Language as Picture in Plato's *Cratylus* and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

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Abstract

The aim of the following article is to compare Plato and Wittgenstein's doctrines of language as a picture, focusing on the *Cratylus* and the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Despite the fact that the *Cratylus* deals with the correctness of names while the *Tractatus* attends to the nature and structure of propositions, the study demonstrates, focusing on *Cratylus* 421c-427e and *Tractatus* 4.01-4.12, that the language-as-picture doctrines in these texts closely resemble each other in terms of their basic properties and structures. The comparison comprises four aspects: (1) the structure of elements and their form; (2) the correspondence between language and reality; (3) the possibility of falsehood; and (4) the method of verification.

Key words: philosophy of language, Picture Theory, Wittgenstein, Plato, analytical philosophy.

Resumen

La intención del siguiente artículo es comparar las doctrinas del lenguaje como una pintura en Platón y Wittgenstein, concentrándose en el *Cratilo* y en el *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. A pesar de que el *Cratilo* trata sobre la corrección de los nombres mientras que el *Tractatus* atiende la naturaleza y estructura de las proposiciones, el estudio demuestra, centrado en *Cratilo* 421c-427e y *Tractatus* 4.01-4.12, que las doctrinas del lenguaje-como-pintura en estos textos se parecen en términos de sus propiedades básicas y su estructura. La comparación consta de cuatro aspectos: (1) la estructura de elementos y su forma; (2) la correspondencia entre lenguaje y realidad; (3) la posibilidad de la falsedad; y (4) el método de verificación.

Palabras clave: filosofía del lenguaje, teoría pictórica del lenguaje, Wittgenstein, Platón, filosofía analítica.

In the dialogue *Cratylus,* Socrates says: "Now, a name is an imitation, just as a painting or portrait is" (431 a). Here Plato displays, for the first time in the history of western philosophy, a doctrine according to which language is essentially a picture of reality. Twenty-four hundred years later, the young Ludwig Wittgenstein reached the same conclusion and decisively wrote: "A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it" (*Tractatus* 4.01). The aim of the following article is to compare Plato and Wittgenstein's doctrines of language as a picture, focusing on the Platonic *Cratylus* and the Wittgensteinian *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*[1]. Both texts are considered as early philosophical works[2] and both deal with the nature of language. At first sight, the texts display significant disparity: the *Cratylus* deals with the correctness of names and its discussion is entirely based on the ontological postulation that "things have some fixed being or essence of their own" (386e); on the other hand, the *Tractatus* focuses on the nature and structure of propositions, and its discussion is based on a postulate of the mutual logical form of language and reality (cfr. 4.014). Nevertheless, I will strive to demonstrate in the following study that the language-as-picture doctrines in these texts closely resemble each other in terms of their basic properties and structures[3]. More abstractly, both

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[1]In this article, I used the following English translations: Plato, *Cratylus*, tr. C. D. C. Reeve (Cambridge: Hackett Publishers, 1998); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, tr. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2001).

[2]The *Cratylus* belongs to a group of early platonic dialogues, whereas the *Tractatus* is the crux of Wittgenstein's early thoughts. For a recent discussion of the methodological division of Plato's work, see: J. Annas and C. Rowe, eds. *New Perspectives on Plato, Modern and Ancient* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[3]In *Tractatus* 4.122 Wittgenstein says: "In a certain sense we can talk about formal properties of objects and states of affairs, or, in the case of facts, about structural properties: and in the same sense about formal relations and structural relations. (Instead of 'structural property' I also say 'internal property'; instead of 'structural relation', 'internal relation'. I introduce these expressions in order to indicate the source of the confusion between internal relations and relations proper (external relations), which is very widespread among philosophers)…". He uses here the notion 'internal relations' as indicating a genuine similarity between properties and structures. From this viewpoint, the aim of the following article is to display the *internal relations* between Plato and Wittgenstein's doctrines of language as a picture.

texts present language as a pictorial model that corresponds to an object in the world, a view that is generally called *the Picture Theory of language.* In fact, this view presupposes *the correspondence theory of truth,* according to which "truth" consists of a correct relation (in our case, a relation of linguistic description) to reality. Such a correspondence presupposes the idea of *metaphysical realism,* according to which there is a world of objects and properties which is independent of our thoughts and discourse. Hence, the Picture Theory of language presupposes, in general, two preconditions: that there is an objective reality that can be depicted, and that the correspondence of a pictorial description to this reality is a true depiction of reality. More concretely, I will commence my investigation of the Picture Theory of language, as used by Plato and Wittgenstein, with a general review of the *Cratylus* and the *Tractatus*' view of language. Following this review, I will focus on two sections in these texts that saliently display the Picture Theory of language: the discussion of the correctness of first names in *Cratylus* 421c-427e, and the discussion of the proposition as a model of reality in *Tractatus* 4.01-4.12. Finally, I will analytically compare the texts, focusing on four aspects: (1) the structure of elements and their form; (2) the correspondence between language and reality; (3) the possibility of falsehood; and (4) the method of verification.

The contribution of the present study resides in the fact that, first, it will clarify the link between ancient and modern philosophies regarding language. Moreover, it will investigate the most important ramifications of the Picture Theory of language in western thought. Finally, and more concretely, it will add a novel perspective to our understanding of the *Tractatus* and will show the significant resemblance between Wittgenstein's early thought and Plato's philosophy[4].

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[4]I am fully aware of the fact that a different reading of the *Tractatus* would, of course, force a different reading of the *Cratylus*. Regarding some central debates concerning the *Tractatus*, see: Eli Freidlander, *Signs of Sense* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), chapter 11.

1. The Picture theory in the *Cratylus* and the *Tractatus*: an overview

The starting point of the *Cratylus* and the *Tractatus* is that language, in general, is a double-layered phenomenon. In the former text Socrates claims that the rule-setters (νομοθέτης) embodies the general form of the name in sounds and syllables that are used in his own culture (389d-390a). "And if different rule-setters do not make each name out of the same syllables", says Socrates, "we mustn't forget that different black-smiths, who are making the same tool for the same type of work, don't all make it out of the same iron" (389e)[5]. Similarly, Wittgenstein declares in the *Tractatus*:

> Language disguises thought. So much so, that from the
> outward form of the clothing it is impossible to infer the
> form of the thought beneath it, because the outward form
> of the clothing is not designed to reveal the form of the
> body, but for entirely different purposes (4.002).

Therefore, in both cases it is necessary to "undress" language, figu-ratively speaking, and reveal *how* linguistic utterance *truly* depicts reality. The answer is, in principle, the same: first-names (*Cratylus*) and mean-ingful propositions (*Tractatus*) are actually a picture of reality. Let us view how this theory originated in both texts.

1.1. The Picture Theory in the *Cratylus*

The dialogue commences with a discussion between Hermogenes and Cratylus. Hermogenes begins: "Cratylus says, Socrates, that there is a correctness of name for each thing, one that belongs to it by na-ture. A thing's name isn't whatever people agree to call it … but there is a natural correctness of names, which is the same for everyone, Greek or foreigner." (383a). Later on, Hermogenes states his own view, and claims that "No name belongs to a particular thing by nature, but only

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[5]Regarding the *Cratylus'* name-makers, see: N. Demand, "The Nomothetes of the *Cratylus*", *Phronesis* 20 (1975): 106-09.

because of the rules and usage of those who establish the usage and call it by that name" (384d). Thus, Plato sets up here a clear dichotomy[6] concerning the correctness of names and language in general: on the one hand, we have Hermogenes' view according to which names are essentially a conventional (νόμος) set of symbols, a view that follows the theory of the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides[7]. On the other hand, Cratylus maintains that names belong to things by nature (φύσις), a stance that follows Heraclitus' theory of *logos*, and which assumes that names can express the very essence of things; this view presupposes, of course, the idea of metaphysical realism: that things do actually have an objective essence[8]. Socrates willingly takes part in the discussion. He initially claims, in contrast with Protagoras' view that man is the measure of all things, that "things have some fixed being of their own... They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature" (386e). Consequently, an action's performance, he claims, must be in accordance with the action's own nature (387a). Since the act of naming is a part of human actions, it must also follow the nature of the action. At this point Socrates explains how the name is being created by the name-maker (the νομοθέτης)[9]. Similarly to the carpenter and the blacksmith, the νομοθέτης conceives the form (ἰδέα) of the name, what the name is in itself, and embodies it in sounds and syllables (389b-390a). Hence, concludes Socrates, "So Cratylus is right in saying that things have natural names, and that not everyone is a craftsman of names, but only someone who looks to the natural name of each thing and is able to put its form (ἰδέα) into letters and syllables" (390e). He proceeds to examine the correctness of the νομοθέτης name making,

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[6]Regarding the *Cratylus'* Dichotomy concerning the correctness of names, see: G. Anagnostopoulos, "Plato's *Cratylus*: The Two Theories of the Correctness of Names", *Review of Metaphysics* 25 (1971/2): 691-736.

[7]Regarding Parmenides' view of language, see: L. Woodbury, "Parmenides on Names", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 63 (1958-9): 145-160.

[8]According to Aristotle, Cratylus was, in fact, a disciple of Heraclitus (*Metaphysics* III: 1010a).

[9]By νομοθέτης Plato means here "someone who establishes the rules of usage that give significance to names" (Reeve, 15 note).

for "if names are to be given well, a dialectician [i.e., Socrates himself]
must supervise him [i.e., the νομοθέτης]" (390d). Socrates continues
with a long and detailed examination of Greek words (391a-421c). His
method of examination is based on etymological analysis, which unfolds
the fundamental meaning of ancient names. For instance, according to
Socrates, the word "name" (ὄνομα) etymologically means "this is a being
for which there is a search" (ὂν οὗ μάσμα ἐστίν), and the word "truth"
(ἀλήθεια) "is a compressed form of the phrase 'a wandering that is di-
vine' (ἄλη θεία)" (421b)[10]. It turns out, then, that Plato actually inter-
prets names as propositions, using his etymological method: each name
is conceived as a compressed form of a meaningful phrase. At this point
Hermogenes addresses the question of the correctness of the names that
constitute elements of other names, that is, the names that are compo-
nents of the etymological analysis of other names (421c). Socrates calls
these elementary names "first names" (τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα), and refers
to them as the fundamentals of all names and statements, as names "that
aren't composed out of other names... an element which cannot any
longer be carried back to other names" (422b). Thereafter, he makes
clear that "the correctness of every name we analyzed was intended to
consist in its expressing the nature of one of the things that are" (422d).
And thus, if the primary names are indeed names, they must make things
as clear as possible to us. "But how", asks Socrates, "can they do this
when they aren't based on other names?" (422e). The answer to this
question constitutes the correctness of the first names which form the
basis of all other names, and this thus serves as the Archimedean point
of Socrates' whole theory of the correctness of names (422a-427e). Gen-
erally speaking, Socrates claims here, with some hesitation, that the first-
name corresponds to a thing in reality since its elements (letters and
syllables) correspond to the elements that compose the thing; "It's just
the same as it is with painters", he adds (422d). This claim will be the
crux of our investigation and will be analyzed in detail thereafter, since
here Socrates clearly depicts language as a picture of reality. Following

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[10]Regarding Socrates' Etymological method, see: D. Sedley, "The Etymologies in
Plato's *Cratylus*", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 118 (1998): 140-154.

Socrates' argument, Cratylus joins the discussion (427e). At this point Socrates states: "But, Cratylus, I have long been surprised at my own wisdom —and doubtful of it, too. That's why I think it's necessary to keep re-investigating whatever I say, since self-deception is the worst thing of all" (428d). Here begins the deconstructive section of the dialogue[11]. Socrates proves, first, that even though there is a genuine correctness of names, this does not exclude the possibility of the existence of a false name: it is possible to say to a man "this is your portrait" while showing him the likeness of a woman (431a); it is correspondingly possible to assign names incorrectly, that is "to give them not to things they fit but to things they don't fit" (431b)[12]. Moreover, stresses Socrates, even a correct name is an image, and an image is *necessarily* ontologically inferior to the thing, otherwise every act of naming would have duplicated the things in the world "and no one would be able to say which was the thing and which was the name" (432d)[13]. Then, after undermining the epistemological competency of the name-giver (438a-c), Socrates concludes that "it is far better to investigate them [things] and learn about them through themselves than to do so through their names" (439b). And the dialogue concludes with *aporia*, with a Socratic demand to carry on with the investigation, courageously and thoroughly, without accepting anything easily (440d). In sum, the Picture Theory of language is incorporated in the *Cratylus* with the theory of the correctness of the first names, which functions as the apex of the dialogue's "positive" section and as the basis of Socrates' correspondence theory of language in gen-

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[11] See B. Williams, "Cratylus' Theory of Naming and its Refutation", in *Language and Logos*, eds. M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum (London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 83-93.

[12] Regarding the problem of false names in the Cratylus, see N. Denyer, *Language, Thought, and Falsehood in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1991), chapter 5; M. Richardson, "True and False Names in the *Cratylus*", *Phronesis* 21 (1976): 135-45; J. V. Luce, "Plato on the Truth and Falsity of names", *Classical Quarterly* 19 (1969): 22-32.

[13] Regarding names and ontology in the Cratylus, see C. Kahn, "Language and Ontology in the *Cratylus*", in *Exegesis and Argument*, eds. E. N. Lee and A. Mourelatos (Assen: van Gorcum, 1973), 152-76.

eral. Before focusing on it, I will briefly display the Picture Theory in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

1.2.   The Origins of the Picture Theory in the *Tractatus*

During one of his meetings with members of the Vienna Circle, held on December 9, 1931, Wittgenstein explains:

> I have inherited this concept of a picture [*Bild*] from two sides: first from a drawn picture, second from the model of a mathematician, which already is a general concept. For a mathematician talks of picturing (*Abbildung*) where a painter would no longer use this expression[14].

Wittgenstein thus uses the term 'picture' in order to indicate both a visual painting and an abstract model. Correspondingly, he gives in the *Tractatus* two justifications to the Picture Theory of the proposition. One considers the proposition as a visual picture: "In order to understand the essential nature of a proposition, we should consider hieroglyphic script, which depicts the facts that it described. And alphabetic script developed out of it without losing what was essential to depiction" (4.016). The other justification is more abstract, and deals with the form of a proposition: "It is obvious that a proposition of the form 'aRb' strikes us as a picture. In this case the sign is obviously a likeliness of what is signified" (4.012)[15]. More concretely, the *Tractatus*' Picture Theory of the proposition is based on two preliminary doctrines: the metaphysics of logical atomism and the general Picture Theory.

Wittgenstein presents the doctrine of logical atomism in the outset of the book, in sections 1-2.063[16]. He argues, in general, that the world

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[14]B. McGuinness, ed., *Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 185.

[15]A few sections before, he explains: "Instead of, 'The complex sign aRb says that a stands to b in the relation R', we ought to put, '*That a stands to b in a certain relation* says *that aRb*.'" (3.1432).

[16]Regarding the *Tractatus*' logical atomism, see A. Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (London: The Penguin Press, 1973), chapter 5. Regarding the development of Wittgenstein's

is the totality of facts (1.1), that a fact is the existence of states of affairs (2), and that "A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things)" (2.01), so that "The determinate way in which objects are connected in a state of affairs is the structure of the state of affair" (2.032). Moreover, states of affairs are totally independent of one another (2.061), so that "From the existence and non-existence of one state of affairs it is impossible to infer the existence or non-existence of another" (2.062). Objects, thus, are the fundamental elements of reality: they are simple (2.02), colorless (2.023), and make up the substance of the world (2.021)[17]. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein does not explain what actually *is* an object; he only states that simple objects are indispensable: "There must be objects, if the world is to have an unalterable form" (2.026). Anthony Kenny elegantly illuminates Wittgenstein's logical atomism by means of an analogy to the game of chess:

> The game of chess, importantly modified, provides as near as we can get to a model for the way the world is conceived in the *Tractatus.* Imagine that the objects of the world are the chess-pieces and the squares of the chessboard. Then states of affairs will be the relations between the pieces and the squares. That a certain piece is or is not on a certain square will be a positive or negative fact. The world, all that is the case, will be the position on the board at any given time (Kenny, 74).

Kenny's analogy elegantly clarifies the fact that, basically, Wittgenstein's "world" comprises fundamental undivided elements that are combined in an indeterminate structure, as can be seen in clause 2.0271: "Objects are what is unalterable and subsistent; their configuration is what is changing and unstable"[18].

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logical atomism in its relationship to Frege and Russell, see G. E. M Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 25-51.

[17]Regarding the *Tractatus'* simple objects, see Friedlander, 167-175.

[18]This outlook is the basis of Wittgenstein's claim that value must necessarily reside *outside* the world of facts: "The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the

The second preliminary doctrine in the *Tractatus* is the "general" Picture Theory, or the Theory of Logical Portrayal, presented in clauses 2.1-2.225[19]. It appears for the first time in Wittgenstein's notebooks, on 29.9.1914[20]. According to Monk's extensive biography on Wittgenstein, the story of how this idea occurred to him was told by Wittgenstein in later life to his friend G. H. von Wright[21]. According to the story, Wittgenstein read, while serving on the Eastern Front, a magazine report of a lawsuit in Paris concerning a car accident. A model of the accident was presented in court, using dolls and toy cars. "It occurred to him", tells Monk, "that the model could represent the accident because of the correspondence between the parts of the model (the miniature houses, cars, people) and the real things (houses, cars, people)" (Monk, 118). More concretely, Wittgenstein declares in *Tractatus* 2.12 that "A picture is a model of reality". He then explains what a model is and what conditions are necessary for any possible representation. He first stresses that pictures comprise fundamental elements that correspond to objects in reality: "In a picture the elements of the picture are the representatives of objects" (2.131). The elements of the picture are related

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world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in* it no value exists —and if it did exist, it would have no value. If there is any value that does have value, it must lie outside the whole sphere of what happens and is the case. For all that happens and is the case is accidental. What makes it non-accidental cannot lie *within* the world, since if it did it would itself be accidental. It must lie outside the world." (6.41). Regarding Wittgenstein's fact/value dichotomy, see: E. Friedlander, 123-143.

[19]Wittgenstein actually considers the existence of simple object as a necessary condition for the Picture Theory. In clauses 2.0211 and 2.0212, he says: "If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true. In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false)." This fact therefore links logical atomism and the Picture Theory.

[20]"In the proposition, a world is as it were put together experimentally. (As when in the law-court in Paris a motor-car accident is represented by means of dolls, etc.)" (*Notebooks* 7). Regarding the development of Wittgenstein's Picture Theory, with special attention given to the interrelations among *Notes on Logic*, the *Notebooks*, and the *Tractatus*, see T. Ricketts, "Picture, Logic, and the limits of Sense", in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, eds. H. Sluga and D. Stern (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 69-79.

[21]R. Monk, *Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Penguin, 1991), 118.

to one another in a determinate way (2.14) that constitutes the pictorial form (*Form der Abbildung*) —the possibility of forming the pictures' structure[22]. In order that a picture actually *be* a picture of something, its elements must go proxy for the elements of the depicted situation in reality: this is the pictorial relationship (*abbildende Beziehung*) (2.1514) that is, "as it were, the feelers of the picture's elements, with which the picture touches reality" (2.1515)[23]. The possibility of such a pictorial relationship, Wittgenstein says, is based on the necessary presumption that there must be something identical in a picture and what it depicts, to enable one to be a picture of the other at all (2.161). This necessary common denominator is what Wittgenstein calls logical form: "What any picture, of whatever form, must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it —correctly or incorrectly— in any way at all, is logical form, i.e. the form of reality" (2.18). Moreover, no picture is true a *priori* (2.225); a picture represents *possible* —true or false— situations, the possibility of existence and non-existence of states of affairs (2.201). This representation is the picture's sense (*Sinn*) (2.221), and the agreement or disagreement of this sense with reality constitutes the picture's truth or falsity (2.222)[24]. Finally, in order to determine whether the picture's sense is in agreement with reality, we must compare it with reality (2.223). This correspondence between pictures and reality is, according to Wittgenstein, essentially an isomorphic relationship. As Ricketts puts it,

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[22]"The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way. Let us call this connexion of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture" (2.15). Regarding the *Tractatus'* pictorial form, see T. Ricketts, "Picture, Logic, and the limits of Sense", in *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*, eds. H. Sluga and D. Stern (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 78-79.

[23]In his letters to C. K. Ogden, the first English translator of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein comments: "Here by 'Fühler' I meant the things which a butterfly has. If these are called 'feelers' its all right". See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Letters to C. K. Ogden* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), 24.

[24]Regarding the notion of 'sense' in the *Tractatus*, see Friedlander, 103-112.

Modeling does not require that the pictorial elements and
the represented objects share the very same possibilities of
combination. It only requires a formal 'isomorphism' be-
tween the possible configuration of pictorial elements into
pictures and of objects into facts (Ricketts, 78).

In sum, Wittgenstein's theory of pictorial representation is based on
two metaphysical presumptions: (1) the existence of simple objects, and
(2) the logical form of reality. As for the Picture Theory, it comprises
the following principles: (1) A picture constitutes both elements that go
proxy for reality's objects, and a pictorial form that represents possible
situations in reality. (2) Picture and reality share a common logical form,
"the form of reality", and they thus stand in an isomorphic relationship
to one another. (3) In order to determine whether pictures are true or
false, we must compare them with reality[25]. Anscombe, in her classical
introduction to the *Tractatus*, concludes the gist of this theory:

Thus there are two distinct features belonging to a picture
(in the ordinary sense of 'picture'): first, the relation be-
tween the elements of the picture; and second, the correla-
tions of the elements in the picture with things outside the
picture; and as we have seen, the first feature must belong
to a picture before the second one can; only if significant
relations hold among the elements of the picture *can* they
be correlated with objects outside so as to stand for them.
The correlation is not something that the picture itself does;
it is something that *we* do (Anscombe, 68).

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[25]In general, the *Tractatus'* commentators have evoked some general reservations
concerning the theory of pictorial representation. For instance, Kenny argues that
Wittgenstein seems to give inconsistent answers to the basic question "how does the
picture connect with the reality it depicts?" (Kenny, 56), and he does not adequately jus-
tify the assumption of a one-way correlation between pictures and reality (Kenny, 70).
On the other hand, Anscombe argues that it seems certain that the *Tractatus'* account
is wrong, "This is partly because one cannot believe in the simple objects required by
the theory; partly because it leads to dogmatic and plainly false conclusions about the
will, about modality and about generalization in infinite cases"; "But", she adds, "it is a
powerful and beautiful theory" (Anscombe, 77).

Having presented brief synopses of the *Cratylus* and the *Tractatus*,
I will next examine the picture theories of language in these texts, focus-
ing on Plato's theory of the correctness of first names (422a-427e) and
Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of the proposition (4.01-4.12).

2.   The Picture Theory of Language in the *Cratylus* and the *Tractatus*

2.1.   *Cratylus*: The Correctness of First Names

Following an extensive etymological investigation, Socrates turns to
examine the correctness of "names that are as it were the elements of
all other statements and names" (422a). He first indicates (in accordance
with Cratylus' view) that the correctness of every name, primary or other,
consists in its expressing the nature of one of the things that are (422d).
Then he points out that a name is essentially an imitation of the being or
essence of what it imitates (423b-424a). The term "imitation" (μίμησις)
is of special importance here and in the Platonic philosophy in general[26].
Plato uses it in order to indicate coincidently (1) an essential resemblance
between the represented source and its representation, and (2) a substan-
tial ontological-inferiority of the representation *vis-à-vis* the represented
source[27]. But how can we examine the correctness of the imitation of
the first name? Here Socrates suggests that, since the first name consists
of letters and syllables and cannot be reduced to other names (being *ele-
mentary* name), its correctness should be examined, first, by dividing off
its letters (424 c). Then Socrates suggests the following:

> So mustn't we first divide off the vowels and then the others
> in accordance with their differences in kind, that is to say,
> the "consonants" and "mutes" […] and the semivowels,
> which are neither vowels nor mutes? And, as to the vowels

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[26] For instance, the entire physical reality stands in a mimetic relation to the eternal
set of *Ideas* (*Timaeus*); political justice is a μίμησις of the *Idea* of Justice (*Republic*);
and the beauty of human body imitates the transcendental *Idea* of Beauty (*Symposium*).

[27] Regarding the use of the term μίμησις in Plato's writing, see P. Murray, *Plato on
Poetry* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

themselves, mustn't we also divide off those that differ in
kind from one another? Then when we've also well divided
off the things that are —the things to which we have to give
names— if there are some things to which they can all be
carried back, as names are to the letters, and from which we
can see that they derive, and if different kind of being are
found among them, in just the way that there are among
the letters —once we've done all this well, we'll know how
to apply each letter to what it resembles, whether one letter
or a combination of many is to be applied to one thing. It's
just the same as it is with painters. When they want to pro-
duce a resemblance, they sometimes use only purple, some-
times another color, and sometimes —for example, when
they want to paint human flesh or something of that sort—
they mix many colors, employing the particular color, I sup-
pose, that their particular subject demands. Similarly, we'll
apply letters to things, using one letter to one thing, when
that's what seems to be required, or many letters together,
to form what called a syllable, or many syllables combined
to form names and verbs. From names and verbs, in turn,
we shall finally construct something important, beautiful,
and whole. And just as the painter painted an animal, so
—by means of the craft of naming or rhetoric or whatever
it is— we shall construct sentences (424c-425b).

Socrates immediately criticizes his own view, saying that his
impression about primary names "seem to me to be entirely outrageous
and absurd" (426b)[28]. Yet, in the same breath, he justifies it, saying
that "perhaps it will seem absurd, Hermogenes, to think that things be-
come clear by being imitated in letters and syllables, but it is absolutely
unavoidable. For we have nothing better on which to base the truth
of primary names" (425d). And it is 'unavoidable' since "anyone who
claims to have a scientific understanding of derivative names must first

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[28]Regarding Socrates hesitation concerning his theory of the correctness of first
names, see Reeve, xxiv-xxxv.

and foremost be able to explain the primary ones with perfect clarity. Otherwise he can be certain that what he says about the others will be worthless" (426b). Thereafter, once Cratylus joins the discussion, Socrates attends to the question of false names (430a-434b). In light of the presumption that "a name is an imitation, just as a painting or portrait is" (431a), Socrates says that in the same manner that we can assign a woman's portrait to a man and incorrectly say 'this is your portrait', "it is sometimes possible to assign names incorrectly, to give them not to things they fit but to things they don't fit" (431b). The same is true of verbs and statements (431 b-c), that is, of language in general. Therefore, a name can be true or false, and its truth or falsehood can be determined by comparing it to the depicted thing. It is only by comparing a name (and more generally, language) to reality, then, that we can determine its truth value. Returning to the aforementioned quotation, it is noteworthy that here Socrates presents a substantial pictorial theory of language. This theory comprises the following arguments:

1. Primary names are the basis of all other names. Thus, an examination of their correspondence with reality is indispensable.

2. The fundamental elements of primary names are their letters. A primary name comprises a mould of letters.

3. The depicted thing should be analyzed, correspondently, to its fundamentals[29].

4. The elements of the first name, i.e. the letters, should correspond to the fundamentals that comprise the thing depicted.

5. This correspondence is either simple (one letter represents one element) or complex (several letters represent one element).

6. The letters of the first name are analogous to a painter's colors.

7. First names are analogous to paintings or portraits.

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[29]Later on, Socrates indicates that these elements comprise 'motion', 'rest', etc. (426c-e).

8. The name-giver is analogous to the painter (implied).

More abstractly, Socrates' theory of the correctness of first names supposes that:

a) Language (names, speech, and propositions) is essentially analogous to pictures and portraits.

b) The fundamentals of language, i.e., first names, comprise basic elements combined in a certain structure (just as painting comprises colors and form).

c) The depicted thing in reality comprises basic elements combined in a certain form.

d) There is an isomorphic or mimetic relationship between language and reality: language's elements correspond to the thing's elements, and its form corresponds to the thing's form.

e) The isomorphic relationship between language and reality can be true or false, in the same manner that a portrait can correspond or not correspond to a depicted man.

f) The truth or falsehood of linguistic expressions is determined by comparing them to reality. No name is true *a priori*.

2.2. *Tractatus*: The Picture Theory of the Proposition

In the *Tractatus*, the theory that a proposition is a picture of reality is clearly stated in clause 4.01: "A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it". It is based, as demonstrated above, on the metaphysics of logical atomism and on a general theory of pictorial representation. It also presupposes that a thought is a logical picture of facts (*Tractatus* 3) and hence functions as the link between propositions (language) and states of affairs (reality)[30]. Wittgenstein was aware of the fact that at first sight a proposition does not seem

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[30]"'[A] state of affairs is thinkable': what this means is that we can picture it to ourselves" (3.001); thus, "The totality of true thoughts is a picture of reality" (3.01).

to be a picture of reality with which it is concerned (4.011). He justifies this view as follows: "In order to understand the essential nature of a proposition, we should consider hieroglyphic script, which depicts the facts that it describes[31]. And alphabetic script developed out of it without losing what was essential to description" (4.016). It is to the fact that a proposition can communicate a new sense with old words (4.03) that Wittgenstein appeals to prove that a proposition is a picture of a possible situation in reality[32]. Anthony Kenny elegantly sums up the gist of this theory in eight theses[33]:

1. **A *proposition is essentially composite*[34]**. Propositions must have parts that can occur in other propositions, unlike names that are 'simple signs' (3.202; 3.3411); thus, "names are like points; propositions like arrows" (3.144). Moreover, "What constitutes the propositional sign is that in it its elements (the words) stand in a determinate relation to one another. A propositional sign is a fact" (3.14). In other words: "A proposition is not a blend of words. (Just as a theme in music is not a blend of notes.) A proposition is articulate" (3.141). It is only by virtue of this articulation that a proposition can express a sense (3.142), i.e., represent a possible situation in the world (2.202).

2. **The elements which compose a proposition are correlated by human decision with elements of reality**. Simple signs

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Regarding thought, knowledge, and the Picture Theory, see D. Pears, "The Relation between Wittgenstein's Picture Theory of Proposition and Russell's Theories of Judgment", in *Wittgenstein: Sources and Perspectives*, ed. C. G. Luckhardt (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979), 190-213.

[31]Wittgenstein overlooks here the fact that hieroglyphic scripts tend to depict the transcendental world of the gods, not reality; this fact actually opposes his theory of nonsensical utterances. For Wittgenstein's view of nonsense in its relation to the limits of language, see Friedlander, 202-209.

[32]For a strong criticism of the view that propositions can be conceived as pictures, see E. Daitz, "The Picture Theory of Meaning", *Mind* 62/246 (April, 1953): 184-201.

[33]Kenny, 62-68. For an analytical synopsis of the theory in relation to logic, see: Anscombe, 64-87.

[34]See also Plato, *Sophist* 262a ff.

or names constitute the elements of the propositions (3.26). A name is the proxy in the proposition for the object: "A name means an object. The object is its meaning" (3.203). The connection between a name and what it signifies is simply a matter of human convention (3.322)[35]. In addition to correlating names with objects, we must correlate relationships between the names in a proposition with relationships between objects as facts, so that "the configuration of objects in a situation corresponds to the configuration of simple signs in the propositional sign" (3.21). Such a correlation is made by arbitrarily setting a rule (*Notebooks* 99) based on an appropriate syntactical form of names.

3. **The combination of such correlated elements into a proposition presents —without further human intervention— a possible state of affairs.** In clause 3.342 it is made clear that "Although there is something in our notations, *this* much is not arbitrary —that *when* we have determined one thing arbitrarily, something else is necessarily the case. (this derives from the *essence* of notation)". Once the abovementioned conventions concerning names and relationships have been established, there is no need for further conventions. "In this way the proposition represents the situation —as it were off its own bat" (*Notebooks* 26).

4. **A proposition stands in an internal relation to the possible state of affairs that it presents.**

> A proposition possesses essential and accidental features. Accidental features are those that result from the particular way in which the propositional sign is produced. Essential features are those without which the proposition could not express its sense (3.34).

The essential features of the proposition are its logical form, the logical multiplicity, which it must have in common with the pre-

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[35] Here Wittgenstein's conception of names opposes that of Plato's *Cratylus*, and of Cratylus himself, and supports the outlook of Hermogenes.

sented situation. Logical form is an internal property of both the proposition and the situation (4.123), hence, they stand in an *internal relation* to one another, i.e., they maintain formal likeness. Thus, the proposition is *essentially* connected with the situation "and the connection is precisely that it is its logical picture" (4.03).

5. **This internal relationship can only be shown, it cannot be informatively stated.** The possession of an internal relationship is something that cannot be said, since it is *unthinkable* that a proposition will lack this property (4.123): "Propositions can represent the whole of reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it —logical form" (4.12). Thus, it is impossible to "assert by means of propositions that such internal properties and relations obtain: rather, this makes itself manifest in the propositions that represent the relevant states of affairs" (4.122).

6. **A proposition is true or false by virtue of being compared to reality.** Every proposition describes a *possible* state of affairs, but not every proposition describes an actual state of affairs (4.031). Thus, either the proposition or its negation describes an actual state of affairs (4.023). In order to determine whether the proposition is true or false, we must compare it with reality (4.05). In other words, a proposition is a logical picture of a possible situation (4.03), and "in order to tell whether a picture is true or false we must compare it with reality" (2.223).

7. **A proposition must be independent of the actual state of affairs that makes it true or false.** A proposition is a logical picture of reality, and "What a picture represents it represents independently of its truth or falsity, by means of its pictorial form" (2.22). Hence, a proposition has a sense that is independent of the facts in reality (4.061): "Every proposition must *already* have a sense: it cannot be given a sense by affirmation. Indeed its sense is just what is affirmed" (4.064).

8. **No proposition is a priori true.** A proposition could be true *a priori* only if it were possible to recognize its truth by inspecting the proposition itself without comparing it to reality. However, this is impossible since the proposition does not *contain* the states of affairs that it depicts (3.13). In other words, a proposition is a logical picture of reality (4.03), and "It is impossible to tell from the picture alone whether it is true or false. There are no pictures that are true *a priori*" (2.224-2.225).

3.   Conclusion: the *Cratylus vis-à-vis* the *Tractatus*

In this conclusive section, I will analytically compare Plato's theory of the correctness of first names in the *Cratylus* with Wittgenstein's picture theory of the proposition in the *Tractatus*. As we have seen, both philosophers indicate that language is essentially a picture of reality: "Now, a name is an imitation, just as a painting or portrait is", says Socrates in the *Cratylus* (431a); "A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of reality as we imagine it", states Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* (4.01). Before I compare the texts, I will make some preliminary remarks. First, I do not claim that Plato actually *influenced* Wittgenstein's early thought. In fact, it is plausible to assume, based on Wittgenstein's diaries and letters, that while the *Tractatus* was written, he was not familiar with Plato's *Cratylus*. Actually, we have evidence, as mentioned before, that Wittgenstein told his friend that the idea of the Picture Theory of representation occurred to him when he read in a newspaper a report of a lawsuit concerning a car accident. Finally, in his introduction to the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein flaunts his indifference to the questions of influence and originality:

> I do not wish to judge how far my efforts coincide with those of other philosophers. Indeed, what I have written here makes no claim to novelty in detail, and the reason why I give no sources is that it is a matter of indifference to me whether the thoughts that I have had been anticipated by someone else (Introduction 4).

Additionally, it is possible to compare the *Cratylus'* theory of the correctness of *first names* and the *Tractatus'* Picture Theory of the *proposition* because Plato actually relates to names, as mentioned above, as 'compressed forms of phrases', i.e., as propositions (421b). In light of these remarks, I will now begin a conclusive analytical comparison of the texts, aiming at revealing a substantial similarity, or an internal relation, between Wittgenstein and Plato's picture theories of language. This analytic comparison will comprise four aspects: (A) the structure of elements and their form; (B) the correspondence between language and reality; (C) the possibility of falsehood; and (D) the method of verification.

A) The Structure of Elements and Their Form

Plato combines language, reality, and pictures into a general structure of elements and form. First-names are composed of fundamental elements —vowels and letters that are combined together in a certain form. Similarly, the things to which we have to give names can be traced to elementary fundamentals, "as names are to letters" (424d). The combination of these fundamentals in a certain mould constitutes the 'thing'. The same occurs in paintings: the combination of colors plus the form of the depicted man constitutes the portrait of the man (424d). On the other hand, Wittgenstein, too, combines reality, language, and pictures into a similar structure of elements and form. As seen above, the facts in reality indicate the existence of states of affairs, and states of affairs are a combination of simple, i.e., non-composite objects (2.01). Contrary to Plato, Wittgenstein stresses that whereas the objects are unalterable, their configuration is accidental and unstable (2.0271). Moreover, according to Wittgenstein, the proposition is composed, too, of non-composite elements and simple signs, which are names (3.202). These names and the other elements of the propositions (words) stand in a determinate relation to one another. Thus, a proposition is essentially articulate (3.141). Concordantly, pictures are composed of elements that represent objects (2.131) and are related to one another in a determinate way (2.14). In sum, both Plato and Wittgenstein presuppose that reality, language, and

pictures, consist of simple elements that stand in a determinate relation-
ship to one another.

B) The Correspondence between Language and Reality

According to Plato, a name is an imitation of the essence or being of
a thing (423b-e). Thus, the 'correctness' of every name requires that it
expresses the nature of one of the things that are (422d). In the case of
the first names, this correctness consists of a correspondence between
the name's elements, i.e., letters, and the thing's metaphysical elements,
e.g., 'motion', 'rest' etc. (426c-e). Such a correspondence can be sim-
ple (one letter applies to one element) or complex (a combination of
letters apply to one element) (424d). By the word 'imitation' (μίμησις),
Plato implies that the form of the first name depicts the image, i.e., the
explicit form, of the thing in the same manner that a portrait imitates
the image of the man (430a-431d). On the other hand, Wittgenstein
insists on an isomorphic relation between a proposition and a possible
situation: "One name stands for one thing, another for another thing,
and they are combined with one another. In this way the whole group
—like a *tableau vivant*— presents a state of affairs" (4.0311). This pre-
supposes a logico-mathematical correspondence: "In the propositions
there must be exactly as many distinguishable parts as in the situation
that it represents. The two must possess the same logical (mathemat-
ical) multiplicity" (4.04). This isomorphic relation is based on the fact
that both the proposition and the state of affairs share a mutual logical
form (4.12). Thus, whereas Plato speaks of a vague mimetic relation-
ship in general, Wittgenstein stresses a firm and accurate relationship,
a logical-mathematical isomorphism. Hence Plato allows a first-name
to contain more syllables than the elements of the thing (424d). Con-
cordantly, Socrates emphasizes that the name's 'likeness' to the things is
essentially inferior to 'identity': "an image cannot remain an image if it
presents all the details of what it represents" (432b), otherwise "names
would have a absurd effect on the things they name, if they resemble
them in every respect, since all of them would then be duplicated, and no
one would be able to say which was the thing and which was the name"

(432d). In sum, both Plato and Wittgenstein assume that language must correspond to reality; Plato tends to stress the weakness of this correspondence whereas Wittgenstein emphasizes its logical substantiality.

C) The possibility of falsehood

Socrates limits the correctness of first names. Following his speech concerning the analytical correspondence between first names and things, he stresses the possibility of using a false name. According to Cratylus' view, speaking falsely is nothing more than just making noise "as if he were banging a brass pot" (430a). In contrast, Socrates opines that "since the name is an imitation, just as a painting or portrait is", then it is possible to assign names correctly or incorrectly in the same manner that it is possible to assign paintings correctly and incorrectly (430d-e). A correct assigning of a name can be considered a "true name" and an incorrect one, a "false name" (430d). On the other hand, Wittgenstein insists that a proposition is essentially bipolar: it can be true or false and its sense is independent of its verification; there is no *a priori* true proposition. This is because a proposition depicts a *possible* state of affairs: "A proposition constructs a world with the help of a logical scaffolding, so that one can actually see from the proposition how everything stands logically if it is true. One can *draw conclusions* from a false proposition" (4.023). Thus, a true proposition represents a positive fact whereas a false proposition represents a negative fact (4.063). In short, Plato and Wittgenstein are in agreement concerning the possibility of false utterance. Nevertheless, whereas Plato speaks of the possibility of ascribing a false name in general, Wittgenstein stresses that *every* proposition is essentially true or false.

D) The Method of Verification

The possibility of false utterance demands some method of verification. How can we determine whether an utterance (a name or a proposition) is true or false? Plato emphasizes the indispensability of such verification. First, he argues that the dialectician is the right person

to supervise the work of the name-maker (390d)[36], and he suggests the method of etymology. Thereafter, following the above-quoted speech on the construction of first names, Socrates adds:

> It was *the ancients* who combined things [i.e. first-names] in this way. Our job —if indeed we are to examine all these things with scientific knowledge— is to divide where they put together, so as to see whether or not both the primary and derivative names are given in accord to nature. For, any other way of connecting names to things, Hermogenes, is inferior and unsystematic. (425a-b)

"To see whether names are given in accord to nature" means, of course, to examine their truth value; that is, to analytically examine the correspondence between the names' elements and the thing's elements. Socrates demonstrates this method using an analogy to painting: it is possible to step up to a man and say 'This is your portrait', while showing him what happens to be his own likeness, or what happens to be the likeness of a woman, "And by 'show' I mean bring before the sense of sight" (430e). In the same manner, says Socrates, we can present a name to a man and ask him whether it is his true name (431a). Thus, while dealing with the verification of first names, Plato offers to compare the name to reality: an analytical comparison in the first example, and a more intuitive comparison in the second. On the other hand, Wittgenstein is very clear concerning the method of verifying a proposition. As demonstrated above, every proposition is essentially bipolar, true, or false. And "Reality is compared with propositions" (4.05): it is only by comparing it to reality that we can unequivocally determine whether it is true or false. More precisely, Wittgenstein's method of verification is based on the following argument:

1. A proposition is a picture of reality (4.06).

2. "A picture agrees with reality or fails to agree; it is correct or incorrect, true or false" (2.21).

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[36]See also: *Republic* 532a ff.

3. "In order to tell whether a picture is true or false, we must compare it with reality" (2.223).

And the comparison of a proposition with reality is done in two steps:

1. Analyzing propositions, which "brings us to elementary propositions which consist of names in immediate combination" (4.221).

2. Examining the elementary propositions, using a schemata of truth-possibilities (4.31).

In sum, it appears that both Plato and Wittgenstein stress the indispensability of linguistic verification. They both suggest an analytical method of verification that examines the correspondence between the elements of reality and the elements of a fundamental linguistic unit (first names in the case of Plato, elementary proposition in the case of Wittgenstein).

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