

Plato  
Cratylus

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## INTRODUCTION.

The Cratylus has always been a source of perplexity to the student of Plato. While in fancy and humour, and perfection of style and metaphysical originality, this dialogue may be ranked with the best of the Platonic writings, there has been an uncertainty about the motive of the piece, which interpreters have hitherto not succeeded in dispelling. We need not suppose that Plato used words in order to conceal his thoughts, or that he would have been unintelligible to an educated contemporary. In the Phaedrus and Euthydemus we also find a difficulty in determining the precise aim of the author. Plato wrote satires in the form of dialogues, and his meaning, like that of other satirical writers, has often slept in the ear of posterity. Two causes may be assigned for this obscurity: 1st, the subtlety and allusiveness of this species of composition; 2nd, the difficulty of reproducing a state of life and literature which has passed away. A satire is unmeaning unless we can place ourselves back among the persons and thoughts of the age in which it was written. Had the treatise of Antisthenes upon words, or the speculations of Cratylus, or some other Heracleitean of the fourth century B.C., on the nature of language been preserved to us; or if we had lived at the time, and been 'rich enough to attend the fifty-drachma course of Prodicus,' we should have understood Plato better, and many points which are now attributed to the extravagance of Socrates' humour would have been found, like the allusions of Aristophanes in the Clouds, to have gone home to the sophists and grammarians of the day.

For the age was very busy with philological speculation; and many questions were beginning to be asked about language which were parallel to other questions about justice, virtue, knowledge, and were illustrated in a similar manner by the analogy of the arts. Was there a correctness in words, and were they given by nature or convention? In the presocratic philosophy mankind had been striving to attain an expression of their ideas, and now they were beginning to ask themselves whether the expression might not be distinguished from the idea? They were also seeking to distinguish the parts of speech and to enquire into the relation of subject and predicate. Grammar and logic were moving about somewhere in the depths of the

human soul, but they were not yet awakened into consciousness and had not found names for themselves, or terms by which they might be expressed. Of these beginnings of the study of language we know little, and there necessarily arises an obscurity when the surroundings of such a work as the *Cratylus* are taken away. Moreover, in this, as in most of the dialogues of Plato, allowance has to be made for the character of Socrates. For the theory of language can only be propounded by him in a manner which is consistent with his own profession of ignorance. Hence his ridicule of the new school of etymology is interspersed with many declarations 'that he knows nothing,' 'that he has learned from Euthyphro,' and the like. Even the truest things which he says are depreciated by himself. He professes to be guessing, but the guesses of Plato are better than all the other theories of the ancients respecting language put together.

The dialogue hardly derives any light from Plato's other writings, and still less from Scholiasts and Neoplatonist writers. Socrates must be interpreted from himself, and on first reading we certainly have a difficulty in understanding his drift, or his relation to the two other interlocutors in the dialogue. Does he agree with Cratylus or with Hermogenes, and is he serious in those fanciful etymologies, extending over more than half the dialogue, which he seems so greatly to relish? Or is he serious in part only; and can we separate his jest from his earnest?—*Sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura*. Most of them are ridiculously bad, and yet among them are found, as if by accident, principles of philology which are unsurpassed in any ancient writer, and even in advance of any philologist of the last century. May we suppose that Plato, like Lucian, has been amusing his fancy by writing a comedy in the form of a prose dialogue? And what is the final result of the enquiry? Is Plato an upholder of the conventional theory of language, which he acknowledges to be imperfect? or does he mean to imply that a perfect language can only be based on his own theory of ideas? Or if this latter explanation is refuted by his silence, then in what relation does his account of language stand to the rest of his philosophy? Or may we be so bold as to deny the connexion between them? (For the allusion to the ideas at the end of the dialogue is merely intended to show that we must not put words in the place of things or realities, which is a thesis strongly insisted on by Plato in many other passages)...These are some of the first thoughts which arise in the mind of the reader of the *Cratylus*. And the consideration of them may form a convenient introduction to the general subject of the dialogue.

We must not expect all the parts of a dialogue of Plato to tend equally to some clearly-defined end. His idea of literary art is not the absolute proportion of the whole, such as we appear to find in a Greek temple or statue; nor should his works be tried by any such standard. They have often the beauty of poetry, but they have also the freedom of conversation. 'Words are more plastic than wax' (*Rep.*), and

may be moulded into any form. He wanders on from one topic to another, careless of the unity of his work, not fearing any 'judge, or spectator, who may recall him to the point' (Theat.), 'whither the argument blows we follow' (Rep.). To have determined beforehand, as in a modern didactic treatise, the nature and limits of the subject, would have been fatal to the spirit of enquiry or discovery, which is the soul of the dialogue...These remarks are applicable to nearly all the works of Plato, but to the Cratylus and Phaedrus more than any others. See Phaedrus, Introduction.

There is another aspect under which some of the dialogues of Plato may be more truly viewed:—they are dramatic sketches of an argument. We have found that in the Lysis, Charmides, Laches, Protagoras, Meno, we arrived at no conclusion—the different sides of the argument were personified in the different speakers; but the victory was not distinctly attributed to any of them, nor the truth wholly the property of any. And in the Cratylus we have no reason to assume that Socrates is either wholly right or wholly wrong, or that Plato, though he evidently inclines to him, had any other aim than that of personifying, in the characters of Hermogenes, Socrates, and Cratylus, the three theories of language which are respectively maintained by them.

The two subordinate persons of the dialogue, Hermogenes and Cratylus, are at the opposite poles of the argument. But after a while the disciple of the Sophist and the follower of Heracleitus are found to be not so far removed from one another as at first sight appeared; and both show an inclination to accept the third view which Socrates interposes between them. First, Hermogenes, the poor brother of the rich Callias, expounds the doctrine that names are conventional; like the names of slaves, they may be given and altered at pleasure. This is one of those principles which, whether applied to society or language, explains everything and nothing. For in all things there is an element of convention; but the admission of this does not help us to understand the rational ground or basis in human nature on which the convention proceeds. Socrates first of all intimates to Hermogenes that his view of language is only a part of a sophistical whole, and ultimately tends to abolish the distinction between truth and falsehood. Hermogenes is very ready to throw aside the sophistical tenet, and listens with a sort of half admiration, half belief, to the speculations of Socrates.

Cratylus is of opinion that a name is either a true name or not a name at all. He is unable to conceive of degrees of imitation; a word is either the perfect expression of a thing, or a mere inarticulate sound (a fallacy which is still prevalent among theorizers about the origin of language). He is at once a philosopher and a sophist; for while wanting to rest language on an immutable basis, he would deny the possibility of falsehood. He is inclined to derive all truth from language, and in language he sees reflected the philosophy of Heracleitus. His views are not like

those of Hermogenes, hastily taken up, but are said to be the result of mature consideration, although he is described as still a young man. With a tenacity characteristic of the Heracleitean philosophers, he clings to the doctrine of the flux. (Compare Theaet.) Of the real Cratylus we know nothing, except that he is recorded by Aristotle to have been the friend or teacher of Plato; nor have we any proof that he resembled the likeness of him in Plato any more than the Critias of Plato is like the real Critias, or the Euthyphro in this dialogue like the other Euthyphro, the diviner, in the dialogue which is called after him.

Between these two extremes, which have both of them a sophistical character, the view of Socrates is introduced, which is in a manner the union of the two. Language is conventional and also natural, and the true conventional-natural is the rational. It is a work not of chance, but of art; the dialectician is the artificer of words, and the legislator gives authority to them. They are the expressions or imitations in sound of things. In a sense, Cratylus is right in saying that things have by nature names; for nature is not opposed either to art or to law. But vocal imitation, like any other copy, may be imperfectly executed; and in this way an element of chance or convention enters in. There is much which is accidental or exceptional in language. Some words have had their original meaning so obscured, that they require to be helped out by convention. But still the true name is that which has a natural meaning. Thus nature, art, chance, all combine in the formation of language. And the three views respectively propounded by Hermogenes, Socrates, Cratylus, may be described as the conventional, the artificial or rational, and the natural. The view of Socrates is the meeting-point of the other two, just as conceptualism is the meeting-point of nominalism and realism.

We can hardly say that Plato was aware of the truth, that 'languages are not made, but grow.' But still, when he says that 'the legislator made language with the dialectician standing on his right hand,' we need not infer from this that he conceived words, like coins, to be issued from the mint of the State. The creator of laws and of social life is naturally regarded as the creator of language, according to Hellenic notions, and the philosopher is his natural advisor. We are not to suppose that the legislator is performing any extraordinary function; he is merely the Eponymus of the State, who prescribes rules for the dialectician and for all other artists. According to a truly Platonic mode of approaching the subject, language, like virtue in the Republic, is examined by the analogy of the arts. Words are works of art which may be equally made in different materials, and are well made when they have a meaning. Of the process which he thus describes, Plato had probably no very definite notion. But he means to express generally that language is the product of intelligence, and that languages belong to States and not to individuals.

A better conception of language could not have been formed in Plato's age, than that which he attributes to Socrates. Yet many persons have thought that the mind of Plato is more truly seen in the vague realism of Cratylus. This misconception has probably arisen from two causes: first, the desire to bring Plato's theory of language into accordance with the received doctrine of the Platonic ideas; secondly, the impression created by Socrates himself, that he is not in earnest, and is only indulging the fancy of the hour.

1. We shall have occasion to show more at length, in the Introduction to future dialogues, that the so-called Platonic ideas are only a semi-mythical form, in which he attempts to realize abstractions, and that they are replaced in his later writings by a rational theory of psychology. (See introductions to the Meno and the Sophist.) And in the Cratylus he gives a general account of the nature and origin of language, in which Adam Smith, Rousseau, and other writers of the last century, would have substantially agreed. At the end of the dialogue, he speaks as in the Symposium and Republic of absolute beauty and good; but he never supposed that they were capable of being embodied in words. Of the names of the ideas, he would have said, as he says of the names of the Gods, that we know nothing. Even the realism of Cratylus is not based upon the ideas of Plato, but upon the flux of Heracleitus. Here, as in the Sophist and Politicus, Plato expressly draws attention to the want of agreement in words and things. Hence we are led to infer, that the view of Socrates is not the less Plato's own, because not based upon the ideas; 2nd, that Plato's theory of language is not inconsistent with the rest of his philosophy.

2. We do not deny that Socrates is partly in jest and partly in earnest. He is discoursing in a high-flown vein, which may be compared to the 'dithyrambics of the Phaedrus.' They are mysteries of which he is speaking, and he professes a kind of ludicrous fear of his imaginary wisdom. When he is arguing out of Homer, about the names of Hector's son, or when he describes himself as inspired or maddened by Euthyphro, with whom he has been sitting from the early dawn (compare Phaedrus and Lysias; Phaedr.) and expresses his intention of yielding to the illusion to-day, and to-morrow he will go to a priest and be purified, we easily see that his words are not to be taken seriously. In this part of the dialogue his dread of committing impiety, the pretended derivation of his wisdom from another, the extravagance of some of his etymologies, and, in general, the manner in which the fun, fast and furious, vires acquirit eundo, remind us strongly of the Phaedrus. The jest is a long one, extending over more than half the dialogue. But then, we remember that the Euthydemus is a still longer jest, in which the irony is preserved to the very end. There he is parodying the ingenious follies of early logic; in the Cratylus he is ridiculing the fancies of a new school of sophists and grammarians. The fallacies of the Euthydemus are still retained at the end of our

logic books; and the etymologies of the Cratylus have also found their way into later writers. Some of these are not much worse than the conjectures of Hemsterhuis, and other critics of the last century; but this does not prove that they are serious. For Plato is in advance of his age in his conception of language, as much as he is in his conception of mythology. (Compare Phaedrus.)

When the fervour of his etymological enthusiasm has abated, Socrates ends, as he has begun, with a rational explanation of language. Still he preserves his 'know nothing' disguise, and himself declares his first notions about names to be reckless and ridiculous. Having explained compound words by resolving them into their original elements, he now proceeds to analyse simple words into the letters of which they are composed. The Socrates who 'knows nothing,' here passes into the teacher, the dialectician, the arranger of species. There is nothing in this part of the dialogue which is either weak or extravagant. Plato is a supporter of the Onomatopoeic theory of language; that is to say, he supposes words to be formed by the imitation of ideas in sounds; he also recognises the effect of time, the influence of foreign languages, the desire of euphony, to be formative principles; and he admits a certain element of chance. But he gives no imitation in all this that he is preparing the way for the construction of an ideal language. Or that he has any Eleatic speculation to oppose to the Heracleiteanism of Cratylus.

The theory of language which is propounded in the Cratylus is in accordance with the later phase of the philosophy of Plato, and would have been regarded by him as in the main true. The dialogue is also a satire on the philological fancies of the day. Socrates in pursuit of his vocation as a detector of false knowledge, lights by accident on the truth. He is guessing, he is dreaming; he has heard, as he says in the Phaedrus, from another: no one is more surprised than himself at his own discoveries. And yet some of his best remarks, as for example his view of the derivation of Greek words from other languages, or of the permutations of letters, or again, his observation that in speaking of the Gods we are only speaking of our names of them, occur among these flights of humour.

We can imagine a character having a profound insight into the nature of men and things, and yet hardly dwelling upon them seriously; blending inextricably sense and nonsense; sometimes enveloping in a blaze of jests the most serious matters, and then again allowing the truth to peer through; enjoying the flow of his own humour, and puzzling mankind by an ironical exaggeration of their absurdities. Such were Aristophanes and Rabelais; such, in a different style, were Sterne, Jean Paul, Hamann,— writers who sometimes become unintelligible through the extravagance of their fancies. Such is the character which Plato intends to depict in some of his dialogues as the Silenus Socrates; and through this medium we have to receive our theory of language.

There remains a difficulty which seems to demand a more exact answer: In what relation does the satirical or etymological portion of the dialogue stand to the serious? Granting all that can be said about the provoking irony of Socrates, about the parody of Euthyphro, or Prodicus, or Antisthenes, how does the long catalogue of etymologies furnish any answer to the question of Hermogenes, which is evidently the main thesis of the dialogue: What is the truth, or correctness, or principle of names?

After illustrating the nature of correctness by the analogy of the arts, and then, as in the Republic, ironically appealing to the authority of the Homeric poems, Socrates shows that the truth or correctness of names can only be ascertained by an appeal to etymology. The truth of names is to be found in the analysis of their elements. But why does he admit etymologies which are absurd, based on Heracleitean fancies, fourfold interpretations of words, impossible unions and separations of syllables and letters?

1. The answer to this difficulty has been already anticipated in part: Socrates is not a dogmatic teacher, and therefore he puts on this wild and fanciful disguise, in order that the truth may be permitted to appear: 2. as Benfey remarks, an erroneous example may illustrate a principle of language as well as a true one: 3. many of these etymologies, as, for example, that of *dikaion*, are indicated, by the manner in which Socrates speaks of them, to have been current in his own age: 4. the philosophy of language had not made such progress as would have justified Plato in propounding real derivations. Like his master Socrates, he saw through the hollowness of the incipient sciences of the day, and tries to move in a circle apart from them, laying down the conditions under which they are to be pursued, but, as in the *Timaeus*, cautious and tentative, when he is speaking of actual phenomena. To have made etymologies seriously, would have seemed to him like the interpretation of the myths in the *Phaedrus*, the task 'of a not very fortunate individual, who had a great deal of time on his hands.' The irony of Socrates places him above and beyond the errors of his contemporaries.

The *Cratylus* is full of humour and satirical touches: the inspiration which comes from Euthyphro, and his prancing steeds, the light admixture of quotations from Homer, and the spurious dialectic which is applied to them; the jest about the fifty-drachma course of Prodicus, which is declared on the best authority, viz. his own, to be a complete education in grammar and rhetoric; the double explanation of the name Hermogenes, either as 'not being in luck,' or 'being no speaker;' the dearly-bought wisdom of Callias, the Lacedaemonian whose name was 'Rush,' and, above all, the pleasure which Socrates expresses in his own dangerous discoveries, which 'to-morrow he will purge away,' are truly humorous. While delivering a lecture on the philosophy of language, Socrates is also satirizing the endless fertility of the human mind in spinning arguments out of nothing, and

employing the most trifling and fanciful analogies in support of a theory. Etymology in ancient as in modern times was a favourite recreation; and Socrates makes merry at the expense of the etymologists. The simplicity of Hermogenes, who is ready to believe anything that he is told, heightens the effect. Socrates in his genial and ironical mood hits right and left at his adversaries: Ouranos is so called *apo tou oran ta ano*, which, as some philosophers say, is the way to have a pure mind; the sophists are by a fanciful explanation converted into heroes; 'the givers of names were like some philosophers who fancy that the earth goes round because their heads are always going round.' There is a great deal of 'mischief' lurking in the following: 'I found myself in greater perplexity about justice than I was before I began to learn;' 'The rho in *katoptron* must be the addition of some one who cares nothing about truth, but thinks only of putting the mouth into shape;' 'Tales and falsehoods have generally to do with the Tragic and goatish life, and tragedy is the place of them.' Several philosophers and sophists are mentioned by name: first, Protagoras and Euthydemus are assailed; then the interpreters of Homer, *oi palαιοi Omerikoi* (compare Arist. Met.) and the Orphic poets are alluded to by the way; then he discovers a hive of wisdom in the philosophy of Heracleitus;— the doctrine of the flux is contained in the word *ousia* (= *osia* the pushing principle), an anticipation of Anaxagoras is found in *psuche* and *selene*. Again, he ridicules the arbitrary methods of pulling out and putting in letters which were in vogue among the philologers of his time; or slightly scoffs at contemporary religious beliefs. Lastly, he is impatient of hearing from the half-converted Cratylus the doctrine that falsehood can neither be spoken, nor uttered, nor addressed; a piece of sophistry attributed to Gorgias, which reappears in the Sophist. And he proceeds to demolish, with no less delight than he had set up, the Heracleitean theory of language.

In the latter part of the dialogue Socrates becomes more serious, though he does not lay aside but rather aggravates his banter of the Heracleiteans, whom here, as in the Theaetetus, he delights to ridicule. What was the origin of this enmity we can hardly determine:—was it due to the natural dislike which may be supposed to exist between the 'patrons of the flux' and the 'friends of the ideas' (Soph.)? or is it to be attributed to the indignation which Plato felt at having wasted his time upon 'Cratylus and the doctrines of Heracleitus' in the days of his youth? Socrates, touching on some of the characteristic difficulties of early Greek philosophy, endeavours to show Cratylus that imitation may be partial or imperfect, that a knowledge of things is higher than a knowledge of names, and that there can be no knowledge if all things are in a state of transition. But Cratylus, who does not easily apprehend the argument from common sense, remains unconvinced, and on the whole inclines to his former opinion. Some profound philosophical remarks are scattered up and down, admitting of an application not only to language but to knowledge generally; such as the assertion

that ‘consistency is no test of truth:’ or again, ‘If we are over-precise about words, truth will say “too late” to us as to the belated traveller in Aegina.’

The place of the dialogue in the series cannot be determined with certainty. The style and subject, and the treatment of the character of Socrates, have a close resemblance to the earlier dialogues, especially to the *Phaedrus* and *Euthydemus*. The manner in which the ideas are spoken of at the end of the dialogue, also indicates a comparatively early date. The imaginative element is still in full vigour; the Socrates of the *Cratylus* is the Socrates of the *Apology* and *Symposium*, not yet Platonized; and he describes, as in the *Theaetetus*, the philosophy of Heracleitus by ‘unsavoury’ similes—he cannot believe that the world is like ‘a leaky vessel,’ or ‘a man who has a running at the nose’; he attributes the flux of the world to the swimming in some folks’ heads. On the other hand, the relation of thought to language is omitted here, but is treated of in the *Sophist*. These grounds are not sufficient to enable us to arrive at a precise conclusion. But we shall not be far wrong in placing the *Cratylus* about the middle, or at any rate in the first half, of the series.

*Cratylus*, the Heracleitean philosopher, and *Hermogenes*, the brother of *Callias*, have been arguing about names; the former maintaining that they are natural, the latter that they are conventional. *Cratylus* affirms that his own is a true name, but will not allow that the name of *Hermogenes* is equally true. *Hermogenes* asks Socrates to explain to him what *Cratylus* means; or, far rather, he would like to know, What Socrates himself thinks about the truth or correctness of names? Socrates replies, that hard is knowledge, and the nature of names is a considerable part of knowledge: he has never been to hear the fifty-drachma course of *Prodicus*; and having only attended the single-drachma course, he is not competent to give an opinion on such matters. When *Cratylus* denies that *Hermogenes* is a true name, he supposes him to mean that he is not a true son of *Hermes*, because he is never in luck. But he would like to have an open council and to hear both sides.

*Hermogenes* is of opinion that there is no principle in names; they may be changed, as we change the names of slaves, whenever we please, and the altered name is as good as the original one.

You mean to say, for instance, rejoins Socrates, that if I agree to call a man a horse, then a man will be rightly called a horse by me, and a man by the rest of the world? But, surely, there is in words a true and a false, as there are true and false propositions. If a whole proposition be true or false, then the parts of a proposition may be true or false, and the least parts as well as the greatest; and the least parts are names, and therefore names may be true or false. Would *Hermogenes* maintain that anybody may give a name to anything, and as many names as he pleases; and

would all these names be always true at the time of giving them? Hermogenes replies that this is the only way in which he can conceive that names are correct; and he appeals to the practice of different nations, and of the different Hellenic tribes, in confirmation of his view. Socrates asks, whether the things differ as the words which represent them differ:— Are we to maintain with Protagoras, that what appears is? Hermogenes has always been puzzled about this, but acknowledges, when he is pressed by Socrates, that there are a few very good men in the world, and a great many very bad; and the very good are the wise, and the very bad are the foolish; and this is not mere appearance but reality. Nor is he disposed to say with Euthydemus, that all things equally and always belong to all men; in that case, again, there would be no distinction between bad and good men. But then, the only remaining possibility is, that all things have their several distinct natures, and are independent of our notions about them. And not only things, but actions, have distinct natures, and are done by different processes. There is a natural way of cutting or burning, and a natural instrument with which men cut or burn, and any other way will fail;—this is true of all actions. And speaking is a kind of action, and naming is a kind of speaking, and we must name according to a natural process, and with a proper instrument. We cut with a knife, we pierce with an awl, we weave with a shuttle, we name with a name. And as a shuttle separates the warp from the woof, so a name distinguishes the natures of things. The weaver will use the shuttle well,—that is, like a weaver; and the teacher will use the name well,—that is, like a teacher. The shuttle will be made by the carpenter; the awl by the smith or skilled person. But who makes a name? Does not the law give names, and does not the teacher receive them from the legislator? He is the skilled person who makes them, and of all skilled workmen he is the rarest. But how does the carpenter make or repair the shuttle, and to what will he look? Will he not look at the ideal which he has in his mind? And as the different kinds of work differ, so ought the instruments which make them to differ. The several kinds of shuttles ought to answer in material and form to the several kinds of webs. And the legislator ought to know the different materials and forms of which names are made in Hellas and other countries. But who is to be the judge of the proper form? The judge of shuttles is the weaver who uses them; the judge of lyres is the player of the lyre; the judge of ships is the pilot. And will not the judge who is able to direct the legislator in his work of naming, be he who knows how to use the names—he who can ask and answer questions—in short, the dialectician? The pilot directs the carpenter how to make the rudder, and the dialectician directs the legislator how he is to impose names; for to express the ideal forms of things in syllables and letters is not the easy task, Hermogenes, which you imagine.

‘I should be more readily persuaded, if you would show me this natural correctness of names.’

Indeed I cannot; but I see that you have advanced; for you now admit that there is a correctness of names, and that not every one can give a name. But what is the nature of this correctness or truth, you must learn from the Sophists, of whom your brother Callias has bought his reputation for wisdom rather dearly; and since they require to be paid, you, having no money, had better learn from him at second-hand. 'Well, but I have just given up Protagoras, and I should be inconsistent in going to learn of him.' Then if you reject him you may learn of the poets, and in particular of Homer, who distinguishes the names given by Gods and men to the same things, as in the verse about the river God who fought with Hephaestus, 'whom the Gods call Xanthus, and men call Scamander;' or in the lines in which he mentions the bird which the Gods call 'Chalcis,' and men 'Cymindis;' or the hill which men call 'Batieia,' and the Gods 'Myrinna's Tomb.' Here is an important lesson; for the Gods must of course be right in their use of names. And this is not the only truth about philology which may be learnt from Homer. Does he not say that Hector's son had two names—

'Hector called him Scamandrius, but the others Astyanax'?

Now, if the men called him Astyanax, is it not probable that the other name was conferred by the women? And which are more likely to be right—the wiser or the less wise, the men or the women? Homer evidently agreed with the men: and of the name given by them he offers an explanation;—the boy was called Astyanax ('king of the city'), because his father saved the city. The names Astyanax and Hector, moreover, are really the same,—the one means a king, and the other is 'a holder or possessor.' For as the lion's whelp may be called a lion, or the horse's foal a foal, so the son of a king may be called a king. But if the horse had produced a calf, then that would be called a calf. Whether the syllables of a name are the same or not makes no difference, provided the meaning is retained. For example; the names of letters, whether vowels or consonants, do not correspond to their sounds, with the exception of epsilon, upsilon, omicron, omega. The name Beta has three letters added to the sound—and yet this does not alter the sense of the word, or prevent the whole name having the value which the legislator intended. And the same may be said of a king and the son of a king, who like other animals resemble each other in the course of nature; the words by which they are signified may be disguised, and yet amid differences of sound the etymologist may recognise the same notion, just as the physician recognises the power of the same drugs under different disguises of colour and smell. Hector and Astyanax have only one letter alike, but they have the same meaning; and Agis (leader) is altogether different in sound from Polemarchus (chief in war), or Eupolemus (good warrior); but the two words present the same idea of leader or general, like the words Iatrocles and Acesimbrotus, which equally denote a physician. The son succeeds the father as the foal succeeds the horse, but when,

out of the course of nature, a prodigy occurs, and the offspring no longer resembles the parent, then the names no longer agree. This may be illustrated by the case of Agamemnon and his son Orestes, of whom the former has a name significant of his patience at the siege of Troy; while the name of the latter indicates his savage, man-of-the-mountain nature. Atreus again, for his murder of Chrysippus, and his cruelty to Thyestes, is rightly named Atreus, which, to the eye of the etymologist, is *ateros* (destructive), *ateires* (stubborn), *atreotos* (fearless); and Pelops is *o ta pelas oron* (he who sees what is near only), because in his eagerness to win Hippodamia, he was unconscious of the remoter consequences which the murder of Myrtilus would entail upon his race. The name Tantalus, if slightly changed, offers two etymologies; either *apo tes tou lithou talanteias*, or *apo tou talantaton einai*, signifying at once the hanging of the stone over his head in the world below, and the misery which he brought upon his country. And the name of his father, Zeus, Dios, Zenos, has an excellent meaning, though hard to be understood, because really a sentence which is divided into two parts (Zeus, Dios). For he, being the lord and king of all, is the author of our being, and in him all live: this is implied in the double form, Dios, Zenos, which being put together and interpreted is *di on ze panta*. There may, at first sight, appear to be some irreverence in calling him the son of Cronos, who is a proverb for stupidity; but the meaning is that Zeus himself is the son of a mighty intellect; Kronos, quasi *koros*, not in the sense of a youth, but quasi *to katharon kai akeraton tou nou*—the pure and garnished mind, which in turn is begotten of Uranus, who is so called *apo tou oran ta ano*, from looking upwards; which, as philosophers say, is the way to have a pure mind. The earlier portion of Hesiod's genealogy has escaped my memory, or I would try more conclusions of the same sort. 'You talk like an oracle.' I caught the infection from Euthyphro, who gave me a long lecture which began at dawn, and has not only entered into my ears, but filled my soul, and my intention is to yield to the inspiration to-day; and to-morrow I will be exorcised by some priest or sophist. 'Go on; I am anxious to hear the rest.' Now that we have a general notion, how shall we proceed? What names will afford the most crucial test of natural fitness? Those of heroes and ordinary men are often deceptive, because they are patronymics or expressions of a wish; let us try gods and demi-gods. Gods are so called, *apo tou thein*, from the verb 'to run;' because the sun, moon, and stars run about the heaven; and they being the original gods of the Hellenes, as they still are of the Barbarians, their name is given to all Gods. The demons are the golden race of Hesiod, and by golden he means not literally golden, but good; and they are called demons, quasi *daemones*, which in old Attic was used for *daimones*—good men are well said to become *daimones* when they die, because they are knowing. Eros (with an epsilon) is the same word as *eros* (with an eta): 'the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair;' or perhaps they were a species of sophists or rhetoricians, and so called *apo tou erotan*, or *eirein*, from their habit of spinning questions; for *eirein* is equivalent to

legein. I get all this from Euthyphro; and now a new and ingenious idea comes into my mind, and, if I am not careful, I shall be wiser than I ought to be by to-morrow's dawn. My idea is, that we may put in and pull out letters at pleasure and alter the accents (as, for example, *Dii philos* may be turned into *Diphilos*), and we may make words into sentences and sentences into words. The name *anthrotos* is a case in point, for a letter has been omitted and the accent changed; the original meaning being *o anatron a oopen*—he who looks up at what he sees. *Psuche* may be thought to be the reviving, or refreshing, or animating principle—*e anapsuchousa to soma*; but I am afraid that Euthyphro and his disciples will scorn this derivation, and I must find another: shall we identify the soul with the 'ordering mind' of Anaxagoras, and say that *psuche*, quasi *phuseche* = *e phusin echei* or *ochei*?—this might easily be refined into *psyche*. 'That is a more artistic etymology.'

After *psuche* follows *soma*; this, by a slight permutation, may be either = (1) the 'grave' of the soul, or (2) may mean 'that by which the soul signifies (*semainei*) her wishes.' But more probably, the word is Orphic, and simply denotes that the body is the place of ward in which the soul suffers the penalty of sin,—*en o sozetai*. 'I should like to hear some more explanations of the names of the Gods, like that excellent one of Zeus.' The truest names of the Gods are those which they give themselves; but these are unknown to us. Less true are those by which we propitiate them, as men say in prayers, 'May he graciously receive any name by which I call him.' And to avoid offence, I should like to let them know beforehand that we are not presuming to enquire about them, but only about the names which they usually bear. Let us begin with *Hestia*. What did he mean who gave the name *Hestia*? 'That is a very difficult question.' O, my dear *Hermogenes*, I believe that there was a power of philosophy and talk among the first inventors of names, both in our own and in other languages; for even in foreign words a principle is discernible. *Hestia* is the same with *esia*, which is an old form of *ousia*, and means the first principle of things: this agrees with the fact that to *Hestia* the first sacrifices are offered. There is also another reading—*osia*, which implies that 'pushing' (*othoun*) is the first principle of all things. And here I seem to discover a delicate allusion to the flux of *Heracleitus*—that antediluvian philosopher who cannot walk twice in the same stream; and this flux of his may accomplish yet greater marvels. For the names *Cronos* and *Rhea* cannot have been accidental; the giver of them must have known something about the doctrine of *Heracleitus*. Moreover, there is a remarkable coincidence in the words of *Hesiod*, when he speaks of *Oceanus*, 'the origin of Gods;' and in the verse of *Orpheus*, in which he describes *Oceanus* espousing his sister *Tethys*. *Tethys* is nothing more than the name of a spring—to *diattomenon kai ethoumenon*. *Poseidon* is *posidesmos*, the chain of the feet, because you cannot walk on the sea—the *epsilon* is inserted by way of ornament; or perhaps the name may have been

originally polleidon, meaning, that the God knew many things (polla eidos): he may also be the shaker, apo tou seiein,—in this case, pi and delta have been added. Pluto is connected with ploutos, because wealth comes out of the earth; or the word may be a euphemism for Hades, which is usually derived apo tou aeidous, because the God is concerned with the invisible. But the name Hades was really given him from his knowing (eidenai) all good things. Men in general are foolishly afraid of him, and talk with horror of the world below from which no one may return. The reason why his subjects never wish to come back, even if they could, is that the God enchains them by the strongest of spells, namely by the desire of virtue, which they hope to obtain by constant association with him. He is the perfect and accomplished Sophist and the great benefactor of the other world; for he has much more than he wants there, and hence he is called Pluto or the rich. He will have nothing to do with the souls of men while in the body, because he cannot work his will with them so long as they are confused and entangled by fleshly lusts. Demeter is the mother and giver of food—e didousa meter tes edodes. Here is erate tis, or perhaps the legislator may have been thinking of the weather, and has merely transposed the letters of the word aer. Pherephatta, that word of awe, is pheretapha, which is only an euphonious contraction of e tou pheromenou ephaptomene,—all things are in motion, and she in her wisdom moves with them, and the wise God Hades consorts with her—there is nothing very terrible in this, any more than in her other appellation Persephone, which is also significant of her wisdom (sophe). Apollo is another name, which is supposed to have some dreadful meaning, but is susceptible of at least four perfectly innocent explanations. First, he is the purifier or purger or absolver (apolouon); secondly, he is the true diviner, Aplos, as he is called in the Thessalian dialect (aplos = aplous, sincere); thirdly, he is the archer (aei ballon), always shooting; or again, supposing alpha to mean ama or omou, Apollo becomes equivalent to ama polon, which points to both his musical and his heavenly attributes; for there is a ‘moving together’ alike in music and in the harmony of the spheres. The second lambda is inserted in order to avoid the ill-omened sound of destruction. The Muses are so called—apo tou mosthai. The gentle Leto or Letho is named from her willingness (ethelemon), or because she is ready to forgive and forget (lethe). Artemis is so called from her healthy well-balanced nature, dia to artemes, or as aretes istor; or as a lover of virginity, aroton misesasa. One of these explanations is probably true,—perhaps all of them. Dionysus is o didous ton oionon, and oinos is quasi oionous because wine makes those think (oiesthai) that they have a mind (nous) who have none. The established derivation of Aphrodite dia ten tou athrou genesin may be accepted on the authority of Hesiod. Again, there is the name of Pallas, or Athene, which we, who are Athenians, must not forget. Pallas is derived from armed dances—apo tou pallein ta opla. For Athene we must turn to the allegorical interpreters of Homer, who make the name equivalent to theonoe, or possibly the word was originally

ethonoe and signified moral intelligence (en ethei noesis). Hephaestus, again, is the lord of light—o tou phaeos istor. This is a good notion; and, to prevent any other getting into our heads, let us go on to Ares. He is the manly one (arren), or the unchangeable one (arratos). Enough of the Gods; for, by the Gods, I am afraid of them; but if you suggest other words, you will see how the horses of Euthyphro prance. ‘Only one more God; tell me about my godfather Hermes.’ He is ermeneus, the messenger or cheater or thief or bargainer; or o eirein momenos, that is, eiremes or ermes—the speaker or contriver of speeches. ‘Well said Cratylus, then, that I am no son of Hermes.’ Pan, as the son of Hermes, is speech or the brother of speech, and is called Pan because speech indicates everything—o pan menuon. He has two forms, a true and a false; and is in the upper part smooth, and in the lower part shaggy. He is the goat of Tragedy, in which there are plenty of falsehoods.

‘Will you go on to the elements—sun, moon, stars, earth, aether, air, fire, water, seasons, years?’ Very good: and which shall I take first? Let us begin with elios, or the sun. The Doric form elios helps us to see that he is so called because at his rising he gathers (alizei) men together, or because he rolls about (eilei) the earth, or because he variegates (aiolei = poikillei) the earth. Selene is an anticipation of Anaxagoras, being a contraction of selaenoneoaeia, the light (selas) which is ever old and new, and which, as Anaxagoras says, is borrowed from the sun; the name was harmonized into selanaia, a form which is still in use. ‘That is a true dithyrambic name.’ Meis is so called apo tou meiousthai, from suffering diminution, and astron is from astrape (lightning), which is an improvement of anastrope, that which turns the eyes inside out. ‘How do you explain pur n udor?’ I suspect that pur, which, like udor n kuon, is found in Phrygian, is a foreign word; for the Hellenes have borrowed much from the barbarians, and I always resort to this theory of a foreign origin when I am at a loss. Aer may be explained, oti airei ta apo tes ges; or, oti aei rei; or, oti pneuma ex autou ginetai (compare the poetic word aetai). So aither quasi aitheer oti aei thei peri ton aera: ge, gaia quasi genneteira (compare the Homeric form gegaasi); ora (with an omega), or, according to the old Attic form ora (with an omicron), is derived apo tou orizein, because it divides the year; eniautos and etos are the same thought—o en eauto etazon, cut into two parts, en eauto and etazon, like di on ze into Dios and Zenos.

‘You make surprising progress.’ True; I am run away with, and am not even yet at my utmost speed. ‘I should like very much to hear your account of the virtues. What principle of correctness is there in those charming words, wisdom, understanding, justice, and the rest?’ To explain all that will be a serious business; still, as I have put on the lion’s skin, appearances must be maintained. My opinion is, that primitive men were like some modern philosophers, who, by always going round in their search after the nature of things, become dizzy; and this

phenomenon, which was really in themselves, they imagined to take place in the external world. You have no doubt remarked, that the doctrine of the universal flux, or generation of things, is indicated in names. 'No, I never did.' Phronesis is only phoras kai rou noesis, or perhaps phoras onesis, and in any case is connected with pheresthai; gnome is gones skepsis kai nomesis; noesis is neou or gignomenon esis; the word neos implies that creation is always going on—the original form was neoesis; sophrosune is soteria phroneseos; episteme is e epomene tois pragmasin—the faculty which keeps close, neither anticipating nor lagging behind; sunesis is equivalent to sunienai, sumporeuesthai ten psuche, and is a kind of conclusion—sullogismos tis, akin therefore in idea to episteme; sophia is very difficult, and has a foreign look—the meaning is, touching the motion or stream of things, and may be illustrated by the poetical esuthe and the Lacedaemonian proper name Sous, or Rush; agathon is ro agaston en te tachuteti,—for all things are in motion, and some are swifter than others: dikaiosune is clearly e tou dikaiou sunesis. The word dikaion is more troublesome, and appears to mean the subtle penetrating power which, as the lovers of motion say, preserves all things, and is the cause of all things, quasi diaion going through—the letter kappa being inserted for the sake of euphony. This is a great mystery which has been confided to me; but when I ask for an explanation I am thought obtrusive, and another derivation is proposed to me. Justice is said to be o kaion, or the sun; and when I joyfully repeat this beautiful notion, I am answered, 'What, is there no justice when the sun is down?' And when I entreat my questioner to tell me his own opinion, he replies, that justice is fire in the abstract, or heat in the abstract; which is not very intelligible. Others laugh at such notions, and say with Anaxagoras, that justice is the ordering mind. 'I think that some one must have told you this.' And not the rest? Let me proceed then, in the hope of proving to you my originality. Andreia is quasi anpeia quasi e ano roe, the stream which flows upwards, and is opposed to injustice, which clearly hinders the principle of penetration; arren and aner have a similar derivation; gune is the same as gone; thelu is derived apo tes theles, because the teat makes things flourish (tethelenai), and the word thallein itself implies increase of youth, which is swift and sudden ever (thein and allesthai). I am getting over the ground fast: but much has still to be explained. There is techne, for instance. This, by an aphaeresis of tau and an epenthesis of omicron in two places, may be identified with echonoe, and signifies 'that which has mind.'

'A very poor etymology.' Yes; but you must remember that all language is in process of change; letters are taken in and put out for the sake of euphony, and time is also a great alterer of words. For example, what business has the letter rho in the word katoptron, or the letter sigma in the word sphigx? The additions are often such that it is impossible to make out the original word; and yet, if you may put in and pull out, as you like, any name is equally good for any object. The fact

is, that great dictators of literature like yourself should observe the rules of moderation. 'I will do my best.' But do not be too much of a precisian, or you will paralyze me. If you will let me add mechane, apo tou mekous, which means polu, and anein, I shall be at the summit of my powers, from which elevation I will examine the two words kakia and arete. The first is easily explained in accordance with what has preceded; for all things being in a flux, kakia is to kakos ion. This derivation is illustrated by the word deilia, which ought to have come after andreia, and may be regarded as o lian desmos tes psuches, just as aporia signifies an impediment to motion (from alpha not, and poreuesthai to go), and arete is euporia, which is the opposite of this—the everflowing (aei reousa or aeireite), or the eligible, quasi airete. You will think that I am inventing, but I say that if kakia is right, then arete is also right. But what is kakon? That is a very obscure word, to which I can only apply my old notion and declare that kakon is a foreign word. Next, let us proceed to kalon, aischron. The latter is doubtless contracted from aischoroun, quasi aei ischon roun. The inventor of words being a patron of the flux, was a great enemy to stagnation. Kalon is to kaloun ta pragmata—this is mind (nous or dianoa); which is also the principle of beauty; and which doing the works of beauty, is therefore rightly called the beautiful. The meaning of sumpheron is explained by previous examples;—like episteme, signifying that the soul moves in harmony with the world (sumphora, sumpheronta). Kerdos is to pasi kerannumenon—that which mingles with all things: lusiteloun is equivalent to to tes phoras luon to telos, and is not to be taken in the vulgar sense of gainful, but rather in that of swift, being the principle which makes motion immortal and unceasing; ophelimon is apo tou ophellein—that which gives increase: this word, which is Homeric, is of foreign origin. Blaberon is to blanton or boulomenon aptein tou rou— that which injures or seeks to bind the stream. The proper word would be boulapteroun, but this is too much of a mouthful—like a prelude on the flute in honour of Athene. The word zemiodes is difficult; great changes, as I was saying, have been made in words, and even a small change will alter their meaning very much. The word deon is one of these disguised words. You know that according to the old pronunciation, which is especially affected by the women, who are great conservatives, iota and delta were used where we should now use eta and zeta: for example, what we now call emera was formerly called imera; and this shows the meaning of the word to have been 'the desired one coming after night,' and not, as is often supposed, 'that which makes things gentle' (emera). So again, zugon is duogon, quasi desis duein eis agogen—(the binding of two together for the purpose of drawing. Deon, as ordinarily written, has an evil sense, signifying the chain (desmos) or hindrance of motion; but in its ancient form diion is expressive of good, quasi diion, that which penetrates or goes through all. Zemiodes is really demiodes, and means that which binds motion (dounti to ion): edone is e pros ten onrsin teinousa praxis—the delta is an insertion: lupe is derived apo tes dialuseos tou somatos: ania is from alpha and

ienai, to go: algedon is a foreign word, and is so called apo tou algeinou: odune is apo tes enduseos tes lupes: achthedon is in its very sound a burden: chapa expresses the flow of soul: terpsis is apo tou terpnou, and terpnou is properly erpnou, because the sensation of pleasure is likened to a breath (pnoe) which creeps (erpei) through the soul: euphrosune is named from pheresthai, because the soul moves in harmony with nature: epithumia is e epi ton thumon iousa dunamis: thumos is apo tes thuseos tes psuches: imeros—oti eimenos pei e psuche: pothos, the desire which is in another place, allothi pou: eros was anciently esros, and so called because it flows into (esrei) the soul from without: doxa is e dioxis tou eidenai, or expresses the shooting from a bow (toxon). The latter etymology is confirmed by the words boulesthai, boule, aboulia, which all have to do with shooting (bole): and similarly oiesis is nothing but the movement (oisis) of the soul towards essence. Ekousion is to eikon—the yielding—anagke is e an agke iousa, the passage through ravines which impede motion: aletheia is theia ale, divine motion. Pseudos is the opposite of this, implying the principle of constraint and forced repose, which is expressed under the figure of sleep, to eudon; the psi is an addition. Onoma, a name, affirms the real existence of that which is sought after—on ou masma estin. On and ousia are only ion with an iota broken off; and ouk on is ouk ion. ‘And what are ion, reon, down?’ One way of explaining them has been already suggested—they may be of foreign origin; and possibly this is the true answer. But mere antiquity may often prevent our recognizing words, after all the complications which they have undergone; and we must remember that however far we carry back our analysis some ultimate elements or roots will remain which can be no further analyzed. For example; the word agathos was supposed by us to be a compound of agastos and thoos, and probably thoos may be further resolvable. But if we take a word of which no further resolution seems attainable, we may fairly conclude that we have reached one of these original elements, and the truth of such a word must be tested by some new method. Will you help me in the search?

All names, whether primary or secondary, are intended to show the nature of things; and the secondary, as I conceive, derive their significance from the primary. But then, how do the primary names indicate anything? And let me ask another question,—If we had no faculty of speech, how should we communicate with one another? Should we not use signs, like the deaf and dumb? The elevation of our hands would mean lightness—heaviness would be expressed by letting them drop. The running of any animal would be described by a similar movement of our own frames. The body can only express anything by imitation; and the tongue or mouth can imitate as well as the rest of the body. But this imitation of the tongue or voice is not yet a name, because people may imitate sheep or goats without naming them. What, then, is a name? In the first place, a name is not a musical, or, secondly, a pictorial imitation, but an imitation of that kind which

expresses the nature of a thing; and is the invention not of a musician, or of a painter, but of a namer.

And now, I think that we may consider the names about which you were asking. The way to analyze them will be by going back to the letters, or primary elements of which they are composed. First, we separate the alphabet into classes of letters, distinguishing the consonants, mutes, vowels, and semivowels; and when we have learnt them singly, we shall learn to know them in their various combinations of two or more letters; just as the painter knows how to use either a single colour, or a combination of colours. And like the painter, we may apply letters to the expression of objects, and form them into syllables; and these again into words, until the picture or figure—that is, language—is completed. Not that I am literally speaking of ourselves, but I mean to say that this was the way in which the ancients framed language. And this leads me to consider whether the primary as well as the secondary elements are rightly given. I may remark, as I was saying about the Gods, that we can only attain to conjecture of them. But still we insist that ours is the true and only method of discovery; otherwise we must have recourse, like the tragic poets, to a *Deus ex machina*, and say that God gave the first names, and therefore they are right; or that the barbarians are older than we are, and that we learnt of them; or that antiquity has cast a veil over the truth. Yet all these are not reasons; they are only ingenious excuses for having no reasons.

I will freely impart to you my own notions, though they are somewhat crude:—the letter rho appears to me to be the general instrument which the legislator has employed to express all motion or kinesis. (I ought to explain that kinesis is just *iesis* (going), for the letter eta was unknown to the ancients; and the root, *kiein*, is a foreign form of *ienai*: of kinesis or *eisis*, the opposite is *stasis*). This use of rho is evident in the words tremble, break, crush, crumble, and the like; the imposer of names perceived that the tongue is most agitated in the pronunciation of this letter, just as he used iota to express the subtle power which penetrates through all things. The letters phi, psi, sigma, zeta, which require a great deal of wind, are employed in the imitation of such notions as shivering, seething, shaking, and in general of what is windy. The letters delta and tau convey the idea of binding and rest in a place: the lambda denotes smoothness, as in the words slip, sleek, sleep, and the like. But when the slipping tongue is detained by the heavier sound of gamma, then arises the notion of a glutinous clammy nature: nu is sounded from within, and has a notion of inwardness: alpha is the expression of size; eta of length; omicron of roundness, and therefore there is plenty of omicron in the word *goggulon*. That is my view, Hermogenes, of the correctness of names; and I should like to hear what Cratylus would say. ‘But, Socrates, as I was telling you, Cratylus mystifies me; I should like to ask him, in your presence, what he means by the fitness of names?’ To this appeal, Cratylus replies ‘that he cannot explain

so important a subject all in a moment.’ ‘No, but you may “add little to little,” as Hesiod says.’ Socrates here interposes his own request, that Cratylus will give some account of his theory. Hermogenes and himself are mere sciolists, but Cratylus has reflected on these matters, and has had teachers. Cratylus replies in the words of Achilles: “Illustrious Ajax, you have spoken in all things much to my mind,” whether Euthyphro, or some Muse inhabiting your own breast, was the inspirer.’ Socrates replies, that he is afraid of being self-deceived, and therefore he must ‘look fore and aft,’ as Homer remarks. Does not Cratylus agree with him that names teach us the nature of things? ‘Yes.’ And naming is an art, and the artists are legislators, and like artists in general, some of them are better and some of them are worse than others, and give better or worse laws, and make better or worse names. Cratylus cannot admit that one name is better than another; they are either true names, or they are not names at all; and when he is asked about the name of Hermogenes, who is acknowledged to have no luck in him, he affirms this to be the name of somebody else. Socrates supposes him to mean that falsehood is impossible, to which his own answer would be, that there has never been a lack of liars. Cratylus presses him with the old sophistical argument, that falsehood is saying that which is not, and therefore saying nothing;—you cannot utter the word which is not. Socrates complains that this argument is too subtle for an old man to understand: Suppose a person addressing Cratylus were to say, Hail, Athenian Stranger, Hermogenes! would these words be true or false? ‘I should say that they would be mere unmeaning sounds, like the hammering of a brass pot.’ But you would acknowledge that names, as well as pictures, are imitations, and also that pictures may give a right or wrong representation of a man or woman:—why may not names then equally give a representation true and right or false and wrong? Cratylus admits that pictures may give a true or false representation, but denies that names can. Socrates argues, that he may go up to a man and say ‘this is year picture,’ and again, he may go and say to him ‘this is your name’—in the one case appealing to his sense of sight, and in the other to his sense of hearing;—may he not? ‘Yes.’ Then you will admit that there is a right or a wrong assignment of names, and if of names, then of verbs and nouns; and if of verbs and nouns, then of the sentences which are made up of them; and comparing nouns to pictures, you may give them all the appropriate sounds, or only some of them. And as he who gives all the colours makes a good picture, and he who gives only some of them, a bad or imperfect one, but still a picture; so he who gives all the sounds makes a good name, and he who gives only some of them, a bad or imperfect one, but a name still. The artist of names, that is, the legislator, may be a good or he may be a bad artist. ‘Yes, Socrates, but the cases are not parallel; for if you subtract or misplace a letter, the name ceases to be a name.’ Socrates admits that the number 10, if an unit is subtracted, would cease to be 10, but denies that names are of this purely quantitative nature. Suppose that there are two objects—Cratylus and the image of Cratylus; and let us imagine that some God

makes them perfectly alike, both in their outward form and in their inner nature and qualities: then there will be two Cratyluses, and not merely Cratylus and the image of Cratylus. But an image in fact always falls short in some degree of the original, and if images are not exact counterparts, why should names be? if they were, they would be the doubles of their originals, and indistinguishable from them; and how ridiculous would this be! Cratylus admits the truth of Socrates' remark. But then Socrates rejoins, he should have the courage to acknowledge that letters may be wrongly inserted in a noun, or a noun in a sentence; and yet the noun or the sentence may retain a meaning. Better to admit this, that we may not be punished like the traveller in Egina who goes about at night, and that Truth herself may not say to us, 'Too late.' And, errors excepted, we may still affirm that a name to be correct must have proper letters, which bear a resemblance to the thing signified. I must remind you of what Hermogenes and I were saying about the letter rho accent, which was held to be expressive of motion and hardness, as lambda is of smoothness;—and this you will admit to be their natural meaning. But then, why do the Eritreans call that skleroter which we call sklerotes? We can understand one another, although the letter rho accent is not equivalent to the letter s: why is this? You reply, because the two letters are sufficiently alike for the purpose of expressing motion. Well, then, there is the letter lambda; what business has this in a word meaning hardness? 'Why, Socrates, I retort upon you, that we put in and pull out letters at pleasure.' And the explanation of this is custom or agreement: we have made a convention that the rho shall mean s and a convention may indicate by the unlike as well as by the like. How could there be names for all the numbers unless you allow that convention is used? Imitation is a poor thing, and has to be supplemented by convention, which is another poor thing; although I agree with you in thinking that the most perfect form of language is found only where there is a perfect correspondence of sound and meaning. But let me ask you what is the use and force of names? 'The use of names, Socrates, is to inform, and he who knows names knows things.' Do you mean that the discovery of names is the same as the discovery of things? 'Yes.' But do you not see that there is a degree of deception about names? He who first gave names, gave them according to his conception, and that may have been erroneous. 'But then, why, Socrates, is language so consistent? all words have the same laws.' Mere consistency is no test of truth. In geometrical problems, for example, there may be a flaw at the beginning, and yet the conclusion may follow consistently. And, therefore, a wise man will take especial care of first principles. But are words really consistent; are there not as many terms of praise which signify rest as which signify motion? There is episteme, which is connected with stasis, as mneme is with meno. Bebaion, again, is the expression of station and position; istoria is clearly descriptive of the stopping istanai of the stream; piston indicates the cessation of motion; and there are many words having a bad sense, which are connected with ideas of motion,

such as sumphora, amartia, etc.: amathia, again, might be explained, as e ama theo iontos poreia, and akolasia as e akolouthia tois pragmasin. Thus the bad names are framed on the same principle as the good, and other examples might be given, which would favour a theory of rest rather than of motion. 'Yes; but the greater number of words express motion.' Are we to count them, Cratylus; and is correctness of names to be determined by the voice of a majority?

Here is another point: we were saying that the legislator gives names; and therefore we must suppose that he knows the things which he names: but how can he have learnt things from names before there were any names? 'I believe, Socrates, that some power more than human first gave things their names, and that these were necessarily true names.' Then how came the giver of names to contradict himself, and to make some names expressive of rest, and others of motion? 'I do not suppose that he did make them both.' Then which did he make—those which are expressive of rest, or those which are expressive of motion?...But if some names are true and others false, we can only decide between them, not by counting words, but by appealing to things. And, if so, we must allow that things may be known without names; for names, as we have several times admitted, are the images of things; and the higher knowledge is of things, and is not to be derived from names; and though I do not doubt that the inventors of language gave names, under the idea that all things are in a state of motion and flux, I believe that they were mistaken; and that having fallen into a whirlpool themselves, they are trying to drag us after them. For is there not a true beauty and a true good, which is always beautiful and always good? Can the thing beauty be vanishing away from us while the words are yet in our mouths? And they could not be known by any one if they are always passing away—for if they are always passing away, the observer has no opportunity of observing their state. Whether the doctrine of the flux or of the eternal nature be the truer, is hard to determine. But no man of sense will put himself, or the education of his mind, in the power of names: he will not condemn himself to be an unreal thing, nor will he believe that everything is in a flux like the water in a leaky vessel, or that the world is a man who has a running at the nose. This doctrine may be true, Cratylus, but is also very likely to be untrue; and therefore I would have you reflect while you are young, and find out the truth, and when you know come and tell me. 'I have thought, Socrates, and after a good deal of thinking I incline to Heracleitus.' Then another day, my friend, you shall give me a lesson. 'Very good, Socrates, and I hope that you will continue to study these things yourself.'

...

We may now consider (I) how far Plato in the Cratylus has discovered the true principles of language, and then (II) proceed to compare modern speculations respecting the origin and nature of language with the anticipations of his genius.

I. (1) Plato is aware that language is not the work of chance; nor does he deny that there is a natural fitness in names. He only insists that this natural fitness shall be intelligibly explained. But he has no idea that language is a natural organism. He would have heard with surprise that languages are the common work of whole nations in a primitive or semi- barbarous age. How, he would probably have argued, could men devoid of art have contrived a structure of such complexity? No answer could have been given to this question, either in ancient or in modern times, until the nature of primitive antiquity had been thoroughly studied, and the instincts of man had been shown to exist in greater force, when his state approaches more nearly to that of children or animals. The philosophers of the last century, after their manner, would have vainly endeavoured to trace the process by which proper names were converted into common, and would have shown how the last effort of abstraction invented prepositions and auxiliaries. The theologian would have proved that language must have had a divine origin, because in childhood, while the organs are pliable, the intelligence is wanting, and when the intelligence is able to frame conceptions, the organs are no longer able to express them. Or, as others have said: Man is man because he has the gift of speech; and he could not have invented that which he is. But this would have been an 'argument too subtle' for Socrates, who rejects the theological account of the origin of language 'as an excuse for not giving a reason,' which he compares to the introduction of the 'Deus ex machina' by the tragic poets when they have to solve a difficulty; thus anticipating many modern controversies in which the primary agency of the divine Being is confused with the secondary cause; and God is assumed to have worked a miracle in order to fill up a lacuna in human knowledge. (Compare Timaeus.)

Neither is Plato wrong in supposing that an element of design and art enters into language. The creative power abating is supplemented by a mechanical process. 'Languages are not made but grow,' but they are made as well as grow; bursting into life like a plant or a flower, they are also capable of being trained and improved and engrafted upon one another. The change in them is effected in earlier ages by musical and euphonic improvements, at a later stage by the influence of grammar and logic, and by the poetical and literary use of words. They develop rapidly in childhood, and when they are full grown and set they may still put forth intellectual powers, like the mind in the body, or rather we may say that the nobler use of language only begins when the frame-work is complete. The savage or primitive man, in whom the natural instinct is strongest, is also the greatest improver of the forms of language. He is the poet or maker of words, as in civilised ages the dialectician is the definer or distinguisher of them. The latter calls the second world of abstract terms into existence, as the former has created the picture sounds which represent natural objects or processes. Poetry and philosophy—these two, are the two great formative principles of language, when

they have passed their first stage, of which, as of the first invention of the arts in general, we only entertain conjecture. And mythology is a link between them, connecting the visible and invisible, until at length the sensuous exterior falls away, and the severance of the inner and outer world, of the idea and the object of sense, becomes complete. At a later period, logic and grammar, sister arts, preserve and enlarge the decaying instinct of language, by rule and method, which they gather from analysis and observation.

(2) There is no trace in any of Plato's writings that he was acquainted with any language but Greek. Yet he has conceived very truly the relation of Greek to foreign languages, which he is led to consider, because he finds that many Greek words are incapable of explanation. Allowing a good deal for accident, and also for the fancies of the *conditores linguae Graecae*, there is an element of which he is unable to give an account. These unintelligible words he supposes to be of foreign origin, and to have been derived from a time when the Greeks were either barbarians, or in close relations to the barbarians. Socrates is aware that this principle is liable to great abuse; and, like the 'Deus ex machina,' explains nothing. Hence he excuses himself for the employment of such a device, and remarks that in foreign words there is still a principle of correctness, which applies equally both to Greeks and barbarians.

(3) But the greater number of primary words do not admit of derivation from foreign languages; they must be resolved into the letters out of which they are composed, and therefore the letters must have a meaning. The framers of language were aware of this; they observed that alpha was adapted to express size; eta length; omicron roundness; nu inwardness; rho accent rush or roar; lambda liquidity; gamma lambda the detention of the liquid or slippery element; delta and tau binding; phi, psi, sigma, xi, wind and cold, and so on. Plato's analysis of the letters of the alphabet shows a wonderful insight into the nature of language. He does not expressively distinguish between mere imitation and the symbolical use of sound to express thought, but he recognises in the examples which he gives both modes of imitation. Gesture is the mode which a deaf and dumb person would take of indicating his meaning. And language is the gesture of the tongue; in the use of the letter rho accent, to express a rushing or roaring, or of omicron to express roundness, there is a direct imitation; while in the use of the letter alpha to express size, or of eta to express length, the imitation is symbolical. The use of analogous or similar sounds, in order to express similar analogous ideas, seems to have escaped him.

In passing from the gesture of the body to the movement of the tongue, Plato makes a great step in the physiology of language. He was probably the first who said that 'language is imitative sound,' which is the greatest and deepest truth of philology; although he is not aware of the laws of euphony and association by

which imitation must be regulated. He was probably also the first who made a distinction between simple and compound words, a truth second only in importance to that which has just been mentioned. His great insight in one direction curiously contrasts with his blindness in another; for he appears to be wholly unaware (compare his derivation of *agathos* from *agastos* and *thoos*) of the difference between the root and termination. But we must recollect that he was necessarily more ignorant than any schoolboy of Greek grammar, and had no table of the inflexions of verbs and nouns before his eyes, which might have suggested to him the distinction.

(4) Plato distinctly affirms that language is not truth, or 'philosophie une langue bien faite.' At first, Socrates has delighted himself with discovering the flux of Heracleitus in language. But he is covertly satirising the pretence of that or any other age to find philosophy in words; and he afterwards corrects any erroneous inference which might be gathered from his experiment. For he finds as many, or almost as many, words expressive of rest, as he had previously found expressive of motion. And even if this had been otherwise, who would learn of words when he might learn of things? There is a great controversy and high argument between Heracleiteans and Eleatics, but no man of sense would commit his soul in such enquiries to the imposers of names...In this and other passages Plato shows that he is as completely emancipated from the influence of 'Idols of the tribe' as Bacon himself.

The lesson which may be gathered from words is not metaphysical or moral, but historical. They teach us the affinity of races, they tell us something about the association of ideas, they occasionally preserve the memory of a disused custom; but we cannot safely argue from them about right and wrong, matter and mind, freedom and necessity, or the other problems of moral and metaphysical philosophy. For the use of words on such subjects may often be metaphorical, accidental, derived from other languages, and may have no relation to the contemporary state of thought and feeling. Nor in any case is the invention of them the result of philosophical reflection; they have been commonly transferred from matter to mind, and their meaning is the very reverse of their etymology. Because there is or is not a name for a thing, we cannot argue that the thing has or has not an actual existence; or that the antitheses, parallels, conjugates, correlatives of language have anything corresponding to them in nature. There are too many words as well as too few; and they generalize the objects or ideas which they represent. The greatest lesson which the philosophical analysis of language teaches us is, that we should be above language, making words our servants, and not allowing them to be our masters.

Plato does not add the further observation, that the etymological meaning of words is in process of being lost. If at first framed on a principle of intelligibility,

they would gradually cease to be intelligible, like those of a foreign language, he is willing to admit that they are subject to many changes, and put on many disguises. He acknowledges that the 'poor creature' imitation is supplemented by another 'poor creature,'— convention. But he does not see that 'habit and repute,' and their relation to other words, are always exercising an influence over them. Words appear to be isolated, but they are really the parts of an organism which is always being reproduced. They are refined by civilization, harmonized by poetry, emphasized by literature, technically applied in philosophy and art; they are used as symbols on the border-ground of human knowledge; they receive a fresh impress from individual genius, and come with a new force and association to every lively-minded person. They are fixed by the simultaneous utterance of millions, and yet are always imperceptibly changing;—not the inventors of language, but writing and speaking, and particularly great writers, or works which pass into the hearts of nations, Homer, Shakespear, Dante, the German or English Bible, Kant and Hegel, are the makers of them in later ages. They carry with them the faded recollection of their own past history; the use of a word in a striking and familiar passage gives a complexion to its use everywhere else, and the new use of an old and familiar phrase has also a peculiar power over us. But these and other subtleties of language escaped the observation of Plato. He is not aware that the languages of the world are organic structures, and that every word in them is related to every other; nor does he conceive of language as the joint work of the speaker and the hearer, requiring in man a faculty not only of expressing his thoughts but of understanding those of others.

On the other hand, he cannot be justly charged with a desire to frame language on artificial principles. Philosophers have sometimes dreamed of a technical or scientific language, in words which should have fixed meanings, and stand in the same relation to one another as the substances which they denote. But there is no more trace of this in Plato than there is of a language corresponding to the ideas; nor, indeed, could the want of such a language be felt until the sciences were far more developed. Those who would extend the use of technical phraseology beyond the limits of science or of custom, seem to forget that freedom and suggestiveness and the play of association are essential characteristics of language. The great master has shown how he regarded pedantic distinctions of words or attempts to confine their meaning in the satire on Prodicus in the Protagoras.

(5) In addition to these anticipations of the general principles of philology, we may note also a few curious observations on words and sounds. 'The Eretrians say sklerotes for skleroter;' 'the Thessalians call Apollo Amlos;' 'The Phrygians have the words pur, udor, kunes slightly changed;' 'there is an old Homeric word emesato, meaning "he contrived";' 'our forefathers, and especially the women,

who are most conservative of the ancient language, loved the letters iota and delta; but now iota is changed into eta and epsilon, and delta into zeta; this is supposed to increase the grandeur of the sound.' Plato was very willing to use inductive arguments, so far as they were within his reach; but he would also have assigned a large influence to chance. Nor indeed is induction applicable to philology in the same degree as to most of the physical sciences. For after we have pushed our researches to the furthest point, in language as in all the other creations of the human mind, there will always remain an element of exception or accident or free-will, which cannot be eliminated.

The question, 'whether falsehood is impossible,' which Socrates characteristically sets aside as too subtle for an old man (compare Euthyd.), could only have arisen in an age of imperfect consciousness, which had not yet learned to distinguish words from things. Socrates replies in effect that words have an independent existence; thus anticipating the solution of the mediaeval controversy of Nominalism and Realism. He is aware too that languages exist in various degrees of perfection, and that the analysis of them can only be carried to a certain point. 'If we could always, or almost always, use likenesses, which are the appropriate expressions, that would be the most perfect state of language.' These words suggest a question of deeper interest than the origin of language; viz. what is the ideal of language, how far by any correction of their usages existing languages might become clearer and more expressive than they are, more poetical, and also more logical; or whether they are now finally fixed and have received their last impress from time and authority.

On the whole, the Cratylus seems to contain deeper truths about language than any other ancient writing. But feeling the uncertain ground upon which he is walking, and partly in order to preserve the character of Socrates, Plato envelopes the whole subject in a robe of fancy, and allows his principles to drop out as if by accident.

II. What is the result of recent speculations about the origin and nature of language? Like other modern metaphysical enquiries, they end at last in a statement of facts. But, in order to state or understand the facts, a metaphysical insight seems to be required. There are more things in language than the human mind easily conceives. And many fallacies have to be dispelled, as well as observations made. The true spirit of philosophy or metaphysics can alone charm away metaphysical illusions, which are always reappearing, formerly in the fancies of neoplatonist writers, now in the disguise of experience and common sense. An analogy, a figure of speech, an intelligible theory, a superficial observation of the individual, have often been mistaken for a true account of the origin of language.

Speaking is one of the simplest natural operations, and also the most complex. Nothing would seem to be easier or more trivial than a few words uttered by a child in any language. Yet into the formation of those words have entered causes which the human mind is not capable of calculating. They are a drop or two of the great stream or ocean of speech which has been flowing in all ages. They have been transmitted from one language to another; like the child himself, they go back to the beginnings of the human race. How they originated, who can tell? Nevertheless we can imagine a stage of human society in which the circle of men's minds was narrower and their sympathies and instincts stronger; in which their organs of speech were more flexible, and the sense of hearing finer and more discerning; in which they lived more in company, and after the manner of children were more given to express their feelings; in which 'they moved all together,' like a herd of wild animals, 'when they moved at all.' Among them, as in every society, a particular person would be more sensitive and intelligent than the rest. Suddenly, on some occasion of interest (at the approach of a wild beast, shall we say?), he first, they following him, utter a cry which resounds through the forest. The cry is almost or quite involuntary, and may be an imitation of the roar of the animal. Thus far we have not speech, but only the inarticulate expression of feeling or emotion in no respect differing from the cries of animals; for they too call to one another and are answered. But now suppose that some one at a distance not only hears the sound, but apprehends the meaning: or we may imagine that the cry is repeated to a member of the society who had been absent; the others act the scene over again when he returns home in the evening. And so the cry becomes a word. The hearer in turn gives back the word to the speaker, who is now aware that he has acquired a new power. Many thousand times he exercises this power; like a child learning to talk, he repeats the same cry again, and again he is answered; he tries experiments with a like result, and the speaker and the hearer rejoice together in their newly-discovered faculty. At first there would be few such cries, and little danger of mistaking or confusing them. For the mind of primitive man had a narrow range of perceptions and feelings; his senses were microscopic; twenty or thirty sounds or gestures would be enough for him, nor would he have any difficulty in finding them. Naturally he broke out into speech—like the young infant he laughed and babbled; but not until there were hearers as well as speakers did language begin. Not the interjection or the vocal imitation of the object, but the interjection or the vocal imitation of the object understood, is the first rudiment of human speech.

After a while the word gathers associations, and has an independent existence. The imitation of the lion's roar calls up the fears and hopes of the chase, which are excited by his appearance. In the moment of hearing the sound, without any appreciable interval, these and other latent experiences wake up in the mind of the hearer. Not only does he receive an impression, but he brings previous knowledge

to bear upon that impression. Necessarily the pictorial image becomes less vivid, while the association of the nature and habits of the animal is more distinctly perceived. The picture passes into a symbol, for there would be too many of them and they would crowd the mind; the vocal imitation, too, is always in process of being lost and being renewed, just as the picture is brought back again in the description of the poet. Words now can be used more freely because there are more of them. What was once an involuntary expression becomes voluntary. Not only can men utter a cry or call, but they can communicate and converse; they can not only use words, but they can even play with them. The word is separated both from the object and from the mind; and slowly nations and individuals attain to a fuller consciousness of themselves.

Parallel with this mental process the articulation of sounds is gradually becoming perfected. The finer sense detects the differences of them, and begins, first to agglomerate, then to distinguish them. Times, persons, places, relations of all kinds, are expressed by modifications of them. The earliest parts of speech, as we may call them by anticipation, like the first utterances of children, probably partook of the nature of interjections and nouns; then came verbs; at length the whole sentence appeared, and rhythm and metre followed. Each stage in the progress of language was accompanied by some corresponding stage in the mind and civilisation of man. In time, when the family became a nation, the wild growth of dialects passed into a language. Then arose poetry and literature. We can hardly realize to ourselves how much with each improvement of language the powers of the human mind were enlarged; how the inner world took the place of outer; how the pictorial or symbolical or analogical word was refined into a notion; how language, fair and large and free, was at last complete.

So we may imagine the speech of man to have begun as with the cries of animals, or the stammering lips of children, and to have attained by degrees the perfection of Homer and Plato. Yet we are far from saying that this or any other theory of language is proved by facts. It is not difficult to form an hypothesis which by a series of imaginary transitions will bridge over the chasm which separates man from the animals. Differences of kind may often be thus resolved into differences of degree. But we must not assume that we have in this way discovered the true account of them. Through what struggles the harmonious use of the organs of speech was acquired; to what extent the conditions of human life were different; how far the genius of individuals may have contributed to the discovery of this as of the other arts, we cannot say: Only we seem to see that language is as much the creation of the ear as of the tongue, and the expression of a movement stirring the hearts not of one man only but of many, 'as the trees of the wood are stirred by the wind.' The theory is consistent or not inconsistent with our own mental experience, and throws some degree of light upon a dark corner of the human

mind.

In the later analysis of language, we trace the opposite and contrasted elements of the individual and nation, of the past and present, of the inward and outward, of the subject and object, of the notional and relational, of the root or unchanging part of the word and of the changing inflexion, if such a distinction be admitted, of the vowel and the consonant, of quantity and accent, of speech and writing, of poetry and prose. We observe also the reciprocal influence of sounds and conceptions on each other, like the connexion of body and mind; and further remark that although the names of objects were originally proper names, as the grammarian or logician might call them, yet at a later stage they become universal notions, which combine into particulars and individuals, and are taken out of the first rude agglomeration of sounds that they may be replaced in a higher and more logical order. We see that in the simplest sentences are contained grammar and logic—the parts of speech, the Eleatic philosophy and the Kantian categories. So complex is language, and so expressive not only of the meanest wants of man, but of his highest thoughts; so various are the aspects in which it is regarded by us. Then again, when we follow the history of languages, we observe that they are always slowly moving, half dead, half alive, half solid, half fluid; the breath of a moment, yet like the air, continuous in all ages and countries,—like the glacier, too, containing within them a trickling stream which deposits debris of the rocks over which it passes. There were happy moments, as we may conjecture, in the lives of nations, at which they came to the birth—as in the golden age of literature, the man and the time seem to conspire; the eloquence of the bard or chief, as in later times the creations of the great writer who is the expression of his age, became impressed on the minds of their countrymen, perhaps in the hour of some crisis of national development—a migration, a conquest, or the like. The picture of the word which was beginning to be lost, is now revived; the sound again echoes to the sense; men find themselves capable not only of expressing more feelings, and describing more objects, but of expressing and describing them better. The world before the flood, that is to say, the world of ten, twenty, a hundred thousand years ago, has passed away and left no sign. But the best conception that we can form of it, though imperfect and uncertain, is gained from the analogy of causes still in action, some powerful and sudden, others working slowly in the course of infinite ages. Something too may be allowed to ‘the persistency of the strongest,’ to ‘the survival of the fittest,’ in this as in the other realms of nature.

These are some of the reflections which the modern philosophy of language suggests to us about the powers of the human mind and the forces and influences by which the efforts of men to utter articulate sounds were inspired. Yet in making these and similar generalizations we may note also dangers to which we are

exposed. (1) There is the confusion of ideas with facts—of mere possibilities, and generalities, and modes of conception with actual and definite knowledge. The words ‘evolution,’ ‘birth,’ ‘law,’ ‘development,’ ‘instinct,’ ‘implicit,’ ‘explicit,’ and the like, have a false clearness or comprehensiveness, which adds nothing to our knowledge. The metaphor of a flower or a tree, or some other work of nature or art, is often in like manner only a pleasing picture. (2) There is the fallacy of resolving the languages which we know into their parts, and then imagining that we can discover the nature of language by reconstructing them. (3) There is the danger of identifying language, not with thoughts but with ideas. (4) There is the error of supposing that the analysis of grammar and logic has always existed, or that their distinctions were familiar to Socrates and Plato. (5) There is the fallacy of exaggerating, and also of diminishing the interval which separates articulate from inarticulate language—the cries of animals from the speech of man—the instincts of animals from the reason of man. (6) There is the danger which besets all enquiries into the early history of man—of interpreting the past by the present, and of substituting the definite and intelligible for the true but dim outline which is the horizon of human knowledge.

The greatest light is thrown upon the nature of language by analogy. We have the analogy of the cries of animals, of the songs of birds (‘man, like the nightingale, is a singing bird, but is ever binding up thoughts with musical notes’), of music, of children learning to speak, of barbarous nations in which the linguistic instinct is still undecayed, of ourselves learning to think and speak a new language, of the deaf and dumb who have words without sounds, of the various disorders of speech; and we have the after-growth of mythology, which, like language, is an unconscious creation of the human mind. We can observe the social and collective instincts of animals, and may remark how, when domesticated, they have the power of understanding but not of speaking, while on the other hand, some birds which are comparatively devoid of intelligence, make a nearer approach to articulate speech. We may note how in the animals there is a want of that sympathy with one another which appears to be the soul of language. We can compare the use of speech with other mental and bodily operations; for speech too is a kind of gesture, and in the child or savage accompanied with gesture. We may observe that the child learns to speak, as he learns to walk or to eat, by a natural impulse; yet in either case not without a power of imitation which is also natural to him—he is taught to read, but he breaks forth spontaneously in speech. We can trace the impulse to bind together the world in ideas beginning in the first efforts to speak and culminating in philosophy. But there remains an element which cannot be explained, or even adequately described. We can understand how man creates or constructs consciously and by design; and see, if we do not understand, how nature, by a law, calls into being an organised structure. But the intermediate organism which stands between man and nature, which is the work of mind yet

unconscious, and in which mind and matter seem to meet, and mind unperceived to herself is really limited by all other minds, is neither understood nor seen by us, and is with reluctance admitted to be a fact.

Language is an aspect of man, of nature, and of nations, the transfiguration of the world in thought, the meeting-point of the physical and mental sciences, and also the mirror in which they are reflected, present at every moment to the individual, and yet having a sort of eternal or universal nature. When we analyze our own mental processes, we find words everywhere in every degree of clearness and consistency, fading away in dreams and more like pictures, rapidly succeeding one another in our waking thoughts, attaining a greater distinctness and consecutiveness in speech, and a greater still in writing, taking the place of one another when we try to become emancipated from their influence. For in all processes of the mind which are conscious we are talking to ourselves; the attempt to think without words is a mere illusion,—they are always reappearing when we fix our thoughts. And speech is not a separate faculty, but the expression of all our faculties, to which all our other powers of expression, signs, looks, gestures, lend their aid, of which the instrument is not the tongue only, but more than half the human frame.

The minds of men are sometimes carried on to think of their lives and of their actions as links in a chain of causes and effects going back to the beginning of time. A few have seemed to lose the sense of their own individuality in the universal cause or nature. In like manner we might think of the words which we daily use, as derived from the first speech of man, and of all the languages in the world, as the expressions or varieties of a single force or life of language of which the thoughts of men are the accident. Such a conception enables us to grasp the power and wonder of languages, and is very natural to the scientific philologist. For he, like the metaphysician, believes in the reality of that which absorbs his own mind. Nor do we deny the enormous influence which language has exercised over thought. Fixed words, like fixed ideas, have often governed the world. But in such representations we attribute to language too much the nature of a cause, and too little of an effect,—too much of an absolute, too little of a relative character,—too much of an ideal, too little of a matter-of-fact existence.

Or again, we may frame a single abstract notion of language of which all existent languages may be supposed to be the perversion. But we must not conceive that this logical figment had ever a real existence, or is anything more than an effort of the mind to give unity to infinitely various phenomena. There is no abstract language 'in rerum natura,' any more than there is an abstract tree, but only languages in various stages of growth, maturity, and decay. Nor do other logical distinctions or even grammatical exactly correspond to the facts of language; for they too are attempts to give unity and regularity to a subject which is partly

irregular.

We find, however, that there are distinctions of another kind by which this vast field of language admits of being mapped out. There is the distinction between biliteral and triliteral roots, and the various inflexions which accompany them; between the mere mechanical cohesion of sounds or words, and the 'chemical' combination of them into a new word; there is the distinction between languages which have had a free and full development of their organisms, and languages which have been stunted in their growth,—lamed in their hands or feet, and never able to acquire afterwards the powers in which they are deficient; there is the distinction between synthetical languages like Greek and Latin, which have retained their inflexions, and analytical languages like English or French, which have lost them. Innumerable as are the languages and dialects of mankind, there are comparatively few classes to which they can be referred.

Another road through this chaos is provided by the physiology of speech. The organs of language are the same in all mankind, and are only capable of uttering a certain number of sounds. Every man has tongue, teeth, lips, palate, throat, mouth, which he may close or open, and adapt in various ways; making, first, vowels and consonants; and secondly, other classes of letters. The elements of all speech, like the elements of the musical scale, are few and simple, though admitting of infinite gradations and combinations. Whatever slight differences exist in the use or formation of these organs, owing to climate or the sense of euphony or other causes, they are as nothing compared with their agreement. Here then is a real basis of unity in the study of philology, unlike that imaginary abstract unity of which we were just now speaking.

Whether we regard language from the psychological, or historical, or physiological point of view, the materials of our knowledge are inexhaustible. The comparisons of children learning to speak, of barbarous nations, of musical notes, of the cries of animals, of the song of birds, increase our insight into the nature of human speech. Many observations which would otherwise have escaped us are suggested by them. But they do not explain why, in man and in man only, the speaker met with a response from the hearer, and the half articulate sound gradually developed into Sanscrit and Greek. They hardly enable us to approach any nearer the secret of the origin of language, which, like some of the other great secrets of nature,—the origin of birth and death, or of animal life,—remains inviolable. That problem is indissolubly bound up with the origin of man; and if we ever know more of the one, we may expect to know more of the other. (Compare W. Humboldt, 'Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues;' M. Muller, 'Lectures on the Science of Language;' Steinthal, 'Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft.'

...

It is more than sixteen years since the preceding remarks were written, which with a few alterations have now been reprinted. During the interval the progress of philology has been very great. More languages have been compared; the inner structure of language has been laid bare; the relations of sounds have been more accurately discriminated; the manner in which dialects affect or are affected by the literary or principal form of a language is better understood. Many merely verbal questions have been eliminated; the remains of the old traditional methods have died away. The study has passed from the metaphysical into an historical stage. Grammar is no longer confused with language, nor the anatomy of words and sentences with their life and use. Figures of speech, by which the vagueness of theories is often concealed, have been stripped off; and we see language more as it truly was. The immensity of the subject is gradually revealed to us, and the reign of law becomes apparent. Yet the law is but partially seen; the traces of it are often lost in the distance. For languages have a natural but not a perfect growth; like other creations of nature into which the will of man enters, they are full of what we term accident and irregularity. And the difficulties of the subject become not less, but greater, as we proceed—it is one of those studies in which we seem to know less as we know more; partly because we are no longer satisfied with the vague and superficial ideas of it which prevailed fifty years ago; partly also because the remains of the languages with which we are acquainted always were, and if they are still living, are, in a state of transition; and thirdly, because there are lacunae in our knowledge of them which can never be filled up. Not a tenth, not a hundredth part of them has been preserved. Yet the materials at our disposal are far greater than any individual can use. Such are a few of the general reflections which the present state of philology calls up.

(1) Language seems to be composite, but into its first elements the philologist has never been able to penetrate. However far he goes back, he never arrives at the beginning; or rather, as in Geology or in Astronomy, there is no beginning. He is too apt to suppose that by breaking up the existing forms of language into their parts he will arrive at a previous stage of it, but he is merely analyzing what never existed, or is never known to have existed, except in a composite form. He may divide nouns and verbs into roots and inflexions, but he has no evidence which will show that the omega of *tupto* or the mu of *tithemi*, though analogous to *ego*, *me*, either became pronouns or were generated out of pronouns. To say that 'pronouns, like ripe fruit, dropped out of verbs,' is a misleading figure of speech. Although all languages have some common principles, there is no primitive form or forms of language known to us, or to be reasonably imagined, from which they are all descended. No inference can be drawn from language, either for or against the unity of the human race. Nor is there any proof that words were ever used

without any relation to each other. Whatever may be the meaning of a sentence or a word when applied to primitive language, it is probable that the sentence is more akin to the original form than the word, and that the later stage of language is the result rather of analysis than of synthesis, or possibly is a combination of the two. Nor, again, are we sure that the original process of learning to speak was the same in different places or among different races of men. It may have been slower with some, quicker with others. Some tribes may have used shorter, others longer words or cries: they may have been more or less inclined to agglutinate or to decompose them: they may have modified them by the use of prefixes, suffixes, infixes; by the lengthening and strengthening of vowels or by the shortening and weakening of them, by the condensation or rarefaction of consonants. But who gave to language these primeval laws; or why one race has trilateral, another biliteral roots; or why in some members of a group of languages b becomes p, or d, t, or ch, k; or why two languages resemble one another in certain parts of their structure and differ in others; or why in one language there is a greater development of vowels, in another of consonants, and the like—are questions of which we only ‘entertain conjecture.’ We must remember the length of time that has elapsed since man first walked upon the earth, and that in this vast but unknown period every variety of language may have been in process of formation and decay, many times over.

(Compare Plato, Laws):—

‘ATHENIAN STRANGER: And what then is to be regarded as the origin of government? Will not a man be able to judge best from a point of view in which he may behold the progress of states and their transitions to good and evil?’

CLEINIAS: What do you mean?

ATHENIAN STRANGER: I mean that he might watch them from the point of view of time, and observe the changes which take place in them during infinite ages.

CLEINIAS: How so?

ATHENIAN STRANGER: Why, do you think that you can reckon the time which has elapsed since cities first existed and men were citizens of them?

CLEINIAS: Hardly.

ATHENIAN STRANGER: But you are quite sure that it must be vast and incalculable?

CLEINIAS: No doubt.

ATHENIAN STRANGER: And have there not been thousands and thousands of cities which have come into being and perished during this period? And has not every place had endless forms of government, and been sometimes rising, and at other times falling, and again improving or waning?’

Aristot. *Metaph.*:—

‘And if a person should conceive the tales of mythology to mean only that men thought the gods to be the first essences of things, he would deem the reflection to have been inspired and would consider that, whereas probably every art and part of wisdom had been DISCOVERED AND LOST MANY TIMES OVER, such notions were but a remnant of the past which has survived to our day.’)

It can hardly be supposed that any traces of an original language still survive, any more than of the first huts or buildings which were constructed by man. Nor are we at all certain of the relation, if any, in which the greater families of languages stand to each other. The influence of individuals must always have been a disturbing element. Like great writers in later times, there may have been many a barbaric genius who taught the men of his tribe to sing or speak, showing them by example how to continue or divide their words, charming their souls with rhythm and accent and intonation, finding in familiar objects the expression of their confused fancies—to whom the whole of language might in truth be said to be a figure of speech. One person may have introduced a new custom into the formation or pronunciation of a word; he may have been imitated by others, and the custom, or form, or accent, or quantity, or rhyme which he introduced in a single word may have become the type on which many other words or inflexions of words were framed, and may have quickly ran through a whole language. For like the other gifts which nature has bestowed upon man, that of speech has been conveyed to him through the medium, not of the many, but of the few, who were his ‘law-givers’—‘the legislator with the dialectician standing on his right hand,’ in Plato’s striking image, who formed the manners of men and gave them customs, whose voice and look and behaviour, whose gesticulations and other peculiarities were instinctively imitated by them,—the ‘king of men’ who was their priest, almost their God...But these are conjectures only: so little do we know of the origin of language that the real scholar is indisposed to touch the subject at all.

(2) There are other errors besides the figment of a primitive or original language which it is time to leave behind us. We no longer divide languages into synthetical and analytical, or suppose similarity of structure to be the safe or only guide to the affinities of them. We do not confuse the parts of speech with the categories of Logic. Nor do we conceive languages any more than civilisations to be in a state of dissolution; they do not easily pass away, but are far more tenacious of life than

the tribes by whom they are spoken. 'Where two or three are gathered together,' they survive. As in the human frame, as in the state, there is a principle of renovation as well as of decay which is at work in all of them. Neither do we suppose them to be invented by the wit of man. With few exceptions, e.g. technical words or words newly imported from a foreign language, and the like, in which art has imitated nature, 'words are not made but grow.' Nor do we attribute to them a supernatural origin. The law which regulates them is like the law which governs the circulation of the blood, or the rising of the sap in trees; the action of it is uniform, but the result, which appears in the superficial forms of men and animals or in the leaves of trees, is an endless profusion and variety. The laws of vegetation are invariable, but no two plants, no two leaves of the forest are precisely the same. The laws of language are invariable, but no two languages are alike, no two words have exactly the same meaning. No two sounds are exactly of the same quality, or give precisely the same impression.

It would be well if there were a similar consensus about some other points which appear to be still in dispute. Is language conscious or unconscious? In speaking or writing have we present to our minds the meaning or the sound or the construction of the words which we are using?—No more than the separate drops of water with which we quench our thirst are present: the whole draught may be conscious, but not the minute particles of which it is made up: So the whole sentence may be conscious, but the several words, syllables, letters are not thought of separately when we are uttering them. Like other natural operations, the process of speech, when most perfect, is least observed by us. We do not pause at each mouthful to dwell upon the taste of it: nor has the speaker time to ask himself the comparative merits of different modes of expression while he is uttering them. There are many things in the use of language which may be observed from without, but which cannot be explained from within. Consciousness carries us but a little way in the investigation of the mind; it is not the faculty of internal observation, but only the dim light which makes such observation possible. What is supposed to be our consciousness of language is really only the analysis of it, and this analysis admits of innumerable degrees. But would it not be better if this term, which is so misleading, and yet has played so great a part in mental science, were either banished or used only with the distinct meaning of 'attention to our own minds,' such as is called forth, not by familiar mental processes, but by the interruption of them? Now in this sense we may truly say that we are not conscious of ordinary speech, though we are commonly roused to attention by the misuse or mispronunciation of a word. Still less, even in schools and academies, do we ever attempt to invent new words or to alter the meaning of old ones, except in the case, mentioned above, of technical or borrowed words which are artificially made or imported because a need of them is felt. Neither in our own nor in any other age has the conscious effort of reflection in man contributed in an

appreciable degree to the formation of language. 'Which of us by taking thought' can make new words or constructions? Reflection is the least of the causes by which language is affected, and is likely to have the least power, when the linguistic instinct is greatest, as in young children and in the infancy of nations.

A kindred error is the separation of the phonetic from the mental element of language; they are really inseparable—no definite line can be drawn between them, any more than in any other common act of mind and body. It is true that within certain limits we possess the power of varying sounds by opening and closing the mouth, by touching the palate or the teeth with the tongue, by lengthening or shortening the vocal instrument, by greater or less stress, by a higher or lower pitch of the voice, and we can substitute one note or accent for another. But behind the organs of speech and their action there remains the informing mind, which sets them in motion and works together with them. And behind the great structure of human speech and the lesser varieties of language which arise out of the many degrees and kinds of human intercourse, there is also the unknown or over-ruling law of God or nature which gives order to it in its infinite greatness, and variety in its infinitesimal minuteness—both equally inscrutable to us. We need no longer discuss whether philology is to be classed with the Natural or the Mental sciences, if we frankly recognize that, like all the sciences which are concerned with man, it has a double aspect,—inward and outward; and that the inward can only be known through the outward. Neither need we raise the question whether the laws of language, like the other laws of human action, admit of exceptions. The answer in all cases is the same—that the laws of nature are uniform, though the consistency or continuity of them is not always perceptible to us. The superficial appearances of language, as of nature, are irregular, but we do not therefore deny their deeper uniformity. The comparison of the growth of language in the individual and in the nation cannot be wholly discarded, for nations are made up of individuals. But in this, as in the other political sciences, we must distinguish between collective and individual actions or processes, and not attribute to the one what belongs to the other. Again, when we speak of the hereditary or paternity of a language, we must remember that the parents are alive as well as the children, and that all the preceding generations survive (after a manner) in the latest form of it. And when, for the purposes of comparison, we form into groups the roots or terminations of words, we should not forget how casual is the manner in which their resemblances have arisen—they were not first written down by a grammarian in the paradigms of a grammar and learned out of a book, but were due to many chance attractions of sound or of meaning, or of both combined. So many cautions have to be borne in mind, and so many first thoughts to be dismissed, before we can proceed safely in the path of philological enquiry. It might be well sometimes to lay aside figures of speech, such as the 'root' and the 'branches,' the 'stem,' the 'strata' of Geology,

the 'compounds' of Chemistry, 'the ripe fruit of pronouns dropping from verbs' (see above), and the like, which are always interesting, but are apt to be delusive. Yet such figures of speech are far nearer the truth than the theories which attribute the invention and improvement of language to the conscious action of the human mind...Lastly, it is doubted by recent philologists whether climate can be supposed to have exercised any influence worth speaking of on a language: such a view is said to be unproven: it had better therefore not be silently assumed.

'Natural selection' and the 'survival of the fittest' have been applied in the field of philology, as well as in the other sciences which are concerned with animal and vegetable life. And a Darwinian school of philologists has sprung up, who are sometimes accused of putting words in the place of things. It seems to be true, that whether applied to language or to other branches of knowledge, the Darwinian theory, unless very precisely defined, hardly escapes from being a truism. If by 'the natural selection' of words or meanings of words or by the 'persistence and survival of the fittest' the maintainer of the theory intends to affirm nothing more than this—that the word 'fittest to survive' survives, he adds not much to the knowledge of language. But if he means that the word or the meaning of the word or some portion of the word which comes into use or drops out of use is selected or rejected on the ground of economy or parsimony or ease to the speaker or clearness or euphony or expressiveness, or greater or less demand for it, or anything of this sort, he is affirming a proposition which has several senses, and in none of these senses can be asserted to be uniformly true. For the laws of language are precarious, and can only act uniformly when there is such frequency of intercourse among neighbours as is sufficient to enforce them. And there are many reasons why a man should prefer his own way of speaking to that of others, unless by so doing he becomes unintelligible. The struggle for existence among words is not of that fierce and irresistible kind in which birds, beasts and fishes devour one another, but of a milder sort, allowing one usage to be substituted for another, not by force, but by the persuasion, or rather by the prevailing habit, of a majority. The favourite figure, in this, as in some other uses of it, has tended rather to obscure than explain the subject to which it has been applied. Nor in any case can the struggle for existence be deemed to be the sole or principal cause of changes in language, but only one among many, and one of which we cannot easily measure the importance. There is a further objection which may be urged equally against all applications of the Darwinian theory. As in animal life and likewise in vegetable, so in languages, the process of change is said to be insensible: sounds, like animals, are supposed to pass into one another by imperceptible gradation. But in both cases the newly-created forms soon become fixed; there are few if any vestiges of the intermediate links, and so the better half of the evidence of the change is wanting.

(3) Among the incumbrances or illusions of language may be reckoned many of the rules and traditions of grammar, whether ancient grammar or the corrections of it which modern philology has introduced. Grammar, like law, delights in definition: human speech, like human action, though very far from being a mere chaos, is indefinite, admits of degrees, and is always in a state of change or transition. Grammar gives an erroneous conception of language: for it reduces to a system that which is not a system. Its figures of speech, pleonasms, ellipses, anacolutha, pros to semainomenon, and the like have no reality; they do not either make conscious expressions more intelligible or show the way in which they have arisen; they are chiefly designed to bring an earlier use of language into conformity with the later. Often they seem intended only to remind us that great poets like Aeschylus or Sophocles or Pindar or a great prose writer like Thucydides are guilty of taking unwarrantable liberties with grammatical rules; it appears never to have occurred to the inventors of them that these real 'conditores linguae Graecae' lived in an age before grammar, when 'Greece also was living Greece.' It is the anatomy, not the physiology of language, which grammar seeks to describe: into the idiom and higher life of words it does not enter. The ordinary Greek grammar gives a complete paradigm of the verb, without suggesting that the double or treble forms of Perfects, Aorists, etc. are hardly ever contemporaneous. It distinguishes Moods and Tenses, without observing how much of the nature of one passes into the other. It makes three Voices, Active, Passive, and Middle, but takes no notice of the precarious existence and uncertain character of the last of the three. Language is a thing of degrees and relations and associations and exceptions: grammar ties it up in fixed rules. Language has many varieties of usage: grammar tries to reduce them to a single one. Grammar divides verbs into regular and irregular: it does not recognize that the irregular, equally with the regular, are subject to law, and that a language which had no exceptions would not be a natural growth: for it could not have been subjected to the influences by which language is ordinarily affected. It is always wanting to describe ancient languages in the terms of a modern one. It has a favourite fiction that one word is put in the place of another; the truth is that no word is ever put for another. It has another fiction, that a word has been omitted: words are omitted because they are no longer needed; and the omission has ceased to be observed. The common explanation of kata or some other preposition 'being understood' in a Greek sentence is another fiction of the same kind, which tends to disguise the fact that under cases were comprehended originally many more relations, and that prepositions are used only to define the meaning of them with greater precision. These instances are sufficient to show the sort of errors which grammar introduces into language. We are not considering the question of its utility to the beginner in the study. Even to him the best grammar is the shortest and that in which he will have least to unlearn. It may be said that the explanations here referred to are already out of date, and that the study of Greek grammar has received a new

character from comparative philology. This is true; but it is also true that the traditional grammar has still a great hold on the mind of the student.

Metaphysics are even more troublesome than the figments of grammar, because they wear the appearance of philosophy and there is no test to which they can be subjected. They are useful in so far as they give us an insight into the history of the human mind and the modes of thought which have existed in former ages; or in so far as they furnish wider conceptions of the different branches of knowledge and of their relation to one another. But they are worse than useless when they outrun experience and abstract the mind from the observation of facts, only to envelope it in a mist of words. Some philologists, like Schleicher, have been greatly influenced by the philosophy of Hegel; nearly all of them to a certain extent have fallen under the dominion of physical science. Even Kant himself thought that the first principles of philosophy could be elicited from the analysis of the proposition, in this respect falling short of Plato. Westphal holds that there are three stages of language: (1) in which things were characterized independently, (2) in which they were regarded in relation to human thought, and (3) in relation to one another. But are not such distinctions an anachronism? for they imply a growth of abstract ideas which never existed in early times. Language cannot be explained by Metaphysics; for it is prior to them and much more nearly allied to sense. It is not likely that the meaning of the cases is ultimately resolvable into relations of space and time. Nor can we suppose the conception of cause and effect or of the finite and infinite or of the same and other to be latent in language at a time when in their abstract form they had never entered into the mind of man...If the science of Comparative Philology had possessed 'enough of Metaphysics to get rid of Metaphysics,' it would have made far greater progress.

(4) Our knowledge of language is almost confined to languages which are fully developed. They are of several patterns; and these become altered by admixture in various degrees,—they may only borrow a few words from one another and retain their life comparatively unaltered, or they may meet in a struggle for existence until one of the two is overpowered and retires from the field. They attain the full rights and dignity of language when they acquire the use of writing and have a literature of their own; they pass into dialects and grow out of them, in proportion as men are isolated or united by locality or occupation. The common language sometimes reacts upon the dialects and imparts to them also a literary character. The laws of language can be best discerned in the great crises of language, especially in the transitions from ancient to modern forms of them, whether in Europe or Asia. Such changes are the silent notes of the world's history; they mark periods of unknown length in which war and conquest were running riot over whole continents, times of suffering too great to be endured by the human

race, in which the masters became subjects and the subject races masters, in which driven by necessity or impelled by some instinct, tribes or nations left their original homes and but slowly found a resting-place. Language would be the greatest of all historical monuments, if it could only tell us the history of itself.

(5) There are many ways in which we may approach this study. The simplest of all is to observe our own use of language in conversation or in writing, how we put words together, how we construct and connect sentences, what are the rules of accent and rhythm in verse or prose, the formation and composition of words, the laws of euphony and sound, the affinities of letters, the mistakes to which we are ourselves most liable of spelling or pronunciation. We may compare with our own language some other, even when we have only a slight knowledge of it, such as French or German. Even a little Latin will enable us to appreciate the grand difference between ancient and modern European languages. In the child learning to speak we may note the inherent strength of language, which like 'a mountain river' is always forcing its way out. We may witness the delight in imitation and repetition, and some of the laws by which sounds pass into one another. We may learn something also from the falterings of old age, the searching for words, and the confusion of them with one another, the forgetfulness of proper names (more commonly than of other words because they are more isolated), aphasia, and the like. There are philological lessons also to be gathered from nicknames, from provincialisms, from the slang of great cities, from the argot of Paris (that language of suffering and crime, so pathetically described by Victor Hugo), from the imperfect articulation of the deaf and dumb, from the jabbering of animals, from the analysis of sounds in relation to the organs of speech. The phonograph affords a visible evidence of the nature and divisions of sound; we may be truly said to know what we can manufacture. Artificial languages, such as that of Bishop Wilkins, are chiefly useful in showing what language is not. The study of any foreign language may be made also a study of Comparative Philology. There are several points, such as the nature of irregular verbs, of indeclinable parts of speech, the influence of euphony, the decay or loss of inflections, the elements of syntax, which may be examined as well in the history of our own language as of any other. A few well-selected questions may lead the student at once into the heart of the mystery: such as, Why are the pronouns and the verb of existence generally more irregular than any other parts of speech? Why is the number of words so small in which the sound is an echo of the sense? Why does the meaning of words depart so widely from their etymology? Why do substantives often differ in meaning from the verbs to which they are related, adverbs from adjectives? Why do words differing in origin coalesce in the same sound though retaining their differences of meaning? Why are some verbs impersonal? Why are there only so many parts of speech, and on what principle are they divided? These are a few crucial questions which give us an insight from different points of view into

the true nature of language.

(6) Thus far we have been endeavouring to strip off from language the false appearances in which grammar and philology, or the love of system generally, have clothed it. We have also sought to indicate the sources of our knowledge of it and the spirit in which we should approach it, we may now proceed to consider some of the principles or natural laws which have created or modified it.

i. The first and simplest of all the principles of language, common also to the animals, is imitation. The lion roars, the wolf howls in the solitude of the forest: they are answered by similar cries heard from a distance. The bird, too, mimics the voice of man and makes answer to him. Man tells to man the secret place in which he is hiding himself; he remembers and repeats the sound which he has heard. The love of imitation becomes a passion and an instinct to him. Primitive men learnt to speak from one another, like a child from its mother or nurse. They learnt of course a rudimentary, half-articulate language, the cry or song or speech which was the expression of what we now call human thoughts and feelings. We may still remark how much greater and more natural the exercise of the power is in the use of language than in any other process or action of the human mind.

ii. Imitation provided the first material of language: but it was 'without form and void.' During how many years or hundreds or thousands of years the imitative or half-articulate stage continued there is no possibility of determining. But we may reasonably conjecture that there was a time when the vocal utterance of man was intermediate between what we now call language and the cry of a bird or animal. Speech before language was a rudis indigestaque materies, not yet distributed into words and sentences, in which the cry of fear or joy mingled with more definite sounds recognized by custom as the expressions of things or events. It was the principle of analogy which introduced into this 'indigesta moles' order and measure. It was Anaxagoras' *omou panta chremata, eita nous elthon diekosmese*: the light of reason lighted up all things and at once began to arrange them. In every sentence, in every word and every termination of a word, this power of forming relations to one another was contained. There was a proportion of sound to sound, of meaning to meaning, of meaning to sound. The cases and numbers of nouns, the persons, tenses, numbers of verbs, were generally on the same or nearly the same pattern and had the same meaning. The sounds by which they were expressed were rough-hewn at first; after a while they grew more refined—the natural laws of euphony began to affect them. The rules of syntax are likewise based upon analogy. Time has an analogy with space, arithmetic with geometry. Not only in musical notes, but in the quantity, quality, accent, rhythm of human speech, trivial or serious, there is a law of proportion. As in things of beauty, as in all nature, in the composition as well as in the motion of all things, there is a similarity of relations by which they are held together.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the analogies of language are always uniform: there may be often a choice between several, and sometimes one and sometimes another will prevail. In Greek there are three declensions of nouns; the forms of cases in one of them may intrude upon another. Similarly verbs in —omega and —mu iota interchange forms of tenses, and the completed paradigm of the verb is often made up of both. The same nouns may be partly declinable and partly indeclinable, and in some of their cases may have fallen out of use. Here are rules with exceptions; they are not however really exceptions, but contain in themselves indications of other rules. Many of these interruptions or variations of analogy occur in pronouns or in the verb of existence of which the forms were too common and therefore too deeply imbedded in language entirely to drop out. The same verbs in the same meaning may sometimes take one case, sometimes another. The participle may also have the character of an adjective, the adverb either of an adjective or of a preposition. These exceptions are as regular as the rules, but the causes of them are seldom known to us.

Language, like the animal and vegetable worlds, is everywhere intersected by the lines of analogy. Like number from which it seems to be derived, the principle of analogy opens the eyes of men to discern the similarities and differences of things, and their relations to one another. At first these are such as lie on the surface only; after a time they are seen by men to reach farther down into the nature of things. Gradually in language they arrange themselves into a sort of imperfect system; groups of personal and case endings are placed side by side. The fertility of language produces many more than are wanted; and the superfluous ones are utilized by the assignment to them of new meanings. The vacuity and the superfluity are thus partially compensated by each other. It must be remembered that in all the languages which have a literature, certainly in Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, we are not at the beginning but almost at the end of the linguistic process; we have reached a time when the verb and the noun are nearly perfected, though in no language did they completely perfect themselves, because for some unknown reason the motive powers of languages seem to have ceased when they were on the eve of completion: they became fixed or crystallized in an imperfect form either from the influence of writing and literature, or because no further differentiation of them was required for the intelligibility of language. So not without admixture and confusion and displacement and contamination of sounds and the meanings of words, a lower stage of language passes into a higher. Thus far we can see and no further. When we ask the reason why this principle of analogy prevails in all the vast domain of language, there is no answer to the question; or no other answer but this, that there are innumerable ways in which, like number, analogy permeates, not only language, but the whole world, both visible and intellectual. We know from experience that it does not (a) arise from any conscious act of reflection that the accusative of a Latin noun in ‘us’ should

end in 'um;' nor (b) from any necessity of being understood,—much less articulation would suffice for this; nor (c) from greater convenience or expressiveness of particular sounds. Such notions were certainly far enough away from the mind of primitive man. We may speak of a latent instinct, of a survival of the fittest, easiest, most euphonic, most economical of breath, in the case of one of two competing sounds; but these expressions do not add anything to our knowledge. We may try to grasp the infinity of language either under the figure of a limitless plain divided into countries and districts by natural boundaries, or of a vast river eternally flowing whose origin is concealed from us; we may apprehend partially the laws by which speech is regulated: but we do not know, and we seem as if we should never know, any more than in the parallel case of the origin of species, how vocal sounds received life and grew, and in the form of languages came to be distributed over the earth.

iii. Next in order to analogy in the formation of language or even prior to it comes the principle of onomatopoeia, which is itself a kind of analogy or similarity of sound and meaning. In by far the greater number of words it has become disguised and has disappeared; but in no stage of language is it entirely lost. It belongs chiefly to early language, in which words were few; and its influence grew less and less as time went on. To the ear which had a sense of harmony it became a barbarism which disturbed the flow and equilibrium of discourse; it was an excrescence which had to be cut out, a survival which needed to be got rid of, because it was out of keeping with the rest. It remained for the most part only as a formative principle, which used words and letters not as crude imitations of other natural sounds, but as symbols of ideas which were naturally associated with them. It received in another way a new character; it affected not so much single words, as larger portions of human speech. It regulated the juxtaposition of sounds and the cadence of sentences. It was the music, not of song, but of speech, in prose as well as verse. The old onomatopoeia of primitive language was refined into an onomatopoeia of a higher kind, in which it is no longer true to say that a particular sound corresponds to a motion or action of man or beast or movement of nature, but that in all the higher uses of language the sound is the echo of the sense, especially in poetry, in which beauty and expressiveness are given to human thoughts by the harmonious composition of the words, syllables, letters, accents, quantities, rhythms, rhymes, varieties and contrasts of all sorts. The poet with his 'Break, break, break' or his *e pasin nekuessi kataphthimenoisin anassein* or his 'longius ex altoque sinum trahit,' can produce a far finer music than any crude imitations of things or actions in sound, although a letter or two having this imitative power may be a lesser element of beauty in such passages. The same subtle sensibility, which adapts the word to the thing, adapts the sentence or cadence to the general meaning or spirit of the passage. This is the higher onomatopoeia which has banished the cruder sort as unworthy to have a place in

great languages and literatures.

We can see clearly enough that letters or collocations of letters do by various degrees of strength or weakness, length or shortness, emphasis or pitch, become the natural expressions of the finer parts of human feeling or thought. And not only so, but letters themselves have a significance; as Plato observes that the letter rho accent is expressive of motion, the letters delta and tau of binding and rest, the letter lambda of smoothness, nu of inwardness, the letter eta of length, the letter omicron of roundness. These were often combined so as to form composite notions, as for example in *tromos* (trembling), *trachus* (rugged), *thrauein* (crush), *krouein* (strike), *thruptein* (break), *pumbein* (whirl),—in all which words we notice a parallel composition of sounds in their English equivalents. Plato also remarks, as we remark, that the onomatopoeic principle is far from prevailing uniformly, and further that no explanation of language consistently corresponds with any system of philosophy, however great may be the light which language throws upon the nature of the mind. Both in Greek and English we find groups of words such as *string*, *swing*, *sling*, *spring*, *sting*, which are parallel to one another and may be said to derive their vocal effect partly from contrast of letters, but in which it is impossible to assign a precise amount of meaning to each of the expressive and onomatopoeic letters. A few of them are directly imitative, as for example the omega in *oon*, which represents the round form of the egg by the figure of the mouth: or *bronte* (thunder), in which the fulness of the sound of the word corresponds to the thing signified by it; or *bombos* (buzzing), of which the first syllable, as in its English equivalent, has the meaning of a deep sound. We may observe also (as we see in the case of the poor stammerer) that speech has the co-operation of the whole body and may be often assisted or half expressed by gesticulation. A sound or word is not the work of the vocal organs only; nearly the whole of the upper part of the human frame, including head, chest, lungs, have a share in creating it; and it may be accompanied by a movement of the eyes, nose, fingers, hands, feet which contributes to the effect of it.

The principle of onomatopoeia has fallen into discredit, partly because it has been supposed to imply an actual manufacture of words out of syllables and letters, like a piece of joiner's work,—a theory of language which is more and more refuted by facts, and more and more going out of fashion with philologists; and partly also because the traces of onomatopoeia in separate words become almost obliterated in the course of ages. The poet of language cannot put in and pull out letters, as a painter might insert or blot out a shade of colour to give effect to his picture. It would be ridiculous for him to alter any received form of a word in order to render it more expressive of the sense. He can only select, perhaps out of some dialect, the form which is already best adapted to his purpose. The true onomatopoeia is not a creative, but a formative principle, which in the later stage of

the history of language ceases to act upon individual words; but still works through the collocation of them in the sentence or paragraph, and the adaptation of every word, syllable, letter to one another and to the rhythm of the whole passage.

iv. Next, under a distinct head, although not separable from the preceding, may be considered the differentiation of languages, i.e. the manner in which differences of meaning and form have arisen in them. Into their first creation we have ceased to enquire: it is their aftergrowth with which we are now concerned. How did the roots or substantial portions of words become modified or inflected? and how did they receive separate meanings? First we remark that words are attracted by the sounds and senses of other words, so that they form groups of nouns and verbs analogous in sound and sense to one another, each noun or verb putting forth inflexions, generally of two or three patterns, and with exceptions. We do not say that we know how sense became first allied to sound; but we have no difficulty in ascertaining how the sounds and meanings of words were in time parted off or differentiated. (1) The chief causes which regulate the variations of sound are (a) double or differing analogies, which lead sometimes to one form, sometimes to another (b) euphony, by which is meant chiefly the greater pleasure to the ear and the greater facility to the organs of speech which is given by a new formation or pronunciation of a word (c) the necessity of finding new expressions for new classes or processes of things. We are told that changes of sound take place by innumerable gradations until a whole tribe or community or society find themselves acquiescing in a new pronunciation or use of language. Yet no one observes the change, or is at all aware that in the course of a lifetime he and his contemporaries have appreciably varied their intonation or use of words. On the other hand, the necessities of language seem to require that the intermediate sounds or meanings of words should quickly become fixed or set and not continue in a state of transition. The process of settling down is aided by the organs of speech and by the use of writing and printing. (2) The meaning of words varies because ideas vary or the number of things which is included under them or with which they are associated is increased. A single word is thus made to do duty for many more things than were formerly expressed by it; and it parts into different senses when the classes of things or ideas which are represented by it are themselves different and distinct. A figurative use of a word may easily pass into a new sense: a new meaning caught up by association may become more important than all the rest. The good or neutral sense of a word, such as Jesuit, Puritan, Methodist, Heretic, has been often converted into a bad one by the malevolence of party spirit. Double forms suggest different meanings and are often used to express them; and the form or accent of a word has been not unfrequently altered when there is a difference of meaning. The difference of gender in nouns is utilized for the same reason. New meanings of words push themselves into the vacant spaces of language and retire when they are no longer needed. Language

equally abhors vacancy and superfluity. But the remedial measures by which both are eliminated are not due to any conscious action of the human mind; nor is the force exerted by them constraining or necessary.

(7) We have shown that language, although subject to laws, is far from being of an exact and uniform nature. We may now speak briefly of the faults of language. They may be compared to the faults of Geology, in which different strata cross one another or meet at an angle, or mix with one another either by slow transitions or by violent convulsions, leaving many lacunae which can be no longer filled up, and often becoming so complex that no true explanation of them can be given. So in language there are the cross influences of meaning and sound, of logic and grammar, of differing analogies, of words and the inflexions of words, which often come into conflict with each other. The grammarian, if he were to form new words, would make them all of the same pattern according to what he conceives to be the rule, that is, the more common usage of language. The subtlety of nature goes far beyond art, and it is complicated by irregularity, so that often we can hardly say that there is a right or wrong in the formation of words. For almost any formation which is not at variance with the first principles of language is possible and may be defended.

The imperfection of language is really due to the formation and correlation of words by accident, that is to say, by principles which are unknown to us. Hence we see why Plato, like ourselves unable to comprehend the whole of language, was constrained to 'supplement the poor creature imitation by another poor creature convention.' But the poor creature convention in the end proves too much for all the rest: for we do not ask what is the origin of words or whether they are formed according to a correct analogy, but what is the usage of them; and we are compelled to admit with Hermogenes in Plato and with Horace that usage is the ruling principle, 'quem penes arbitrium est, et jus et norma loquendi.'

(8) There are two ways in which a language may attain permanence or fixity. First, it may have been embodied in poems or hymns or laws, which may be repeated for hundreds, perhaps for thousands of years with a religious accuracy, so that to the priests or rhapsodists of a nation the whole or the greater part of a language is literally preserved; secondly, it may be written down and in a written form distributed more or less widely among the whole nation. In either case the language which is familiarly spoken may have grown up wholly or in a great measure independently of them. (1) The first of these processes has been sometimes attended by the result that the sound of the words has been carefully preserved and that the meaning of them has either perished wholly, or is only doubtfully recovered by the efforts of modern philology. The verses have been repeated as a chant or part of a ritual, but they have had no relation to ordinary life or speech. (2) The invention of writing again is commonly attributed to a

particular epoch, and we are apt to think that such an inestimable gift would have immediately been diffused over a whole country. But it may have taken a long time to perfect the art of writing, and another long period may have elapsed before it came into common use. Its influence on language has been increased ten, twenty or one hundred fold by the invention of printing.

Before the growth of poetry or the invention of writing, languages were only dialects. So they continued to be in parts of the country in which writing was not used or in which there was no diffusion of literature. In most of the counties of England there is still a provincial style, which has been sometimes made by a great poet the vehicle of his fancies. When a book sinks into the mind of a nation, such as Luther's Bible or the Authorized English Translation of the Bible, or again great classical works like Shakspeare or Milton, not only have new powers of expression been diffused through a whole nation, but a great step towards uniformity has been made. The instinct of language demands regular grammar and correct spelling: these are imprinted deeply on the tablets of a nation's memory by a common use of classical and popular writers. In our own day we have attained to a point at which nearly every printed book is spelt correctly and written grammatically.

(9) Proceeding further to trace the influence of literature on language we note some other causes which have affected the higher use of it: such as (1) the necessity of clearness and connexion; (2) the fear of tautology; (3) the influence of metre, rhythm, rhyme, and of the language of prose and verse upon one another; (4) the power of idiom and quotation; (5) the relativeness of words to one another.

It has been usual to depreciate modern languages when compared with ancient. The latter are regarded as furnishing a type of excellence to which the former cannot attain. But the truth seems to be that modern languages, if through the loss of inflections and genders they lack some power or beauty or expressiveness or precision which is possessed by the ancient, are in many other respects superior to them: the thought is generally clearer, the connexion closer, the sentence and paragraph are better distributed. The best modern languages, for example English or French, possess as great a power of self-improvement as the Latin, if not as the Greek. Nor does there seem to be any reason why they should ever decline or decay. It is a popular remark that our great writers are beginning to disappear: it may also be remarked that whenever a great writer appears in the future he will find the English language as perfect and as ready for use as in the days of Shakspeare or Milton. There is no reason to suppose that English or French will ever be reduced to the low level of Modern Greek or of Mediaeval Latin. The wide diffusion of great authors would make such a decline impossible. Nor will modern languages be easily broken up by amalgamation with each other. The distance between them is too wide to be spanned, the differences are too great to

be overcome, and the use of printing makes it impossible that one of them should ever be lost in another.

The structure of the English language differs greatly from that of either Latin or Greek. In the two latter, especially in Greek, sentences are joined together by connecting particles. They are distributed on the right hand and on the left by *men, de, alla, kaitoi, kai de* and the like, or deduced from one another by *ara, de, oun, toinun* and the like. In English the majority of sentences are independent and in apposition to one another; they are laid side by side or slightly connected by the copula. But within the sentence the expression of the logical relations of the clauses is closer and more exact: there is less of apposition and participial structure. The sentences thus laid side by side are also constructed into paragraphs; these again are less distinctly marked in Greek and Latin than in English. Generally French, German, and English have an advantage over the classical languages in point of accuracy. The three concords are more accurately observed in English than in either Greek or Latin. On the other hand, the extension of the familiar use of the masculine and feminine gender to objects of sense and abstract ideas as well as to men and animals no doubt lends a nameless grace to style which we have a difficulty in appreciating, and the possible variety in the order of words gives more flexibility and also a kind of dignity to the period. Of the comparative effect of accent and quantity and of the relation between them in ancient and modern languages we are not able to judge.

Another quality in which modern are superior to ancient languages is freedom from tautology. No English style is thought tolerable in which, except for the sake of emphasis, the same words are repeated at short intervals. Of course the length of the interval must depend on the character of the word. Striking words and expressions cannot be allowed to reappear, if at all, except at the distance of a page or more. Pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions may or rather must recur in successive lines. It seems to be a kind of impertinence to the reader and strikes unpleasantly both on the mind and on the ear that the same sounds should be used twice over, when another word or turn of expression would have given a new shade of meaning to the thought and would have added a pleasing variety to the sound. And the mind equally rejects the repetition of the word and the use of a mere synonym for it,—e.g. *felicity* and *happiness*. The cultivated mind desires something more, which a skilful writer is easily able to supply out of his treasure-house.

The fear of tautology has doubtless led to the multiplications of words and the meanings of words, and generally to an enlargement of the vocabulary. It is a very early instinct of language; for ancient poetry is almost as free from tautology as the best modern writings. The speech of young children, except in so far as they are compelled to repeat themselves by the fewness of their words, also escapes

from it. When they grow up and have ideas which are beyond their powers of expression, especially in writing, tautology begins to appear. In like manner when language is 'contaminated' by philosophy it is apt to become awkward, to stammer and repeat itself, to lose its flow and freedom. No philosophical writer with the exception of Plato, who is himself not free from tautology, and perhaps Bacon, has attained to any high degree of literary excellence.

To poetry the form and polish of language is chiefly to be attributed; and the most critical period in the history of language is the transition from verse to prose. At first mankind were contented to express their thoughts in a set form of words having a kind of rhythm; to which regularity was given by accent and quantity. But after a time they demanded a greater degree of freedom, and to those who had all their life been hearing poetry the first introduction of prose had the charm of novelty. The prose romances into which the Homeric Poems were converted, for a while probably gave more delight to the hearers or readers of them than the Poems themselves, and in time the relation of the two was reversed: the poems which had once been a necessity of the human mind became a luxury: they were now superseded by prose, which in all succeeding ages became the natural vehicle of expression to all mankind. Henceforward prose and poetry formed each other. A comparatively slender link between them was also furnished by proverbs. We may trace in poetry how the simple succession of lines, not without monotony, has passed into a complicated period, and how in prose, rhythm and accent and the order of words and the balance of clauses, sometimes not without a slight admixture of rhyme, make up a new kind of harmony, swelling into strains not less majestic than those of Homer, Virgil, or Dante.

One of the most curious and characteristic features of language, affecting both syntax and style, is idiom. The meaning of the word 'idiom' is that which is peculiar, that which is familiar, the word or expression which strikes us or comes home to us, which is more readily understood or more easily remembered. It is a quality which really exists in infinite degrees, which we turn into differences of kind by applying the term only to conspicuous and striking examples of words or phrases which have this quality. It often supersedes the laws of language or the rules of grammar, or rather is to be regarded as another law of language which is natural and necessary. The word or phrase which has been repeated many times over is more intelligible and familiar to us than one which is rare, and our familiarity with it more than compensates for incorrectness or inaccuracy in the use of it. Striking expressions also which have moved the hearts of nations or are the precious stones and jewels of great authors partake of the nature of idioms: they are taken out of the sphere of grammar and are exempt from the proprieties of language. Every one knows that we often put words together in a manner which would be intolerable if it were not idiomatic. We cannot argue either about the

meaning of words or the use of constructions that because they are used in one connexion they will be legitimate in another, unless we allow for this principle. We can bear to have words and sentences used in new senses or in a new order or even a little perverted in meaning when we are quite familiar with them. Quotations are as often applied in a sense which the author did not intend as in that which he did. The parody of the words of Shakspeare or of the Bible, which has in it something of the nature of a lie, is far from unpleasing to us. The better known words, even if their meaning be perverted, are more agreeable to us and have a greater power over us. Most of us have experienced a sort of delight and feeling of curiosity when we first came across or when we first used for ourselves a new word or phrase or figure of speech.

There are associations of sound and of sense by which every word is linked to every other. One letter harmonizes with another; every verb or noun derives its meaning, not only from itself, but from the words with which it is associated. Some reflection of them near or distant is embodied in it. In any new use of a word all the existing uses of it have to be considered. Upon these depends the question whether it will bear the proposed extension of meaning or not. According to the famous expression of Luther, 'Words are living creatures, having hands and feet.' When they cease to retain this living power of adaptation, when they are only put together like the parts of a piece of furniture, language becomes unpoetical, in expressive, dead.

Grammars would lead us to suppose that words have a fixed form and sound. Lexicons assign to each word a definite meaning or meanings. They both tend to obscure the fact that the sentence precedes the word and that all language is relative. (1) It is relative to its own context. Its meaning is modified by what has been said before and after in the same or in some other passage: without comparing the context we are not sure whether it is used in the same sense even in two successive sentences. (2) It is relative to facts, to time, place, and occasion: when they are already known to the hearer or reader, they may be presupposed; there is no need to allude to them further. (3) It is relative to the knowledge of the writer and reader or of the speaker and hearer. Except for the sake of order and consecutiveness nothing ought to be expressed which is already commonly or universally known. A word or two may be sufficient to give an intimation to a friend; a long or elaborate speech or composition is required to explain some new idea to a popular audience or to the ordinary reader or to a young pupil. Grammars and dictionaries are not to be despised; for in teaching we need clearness rather than subtlety. But we must not therefore forget that there is also a higher ideal of language in which all is relative—sounds to sounds, words to words, the parts to the whole—in which besides the lesser context of the book or speech, there is also the larger context of history and circumstances.

The study of Comparative Philology has introduced into the world a new science which more than any other binds up man with nature, and distant ages and countries with one another. It may be said to have thrown a light upon all other sciences and upon the nature of the human mind itself. The true conception of it dispels many errors, not only of metaphysics and theology, but also of natural knowledge. Yet it is far from certain that this newly-found science will continue to progress in the same surprising manner as heretofore; or that even if our materials are largely increased, we shall arrive at much more definite conclusions than at present. Like some other branches of knowledge, it may be approaching a point at which it can no longer be profitably studied. But at any rate it has brought back the philosophy of language from theory to fact; it has passed out of the region of guesses and hypotheses, and has attained the dignity of an Inductive Science. And it is not without practical and political importance. It gives a new interest to distant and subject countries; it brings back the dawning light from one end of the earth to the other. Nations, like individuals, are better understood by us when we know something of their early life; and when they are better understood by us, we feel more kindly towards them. Lastly, we may remember that all knowledge is valuable for its own sake; and we may also hope that a deeper insight into the nature of human speech will give us a greater command of it and enable us to make a nobler use of it. (Compare again W. Humboldt, 'Ueber die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues;' M. Muller, 'Lectures on the Science of Language;' Steinthal, 'Einleitung in die Psychologie und Sprachwissenschaft:' and for the latter part of the Essay, Delbruck, 'Study of Language;' Paul's 'Principles of the History of Language:' to the latter work the author of this Essay is largely indebted.)

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