said why motion has the name *kinēsis*. But clearly it means *hesis* ("going"), since in the old days we didn't use eta but epsilon. Its root is *kiein*—a foreign word—which means *ienai* ("to go"). So if someone found its old name in the form that fits our language, it would correctly be called *hesis*. As it is, from the foreign *kiein*, together with the change to eta and the insertion of nu, it has been called *kinēsis*, though it ought 426d to have been called *kieinēsis* or *eisin*. And *stasis* ("rest") means to be the negation of going, but has been named *stasis* for the sake of embellishment. Anyway, the letter rho, as I say, struck the name-maker as a fine tool of motion for making likenesses of movement; at any rate, he uses it for that purpose in many places. First, in *rhein* ("to flow") itself and in *rhoē* ("flow") he imitates movement through this letter; then in 426e *tromos* ("trembling"), then in *trechein* ("to run"), and also in verbs like *krouein* ("to strike"), *thrauein* ("to shatter"), *ereikein* ("to rend"), *thryptein* ("to crumble"), *kermatizein* ("to chop up"), *rhymbein* ("to whirl")—he mostly represents all of these through rho. He saw, I think, that in this letter the tongue is least at rest and most agitated, and that's why he seems to me to have made such use of it for these. Iota, in turn, he used for all the fine things, the ones that can most easily pass through everything.

That's why he imitates 427a *ienai* ("to go") and *hiesthai* ("to hasten") by means of iota. In the same way, by means of phi, psi, sigma and zeta, because they're breathy letters, he has imitated all such things in naming them—*psychron* ("cold"), for instance, and *zeon* ("seething"), and *seiesthai* ("to shake"), and shaking (*seismos*) in general. And whenever he imitates something windy, the name-maker almost always seems to apply letters of this kind. Again, the compression of delta and tau and the pressing of the tongue 427b —he seems to have thought their power useful for imitating *desmos* ("bond") and *stasis* ("rest"). And noticing that the tongue glides most in lambda, he made likenesses in naming *leia* ("smooth"), *olisthanein* ("to glide") itself, *liparon* ("sleek"), *kollōdes* ("gluey"), and all the rest of that kind. Where the power of gamma catches the tongue as it glides, he imitated *glischron* ("sticky"), *glyky* ("sweet") and *gloiōdes* ("gummy"). 427c Perceiving, again, the inward quality of the sound of nu, he named *endon* ("inside") and *entos* ("within"), making the realities like the letters. Alpha, in turn, he assigned to *megalon* ("large"), and eta to *mēkos* ("length"), because these letters are large. For *gongylon* ("round") he needed the sign of omicron, and he mixed plenty of it into the name. And this is how the lawgiver appears to fit everything else, making a sign and a name for each of the things that are by means of letters and syllables, and then composing the rest out of these very elements, imitating as he goes. That, 427d Hermogenes, seems to me what the correctness of names means to be—unless Cratylus here has something else to say.

CRATYLUS JOINS IN

Hermogenes hands the argument over, and Cratylus agrees with everything Socrates has said.

HERMOGENES Well, Socrates, Cratylus often gives me a great deal of trouble, as I said at the start. He claims there is such a thing as correctness of names, but never says anything clear about what it is, so I can't tell whether he's being so obscure

about it every time on purpose or not. So now, [427e] Cratylus, tell me in front of Socrates: are you happy with what Socrates says about names, or can you put it better some other way? And if you can, tell us, so that either you learn from Socrates or you teach the two of us.

CRATYLUS What's this, Hermogenes? Do you think it's easy to learn or teach any subject so quickly—let alone one this big, which seems to be the greatest among the greatest?

HERMOGENES [428a] No, by Zeus, I don't. But I think Hesiod puts it well: even if you add only a little to a little, it's worth doing. So if you can make even a little progress, don't give up. Do a kindness to Socrates here—you owe him that much—and to me.[38]

SOCRATES For my own part, Cratylus, I wouldn't insist on anything I've said. I've just looked into things with Hermogenes as they seemed to me. So as far as I'm concerned, speak boldly if you [428b] have something better, because I'll welcome it. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if you can say something finer than this; you seem to me both to have looked into such questions yourself and to have learned from others. So if you do have something finer to say, sign me up too as one of your students in the correctness of names.

CRATYLUS Well, Socrates, as you say, I have given these matters some thought, and perhaps I could make you [428c] my student. But I'm afraid it's quite the opposite. Somehow I feel like saying to you what Achilles says to Ajax in the *Prayers*. He says: "Ajax, son of Telamon, sprung from Zeus, leader of the people, everything you've said seems spoken after my own heart." That's how you seem to me, Socrates: your oracles are pretty much to my mind, whether you've been inspired by Euthyphro or some other Muse has been living in you for a long time without your noticing.[39]

SOCRATES [428d] My good Cratylus, I've been amazed at my own wisdom myself for some time now, and I don't trust it. So I think

38 The allusion is to Hesiod's *Works and Days* 361–62, on how small savings added together grow large.

I need to go back over what I'm saying. Being deceived by yourself is the hardest thing of all: when the deceiver never stands even a little way off but is always right there with you, isn't that terrible? So it seems we must keep turning back to what we said before, and try, in that poet's words, to look "both before and behind." Let's do that now and see what we've said. [428e] The correctness of a name, we say, is this: that it shows what the thing is like. Shall we say that's been adequately stated?

CRATYLUS It seems so to me, absolutely, Socrates.

SOCRATES So names are spoken for the sake of instruction?

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Then shall we say that this too is an art, and that it has its craftsmen?

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Who are they?

CRATYLUS [429a] The ones you mentioned at the beginning: the lawgivers.

SOCRATES Now, shall we say this art, too, arises among human beings like the others, or not? Here's what I mean. Some painters, I suppose, are worse and others better?

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES And the better ones produce finer works—their pictures—and the others poorer ones? And builders likewise: some build finer houses, others uglier ones?

CRATYLUS Yes.

39 The *Prayers* is the ancient title for Book 9 of the *Iliad*; the lines quoted are 9.644–45.

CAN A NAME BE FALSE?

Cratylus denies that a name can be wrong; Socrates compares names to misassigned portraits.

SOCRATES 429b Then do lawgivers, too, produce works that are finer in some cases and uglier in others?

CRATYLUS There I no longer agree.

SOCRATES So you don't think some laws are better and others worse?

CRATYLUS No, I don't.

SOCRATES Nor, it seems, do you think one name is laid down worse and another better?

CRATYLUS No, I don't.

SOCRATES So all names are laid down correctly?

CRATYLUS Yes, all that really are names.

SOCRATES Well then, what about the point raised a moment ago? In the case of Hermogenes here, shall we say 429c that this name isn't laid down for him at all, unless he has some connection with the birth of Hermes? Or that it is laid down, but not correctly?

CRATYLUS I don't think it's even laid down for him, Socrates; it only seems to be. This name belongs to someone else—the one whose nature the name makes clear.

SOCRATES Then isn't someone even lying when he says this man is Hermogenes? Or might it not even be possible to say that this man is Hermogenes, if he isn't?

CRATYLUS What do you mean?

SOCRATES 429d Is it that it's altogether impossible to say false things—is that what your argument amounts to? Plenty of people say so, my dear Cratylus, both now and in the past.

CRATYLUS Well, how could anyone, Socrates, say what he's saying and not be saying what is? Isn't that what saying false things is—saying what isn't?

SOCRATES That argument is too clever for me, my friend, at my age. All the same, tell me just this much: 429e do you think it's impossible to speak falsely, but possible to assert something false?

CRATYLUS I don't think it's possible to assert it either.

SOCRATES Nor to say it, nor to address someone falsely? Suppose, for example, someone met you abroad, took your hand and said, "Greetings, my Athenian visitor, Hermogenes son of Smicrion." Would he be speaking these words, or asserting them, or saying them, or addressing them in this way not to you but to Hermogenes here? Or to no one?

CRATYLUS I think, Socrates, that this man would be uttering these words for nothing.

SOCRATES 430a Well, I'll gladly take even that. Would the one who uttered them be uttering something true or something false? Or would part of it be true and part false? That too would be enough for me.

CRATYLUS I'd say a man like that was just making noise, moving himself to no purpose, as if someone were to strike a bronze pot and set it vibrating.

SOCRATES Come now, Cratylus, let's see if we can somehow come to terms. Wouldn't you say that the name is one thing and the thing it's the name of is another?

CRATYLUS I would.

SOCRATES And you agree that the name is a kind of imitation of the 430b thing?

CRATYLUS Absolutely.

SOCRATES And you say that paintings, too, are imitations of certain things, but in a different way?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES Come then—maybe I don't understand what on earth you're saying, and you may well be right—can both these kinds of imitation, the paintings and those names, be assigned and applied to the things they're imitations of, or not?

CRATYLUS 430c They can.

SOCRATES First, then, consider this. Could someone assign the picture of the man to the man and that of the woman to the woman, and so on?

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES And the reverse as well—the man's picture to the woman and the woman's to the man?

CRATYLUS That's possible too.

SOCRATES Now, are both these assignments correct, or only one of them?

CRATYLUS Only one.

SOCRATES The one, I take it, that gives each thing what belongs to it and resembles it.

CRATYLUS I think so.

SOCRATES 430d Then, so that you and I don't come to blows in our discussion when we're friends, accept what I'm saying. This kind of assignment, my friend, I call correct in the case of both kinds of imitation, pictures and names alike; and in the case of names, true as well as correct. The other kind, the giving and applying of what's unlike, I call not correct—and false, when it involves names.

CRATYLUS But be careful, Socrates: it may be that with paintings 430e this is possible—assigning them incorrectly—but not with names, which must always be assigned correctly.

SOCRATES What do you mean? How is one different from the other? Can't someone go up to a man and say, "This is your portrait," and show him what may happen to be his likeness, or may happen to be a woman's? By "show" I mean bring it before the perception of his eyes.

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Well then? Can't he go up to this same man again and say, "This is your name"? A name, after all, is an imitation, just as a painting is. Here's my point: wouldn't it be possible to 431a say to him, "This is your name," and then bring before the perception of his hearing what may happen to be his imitation, saying "man," or may happen to be the imitation of the female of the human race, saying "woman"? Don't you think this is possible and sometimes happens?

CRATYLUS I'm willing to grant you that, Socrates. Let it be so.

SOCRATES That's good of you, my friend—if it really is so, since there's no need to fight it out over this now. Anyway, if 431b there's such an assignment here too, we want to call one of these speaking truly and the other speaking falsely. And if that's so, and it's possible to assign names incorrectly—not giving each thing what fits it, but sometimes what doesn't—then it would be possible to do the same thing with verbs. And if verbs and names can be laid down this way, so can sentences: 431c for sentences, I take it, are a combination of these. Or what do you say, Cratylus?

CRATYLUS That's right; I think you put it well.

SOCRATES Then if we compare the primary names, in turn, to pictures, it's possible, as with paintings, to give them all the fitting colors and shapes—or not all of them, but to leave some out and add others, putting in too many or too large. Or isn't it possible?

CRATYLUS It is.

SOCRATES And the one who gives them all produces fine pictures and images, while the one who adds or takes away also produces pictures and images, but bad ones?

CRATYLUS 431d Yes.

SOCRATES And what about the one who imitates the being of things through syllables and letters? By the same reasoning, if he gives them everything that fits, won't the image be fine—and that's a name—while if he sometimes leaves out or adds small

things, an image will still come about, but not a fine one? So some names will be well made and others badly?

CRATYLUS Perhaps.

SOCRATES 431e So perhaps one craftsman of names will be good and another bad?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES And this craftsman's name, we said, was "lawgiver."

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES So perhaps, by Zeus, just as in the other arts, one lawgiver will be good and another bad—provided we agree on those earlier points.

CRATYLUS That's so. But you see, Socrates, when we assign these letters—alpha and beta and each of the others—to names by the art of grammar, 432a if we take anything away, or add or transpose anything, it isn't that we've written the name, only incorrectly. We haven't written it at all: it immediately becomes a different name if any of that happens to it.

SOCRATES I'm afraid we're not examining it well if we examine it that way, Cratylus.

CRATYLUS How so?

SOCRATES What you describe might well happen to things that must either be or not be from a certain number—like ten itself or any other number you like: if you take something away or 432b add something, it immediately becomes a different number. But this may not be the correctness of a quality, or of an image in general. On the contrary, an image mustn't reproduce every feature of what it represents at all, if it's to be an image. See whether I'm making sense. Would there be two such things as Cratylus and an image of Cratylus if some god not only reproduced your color and shape, as painters do, but also made all the insides just like yours, gave them the same softness 432c and warmth, put motion and soul and understanding into them like yours, and, in short, set a duplicate of everything you have right

next to you? Would that be Cratylus and an image of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses?

CRATYLUS Two Cratyluses, it seems to me, Socrates.

SOCRATES So you see, my friend, that we must look for a different kind of correctness for an image and for the things we were just talking about, and not insist that if anything 432d is missing or added it's no longer an image? Or don't you perceive how far images fall short of having the same features as the things they're images of?

CRATYLUS I do.

SOCRATES At any rate, Cratylus, the things that names are names of would be ridiculously treated by their names if they were made like them in every way. Everything would be doubled, I suppose, and no one could say of either which was the thing itself and which the name.

CRATYLUS That's true.

SOCRATES Take heart, then, my noble friend, and allow that one name may be well 432e laid down and another not. Don't insist that it have all the letters, so that it's exactly like what it's the name of; allow that an unfitting letter may be applied too. And if a letter, then a name in a sentence; and if a name, then a sentence in a speech may be applied that doesn't fit the things, and the thing will be named and described no less, as long as the outline of the thing the speech is about is present in it—as in the 433a names of the letters, if you remember what Hermogenes and I were saying just now.

CRATYLUS Yes, I remember.

SOCRATES Good. When that is present, even if the name doesn't have all the appropriate letters, the thing will still be spoken of: well when it has them all, badly when it has only a few. So let's allow that it is spoken of, my dear friend. Otherwise we'll pay the penalty, like the people in Aegina who are out on the road late at night, and seem for our part 433b to have truly arrived at things somehow later than we should. Or else look for some

other correctness of names, and don't agree that a name is a way of revealing a thing by syllables and letters. If you say both, you won't be able to agree with yourself.[40]

CRATYLUS Well, Socrates, I think what you say is reasonable, and I'll accept it.

LIKENESS AND CUSTOM

The word for hardness contains a soft letter yet is understood, so custom must play a part.

SOCRATES Since we agree on that, let's look at the next point. If a name is going to be well set down, we say, must it have the appropriate letters?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES 433c And the appropriate ones are those that are like the things?

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES So names that are well set down are set down that way. But if one wasn't set down well, most of it might perhaps be made of appropriate, similar letters, if it's going to be an image at all. Yet it would also contain something inappropriate, and because of that the name wouldn't be fine or finely made. Is that what we say, or something else?

CRATYLUS I don't think there's any need to fight it out, Socrates. Still, I'm not happy saying that something is a name and yet isn't well set down.

SOCRATES 433d Is this what you're not happy with, that a name is a means of revealing the thing?

CRATYLUS No, I'm happy with that.

SOCRATES And you think it's right to say that some names are composed of earlier ones, while others are primary?

40 The allusion is obscure. It seems to refer to a proverb or a local rule in Aegina that penalized people found on the roads late at night.

CRATYLUS I do.

SOCRATES But if the primary ones are going to reveal anything, do you have any better way for them to become means of revealing 433e than to make them as much as possible like the things they're supposed to reveal? Or do you prefer the way Hermogenes and many others describe? On that view names are agreed tokens, and they reveal things to those who made the agreement and already knew the things. Agreement is the correctness of a name, and it makes no difference whether we agree as things are agreed now, or the other way round, calling "big" what we now call "small," and "small" what we now call "big." Which way do you prefer?

CRATYLUS 434a Revealing whatever you reveal by a likeness, Socrates, is utterly different from doing it by any random thing.

SOCRATES Well said. Then if the name is going to be like the thing, the letters from which anyone will put together the primary names must be naturally like the things, mustn't they? Here's what I mean. Could anyone ever have put together the painting we were talking about a moment ago, a likeness of something real, if there didn't exist by nature 434b pigments like the things painting imitates, from which painted images are composed? Or would that be impossible?

CRATYLUS Impossible.

SOCRATES Then in the same way names could never become like anything, unless the things they're composed of had some likeness from the start to the things the names imitate? And the things they must be composed of are letters?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES So now you too are a partner in the argument that just now 434c Hermogenes was a partner in. Come on: do you think we were right to say that rho resembles rushing, motion, and hardness, or not?

CRATYLUS I think you were right.

SOCRATES And lambda resembles what's smooth and soft and the other things we were just mentioning?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES Do you know, then, that for the same thing we say *sklērotēs* ("hardness"), while the Eretrians say *sklērotēr*?[41]

CRATYLUS Certainly.

SOCRATES Then do rho and sigma both resemble the same thing, so that the word reveals the same thing to them when it ends in rho as it does to us when it ends in sigma? Or does it fail to reveal it to one side or the other?

CRATYLUS 434d No, it reveals it to both.

SOCRATES Insofar as rho and sigma are alike, or insofar as they aren't?

CRATYLUS Insofar as they're alike.

SOCRATES Then are they alike in every respect?

CRATYLUS Well, perhaps for revealing rushing.

SOCRATES And the lambda in the word? Doesn't it reveal the opposite of hardness?

CRATYLUS Perhaps it's in there wrongly, Socrates. It would be like the cases you were going through with Hermogenes a moment ago, taking letters out and putting them in where needed, and I thought you were right. Perhaps here too we ought to say rho instead of lambda.

SOCRATES 434e Good point. What then? As we speak now, do we understand nothing of each other when someone says *sklēron* ("hard")? Don't you know right now what I mean?

CRATYLUS I do, my dear friend, through habit at any rate.

SOCRATES And when you say "habit," do you think you mean anything different from agreement? Or do you mean by habit anything other than this: when I utter this word, I have that

41 Eretria was a city on the island of Euboea. Its dialect often had rho where Athenian Greek had sigma.

thing in mind, and you recognize that I have that thing in mind? Isn't that what you mean?

CRATYLUS 435a Yes.

SOCRATES Then if you recognize it when I utter it, something is revealed to you by me?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES And it's revealed by something unlike what I have in mind when I utter it, if lambda is unlike the hardness you speak of. But if that's so, what else have you done but make an agreement with yourself? Correctness of names becomes agreement for you, since both like and unlike letters reveal things once habit and agreement attach to them. And even if habit is as far as you like from 435b agreement, it still wouldn't be right to say that likeness is what reveals. Habit is, since habit, it seems, reveals by means of both the like and the unlike. Since we agree on this, Cratylus (I'll take your silence as agreement), agreement and habit must surely contribute something to revealing what we have in mind when we speak. After all, my excellent friend, suppose you'd like to turn to number. Where do you think you'll find names like each single number to apply to them, if you don't allow 435c your convention and agreement some authority over correctness of names? I myself like the idea that names should be as similar to things as possible. But I'm afraid that this dragging-in of likeness really is, to use Hermogenes' word, a sticky business, and that we're forced to use this vulgar thing, agreement, as well, to make names correct. For perhaps a thing would be spoken of most finely, as far as that's possible, when it is spoken of with letters that are all, or as many as possible, like it—that is, appropriate— 435d and most shamefully when the opposite is true. But tell me this next. What power do names have for us, and what fine thing shall we say they accomplish?

DO NAMES TEACH?

If the name-makers believed in flux and were wrong, names cannot be our guide to things.

CRATYLUS To teach, I think, Socrates. And this is quite simple: whoever knows the names knows the things too.

SOCRATES Perhaps, Cratylus, you mean something like this: when someone knows what a name is like (and it's like the thing), 435e then he'll know the thing too, since the thing happens to be like the name, and there's one and the same art for all things that are like one another. I take it that's why you say whoever knows the names will know the things too.

CRATYLUS Exactly right.

SOCRATES Hold on, then. Let's see what this way of teaching about the things that are, the one you're describing now, might be. Is there another way as well, with this one the better of the two, or is there no other way but this? Which do you think?

CRATYLUS 436a The latter. There's no other way at all. This one is both the only way and the best.

SOCRATES And is discovering the things that are the same thing too, so that whoever has discovered the names has also discovered the things they're names of? Or must one search and discover by a different way, and learn by this one?

CRATYLUS Absolutely. Searching and discovering work in exactly the same way.

SOCRATES Come then, Cratylus, let's think it over. If someone searching for 436b things follows the names, looking into what each one means to be, do you realize there's no small danger of being deceived?

CRATYLUS How so?

SOCRATES Clearly whoever first set down the names set them down to match what he took the things to be, as we say. Isn't that so?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES So if his thinking wasn't correct, and he set them down to match what he thought, what do you think will happen to us who follow him? Anything but being deceived?

CRATYLUS But surely that's not how it is, Socrates. It must 436c be that the one who set down the names did so knowing. Otherwise, as I said long ago, they wouldn't even be names. And here's the strongest evidence for you that the name-maker didn't miss the truth: otherwise his names would never have been so consistent. Or didn't you notice yourself, as you were talking, that all the names came about on the same principle and pointed the same way?

SOCRATES But that's no defense at all, my good Cratylus. Suppose the name-maker slipped at the start, then forced the rest 436d into line with that first step and made them agree with it. That's nothing strange. It's like geometrical diagrams: sometimes a small, unnoticed error is made at the start, and all the many steps that follow agree with one another. So with every matter, every man must give most of his discussion and most of his scrutiny to the starting point, to see whether it's correctly laid down or not. Once that has been examined adequately, the rest should be seen to follow from it. All the same, 436e I'd be surprised if the names do agree with one another. Let's look again at what we went through before. We say the names signify being to us on the assumption that everything is moving, rushing, and flowing. Isn't that how you think they reveal it?

CRATYLUS 437a Very much so, and they signify it correctly.

SOCRATES Then let's pick out some of them and look. First take this name, *epistēmē* ("knowledge"), and see how ambiguous it is. It seems rather to signify that it brings our soul to a stand (*histēsin*) at things than that it's carried around along with them. And it's more correct to pronounce its beginning as we do now, rather than inserting the epsilon as *hepeïstēmē*; the insertion should be made with iota instead of epsilon. Next, *bebaion* ("firm"): it's an imitation of a standing base (*basis*) and of rest,

not of movement. [437b] Then *historia* ("inquiry"), I suppose, signifies just that it stops (*histēsi*) the flow. And *piston* ("trustworthy") plainly signifies stopping (*histan*). And then *mnēmē* ("memory") surely indicates to anyone that it's a staying (*monē*) in the soul, not a movement. And if you like, *hamartia* ("error") and *symphora* ("misfortune"), if you follow the name, will turn out to be the same as *synesis* ("comprehension") here and *epistēmē* and all the other names for things of serious worth. What's more, *amathia* ("ignorance") and *akolasia* ("licentiousness") look much like them. [437c] *Amathia* looks like the journey of someone going along with god (*hama theōi iontos*), and *akolasia* looks exactly like a following along (*akolouthia*) with things. So the names we take to belong to the worst things would turn out to be very like the names for the finest. And I think one could find many others too, if one worked at it, that would lead one to believe the opposite: that the name-maker meant things to be not moving or rushing, but staying still.[42]

CRATYLUS [437d] But Socrates, you can see that most of them signified it the other way.

SOCRATES What of it, Cratylus? Are we going to count names like voting pebbles, and is that where correctness will lie? Will whatever the greater number of names appear to signify be the truth?

CRATYLUS That's not likely, no.

SOCRATES Not in the least, my friend. Let's leave this where it is [438a] and go back to the point where we turned aside. A little while ago, if you remember, you said that the one who set down the names must have known the things he set them down for. Do you still think so, or not?

CRATYLUS Still.

42 Both words suggest "going along with" things: *hamartia* sounds like *homartein* ("to go along with"), and *symphora* means literally "being carried along with." *Synesis* had earlier been explained the same way.

SOCRATES And do you say that the one who set down the primary ones also knew when he set them down?

CRATYLUS He knew.

SOCRATES Then from what sort of names had he learned or discovered 438b the things, if the primary ones hadn't yet been set down? And we say it's impossible to learn and discover things except by learning the names or by finding out for ourselves what they're like.

CRATYLUS I think you have a point, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then how shall we say they set down names knowingly, or were lawgivers, before any name at all had been set down for them to know, if it's impossible to learn things except from names?

BEFORE THERE WERE NAMES

The first name-makers must have known things without names, so things can be learned through themselves.

CRATYLUS 438c I think the truest account of this, Socrates, is that some power greater than human set down the primary names for things, so that they must be correct.

SOCRATES So do you think the one who set them down, being some divinity or god, would have set down names that contradicted each other? Or do you think there was nothing in what we were saying just now?

CRATYLUS But maybe one of the two groups weren't names at all.

SOCRATES Which group, my excellent friend? The ones that point toward rest, or the ones that point toward movement? Surely, given what we just said, it won't be decided by numbers.

CRATYLUS 438d No, that wouldn't be fair, Socrates.

SOCRATES So when names are in civil war, some claiming that they're the ones like the truth and others claiming that they are, what will we use to decide, or where will we turn? Surely not to

yet other names besides these, since there aren't any. No, clearly we must look for something other than names, something that will show us without names which of these are the true ones, clearly by showing the truth of the things that are.

CRATYLUS [438e] I think so.

SOCRATES Then it is possible, it seems, Cratylus, to learn the things that are without names, if this is right.

CRATYLUS Apparently.

SOCRATES Then through what else would you still expect to learn them? Through anything other than what's reasonable and most just: through one another, if they're in any way akin, and through themselves? Something different from them and of another kind would signify something different and of another kind, not them.

CRATYLUS I think you're right.

SOCRATES [439a] Hold on, by Zeus. Didn't we agree many times that names that are well set down resemble the things they're set down as names of, and are images of the things?

CRATYLUS Yes.

SOCRATES So suppose it's entirely possible to learn things through names, and also possible to learn them through the things themselves. Which would be the finer and clearer way to learn? Learning from the image both the image itself, whether it's a good likeness, and the truth it was an image of, [439b] or learning from the truth both the truth itself and its image, whether it was fittingly made?

CRATYLUS It must be from the truth, I think.

SOCRATES Well, how one ought to learn or discover the things that are is perhaps too great a question for you and me to have settled. But we should be content to agree on this much: they must be learned and searched for not from names but, much rather, from themselves.

CRATYLUS Apparently, Socrates.

CRATYLUS AND THE FLUX

Socrates' "dream" of beauty itself: if everything flowed, nothing could be known. Cratylus still sides with Heraclitus.

SOCRATES Then let's look into this further, so that we aren't deceived by this great number of 439c names all pointing the same way. Perhaps those who set them down really did set them down thinking that everything is always moving and flowing (they certainly seem to me to have thought so). And perhaps that isn't how things are at all. Perhaps the name-makers have fallen into a kind of whirlpool and are being churned around in it, and they're dragging us in after them. Consider, my remarkable Cratylus, something I often dream about. Shall we say that there is such a thing as beauty itself, and the good itself, and so with each one of the 439d things that are, or not?

CRATYLUS I think there is, Socrates.

SOCRATES Then let's look at that thing itself. The question isn't whether some face or other such thing is beautiful, since all those things seem to flow. Rather, shall we say that beauty itself is always such as it is?

CRATYLUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES Then can we correctly call it anything if it's always slipping away, saying first that it is that, then that it's of such a kind? Or must it, even as we speak, at once become something else, slip away, and no longer be so?

CRATYLUS Necessarily.

SOCRATES 439e Then how could something that is never in the same state be anything? If it's ever in the same state, then clearly it isn't changing at all during that time. And if it's always in the same state and is the same, how could it change or move, when it never departs from its own form?

CRATYLUS It couldn't, in any way.

SOCRATES Nor, for that matter, could it be known by anyone. Just as 440a the one who was going to know it approached, it would become something else, of another kind, so that it could no longer be known what sort of thing it is or what state it's in. And surely no knowledge knows what it knows if that thing is in no state at all.

CRATYLUS It is as you say.

SOCRATES Nor is it reasonable to say that there's knowledge at all, Cratylus, if all things are changing and nothing stays. If this very thing, knowledge, doesn't change from being knowledge, then knowledge would always stay and would be knowledge. But if the very form 440b of knowledge changes, then at that same moment it would change into another form, other than knowledge, and there would be no knowledge. And if it's always changing, there would always be no knowledge, and on this argument there would be nothing to do the knowing and nothing to be known. But if there is always that which knows, and there is that which is known, and there is the beautiful, and there is the good, and there is each one of the things that are, then I don't think these things we're now talking about are at all like flow 440c or movement. Now whether these things are so, or as Heraclitus and his followers and many others say, I'm afraid may not be easy to investigate. But surely no one with any sense would put himself and his own soul into the care of names, trusting them and the people who set them down. He wouldn't insist that he knows something, or condemn himself and the things that are as having nothing sound in any of them, as though everything leaked like cracked pots. Nor would he believe, just like people sick with a streaming cold, 440d that things too are in that condition, that all things are in the grip of flux and streaming. Perhaps it is so, Cratylus, and perhaps it isn't. So you must look into it bravely and well, and not accept anything easily, since you're still young and in your prime. And once you've looked into it, if you find the answer, share it with me too.

CRATYLUS I'll do that. But you can be sure, Socrates, that even now I haven't failed to consider it. As I consider it and 440e take trouble over it, it seems to me much more that things are the way Heraclitus says.

SOCRATES Then you'll teach me another time, my friend, when you're back. For now, go off to the country as you've been getting ready to do. Hermogenes here will see you on your way.

CRATYLUS I will, Socrates. But you too should keep trying to think these things over from now on.