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## Greek Conceptions of Naming: Three Forms of Appropriateness in Plato and the Literary Tradition

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GREEK CONCEPTIONS OF NAMING:  
THREE FORMS OF APPROPRIATENESS IN  
PLATO AND THE LITERARY TRADITION

SUSAN B. LEVIN

IT HAS LONG BEEN RECOGNIZED that Plato's critical engagement with the literary tradition plays a central role in his treatment of ethical questions in the *Republic*, and his handling of that tradition there has been a major topic of inquiry in Platonic scholarship. What has not been explored, however, is the full nature and extent of Plato's reliance on literary antecedents in other important areas of his thought, especially in his discussions of naming. Judgments of whether ὀνόματα are properly assigned to their referents figure prominently in Greek literature. Of particular note is their employment in connection with etymology, eponymy, and functional terms like "mother" and "son."<sup>1</sup> An investigation of the *Cratylus*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* reveals that in his treatment of appropriateness in these dialogues Plato operates against the backdrop of literary practice in each of these three respects.

This article combines reflection on the pertinent literary sources with discussion of Plato's reaction to them.<sup>2</sup> The investigation will show that while Plato rejects outright the philosophical value of etymology, his own theories of appropriateness with respect to eponymy and functional terms consist to a notable degree of revamped, systematized versions of literary approaches. This inquiry provides support for the view that Plato's occupation with literary sources is more extensive than heretofore acknowledged. Moreover, it underscores the fact that Plato's approach to the literary tradition parallels in at least one crucial way his treatment of other philosophers:

1. Both etymology and eponymy involve deriving an ὄνομα from one or more source-ὀνόματα. Names subject to etymological analysis often provide criteria by which bearers are assessed, and in such cases ὀνόματα are correctly assigned if their semantic constitution accurately describes their referents' natures. Eponymy differs from etymology, e.g., in its relative de-emphasis on questions of "nature transfer" and in the fact that its associated judgments of fitness do not invoke words' semantic constitution. Finally, I have chosen the phrase "functional terms" to encompass ὀνόματα used with reference to individuals by virtue of particular familial or sociopolitical roles they play. All citations are from the OCT editions (for Plato I have used Burnet's Oxford edition).

2. I treat the *Cratylus* and *Phaedo* at length in Levin 1995 and forthcoming, respectively. I draw selectively on those discussions in Sections I–II of the present article, which seeks to emphasize the full impact of literary sources on Plato's theorizing about naming in the middle dialogues and the relationships between his multiple uses of them.

just as Plato does not hesitate to articulate revised versions of ideas presented by philosophers with whom he is at odds in key respects, so too his critical stance toward literary sources does not prevent him from adapting to his own purposes potentially fruitful reflections contained therein.

### I. ETYMOLOGY: LITERARY PRACTICE AND THE *CRATYLUS*

The *Cratylus* focuses above all on the thesis that ὀνόματα are assigned correctly if etymological analyses of them disclose their referents' natures. While sophists and philosophers often serve as a backdrop for Plato's reflections, the evidence is not sufficient to explain the etymological section of the dialogue. I maintain that this portion of the *Cratylus* takes the literary tradition as a central opponent.<sup>3</sup>

Early on Plato rejects, through Hermogenes, the idea that sophistic inquiries pertain directly to the investigation of naming that will be undertaken in the dialogue (391C–D). Hermogenes' negative reaction to the sophists leads Socrates to observe that he must learn instead from Homer and the other poets (391C8–D1). One might be tempted to discount this remark because of Plato's hostility elsewhere toward the literary tradition.<sup>4</sup> Far from rejecting literary sources, however, Hermogenes wishes to familiarize himself with Homer's approach to the topic at hand. Plato's treatment of "the correctness of words or names" (ὀνομάτων ὀρθότης) begins with Socrates' turn to the literary tradition.

Plato uses the names of Hector and his son to explain what he means here by ὀρθότης. Socrates underscores the closeness in semantic constitution of the names "Astyanax" and "Hector" (σχεδόν τι ταῦτόν σημαίνει, βασιλικά ἀμφοτέρω εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα, 393A6–7), and ties the latter to the verb ἔχειν (cf. *Il.* 24.729–30). Both names are viewed as properly assigned, and Plato concludes that Homer's view of correctness has been illuminated (393B3–4). His privileging of the name "Astyanax" constitutes a revision of the *Iliad*, where the fact that Hector employs "Scamandrius" (6.402–3) lends primacy to that appellation. Plato prefers "Astyanax" because it is easily investigated by etymology and accommodates itself to the ties in semantic constitution that he wishes to forge with "Hector." The presence of this revision shows that, far from simply repeating his literary sources, Plato is adapting them to his own philosophical ends.

After giving examples of Homer's treatment of ὀνόματα, Plato etymologizes the names of members of the House of Atreus: Orestes (394E), Agamemnon (395A–B), Atreus (395B–C), Pelops (395C–D), and Tantalus (395D–E). Since it is in tragedy, not the *Iliad*, that the affairs of the royal House itself take center stage, these etymologies expand the scope of Socrates' turn to the literary tradition. It is worth noting, in addition, that the

3. The present survey of etymology and eponymy focuses on Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; Hesiod's *Theogonia* and *Opera et Dies*; Pindar's epinician odes; the extant plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; and Herodotus.

4. For interpretations along these lines, see Weingartner 1970, 23 and 1973, 38; Méridier 1931, 15–16; and Friedländer 1964, 204.

ensuing discussion contains numerous references to Homer, Hesiod, and tragedy.<sup>5</sup>

Writers in the literary tradition frequently articulate the descriptive content of *ὀνόματα*, largely proper names, by way of etymology. Particularly striking is the tremendous range of criteria on the basis of which *ὀνόματα* are said to be assigned.<sup>6</sup> First, appellations might be derived from something important pertaining to an individual's birth and early life. This category may be subdivided, in turn, into assignments traced to the manner or direct cause of an individual's genesis, an object with which the named individual is associated at birth, the place of an individual's birth, an event prior to birth, and an event that takes place soon after birth.<sup>7</sup> Second, assignments might be correlated with features or aspects of individuals or groups. Names may be tied to a physical feature or related aspect of an individual (or common to a group of individuals), an individual's emotional state, bearers' attitudes and character traits, or individuals' skills and capacities.<sup>8</sup> A third category comprises instances in which *ὀνόματα* are connected with actions. The relevant subdivisions are a type of activity by which an individual or group is distinguished; an individual's or group's temporal relation to a particular course of action, or to other individuals engaged in a certain course of action; and the role a place or individual has in someone else's plan of action.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, analyses may emphasize the role an individual plays in a

5. Regarding Homer one may consult, e.g., 402A6, B4, 408A4, 410C2, and 417C8. Hesiod's name occurs, e.g., at 396C4, 397E5, and 406C7. Concerning tragedy, see, e.g., 408C–D and 425D5. For further discussion of Plato's framing of the *Cratylus*' inquiry, and of the dialogue's sources, see Levin 1995.

6. No one set of categories could do justice to the complexity of literary etymology and eponymy; the categories used here simply facilitate the organization of this material for present purposes. In the case of passages that might reasonably be categorized in multiple ways, I make what seems on balance to be the best choice.

7. With respect to the origin of individuals, see Hes. *Th.* 195–98, Aesch. *Cho.* 948–51 (see also Aesch. *Sept.* 662–63 and Hes. *Op.* 256), Aesch. *Supp.* 250–51 (cf. *χθόνα* in 253), Aesch. *PV* 850–51, and *Supp.* 40–48 (along with *Supp.* 313, 315, and 535), and Soph. *OC* 1320–22. For an object as the source of an assignment, see Hes. *Th.* 280–83. The place of an individual's birth grounds *ὀνόματα* at Hes. *Th.* 199 and *Th.* 280–83 (ll. 280–83, cited both here and in the previous subcategory, involve *Χρυσόσφο* on the former occasion and *Πήγασος* on the latter). For events prior to birth as the source of assignments, see Pind. *Isthm.* 6.53 and Hdt. 6.63.3. Lastly, *ὀνόματα* are traced to events soon after birth at Pind. *Ol.* 6.53–57, *Ol.* 6.45–47, Soph. *OT* 1032–36 and 717–19 (along with 1349–50, Eur. *Phoen.* 25–27 and 801–5, cf. 41–42), and Hdt. 5.92ε1.

8. With respect to the first subcategory, see Hom. *Od.* 12.85–87, Hes. *Th.* 144–45, Aesch. *Sept.* 532–37 and Eur. *Supp.* 888–89, Hdt. 1.139, cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 5.57–59 (with 4.63). Individuals' emotional states ground assignments at Soph. *Aj.* 430–32 and Eur. *Bacch.* 508. Bearers' attitudes and character traits are emphasized at Hom. *Il.* 2.212–64, *Od.* 4.499–503, *Od.* 20.288–90, Hes. *Th.* 233–36, Soph. *Phil.* 1344–47 (with 1413–33), Eur. *Tro.* 989–90, *Bacch.* 1197–99, *IA* 1402 (with 1410–11, 1422–23, 1595, cf. 1375–76), and *Rhes.* 215 (cf. 216–18). Finally, individuals' skills and capacities ground assignments at Hom. *Il.* 11.450, Eur. *Hipp.* 1218–20, Eur. *Supp.* 881–87, *Hel.* 8–14, Hom. *Od.* 8.43–45, Eur. *IT* 32–33, Hes. *Th.* 510–11 (combined with the illustration in 535–52, see also Hes. *Op.* 54 and Aesch. *PV* 85–87), Hes. *Op.* 83–89 and Pind. *Pyth.* 5.27–29 (cf. Hes. *Th.* 511), and Hom. *Od.* 13.330–32.

9. Types of activity give rise to *ὀνόματα* at Aesch. *Ag.* 1080–82 (cf. 1085–86, see also Eur. *Or.* 121 and 955–56), Hom. *Od.* 11.422–30 (see also 24.199 and Aesch. *Ag.* 1100–1103), Aesch. *Ag.* 681–92 (cf. Eur. *Andr.* 105–6), Aesch. *Sept.* 577–79 (with 658, 829–31, Eur. *Phoen.* 636–37 and 1493), Hes. *Op.* 80–82, Soph. *Phil.* 1229–30, Aesch. *Pers.* 176–78 (reinforced by 171), and Hes. *Th.* 207–10. Temporal relations are emphasized at Hom. *Od.* 11.506–18 and Soph. *Phil.* 245–47 (see also 70–73 and 348–51), and Eur. *Supp.* 1224–25. The focus is on the role the recipient plays in a plan of action at Eur. *Hel.* 1670–75 and Hdt. 7.193.2. In the latter case, the source of the assignment is unspecified (Herodotus says simply that τῷ γῶρῳ ὀνόμα γέγονε Ἀργεῖται); nevertheless, the place comes to have this *ὄνομα* based on the role it played as a launching point for the Argonauts in the context of their mission.

particular social or familial context.<sup>10</sup> In addition, ὀνόματα are tied to functions and special powers of the divine.<sup>11</sup> The focus here may be on an element over which an individual has control, special capacities of individual deities, or the instrumental role an individual or group plays in the universe as a whole.<sup>12</sup>

This extensive body of literary etymologies, combined with textual cues provided by Plato himself in framing the inquiry into ὀρθότης, constitutes a major backdrop for the *Cratylus*. As I argued in Levin 1995, 98–99, the fact that numerous ὀνόματα analyzed by Plato were also etymologized in literary sources provides further evidence of the dialogue's link to that tradition. For the purposes of illustration, one may cite the following cases: “Hector” and “Astyanax” (392D–393B, cf. 394B6–C1);<sup>13</sup> “Zeus” (395E–396B);<sup>14</sup> “Cronus” (396B);<sup>15</sup> θεοί (397C–D);<sup>16</sup> “Hades” (403A and 404B);<sup>17</sup> “Demeter” (404B);<sup>18</sup> “Hera” (404B–C);<sup>19</sup> “Apollo” (405B–406A);<sup>20</sup> “Aphrodite” (406C–D);<sup>21</sup> “Athena” (407A–C);<sup>22</sup> and “Ares” (407D).<sup>23</sup>

At the core of literary practice is a belief in the existence of individual natures and the idea that etymological analyses illuminate those φύσεις.<sup>24</sup> In direct opposition to the literary tradition's assumption that names are nature-revealing—and to that extent correct—Plato concludes that convention

10. On the names “Hector” and “Astyanax,” see Hom. *Il.* 24.729–30, 22.506–7, 6.402–3, 24.499–501, Eur. *Tro.* 590, 1168, and 1217; for other examples, see Hdt. 4.161.2, Soph. *OC* 1367–69 (combined with 1192 and 1323–26), and Hdt. 4.155.2–3.

11. In general this category is reserved for functions and powers that mortals do not have, and passages that depict gods as having capacities that also belong to mortals, or doing things that mortals too can do, are placed in other categories.

12. Regarding the first subcategory, one may consult Hom. *Il.* 5.775–76 (see also 14.277–88, cf. Eur. *Hel.* 31–36 and 241–51). Capacities of individual deities are emphasized at Hom. *Il.* 5.844–45, Soph. *OT* 919–21 and Eur. *Alc.* 220–25, Aesch. *Sept.* 944–46, and *PV* 910–12. Finally, analyses of the two forms of Zeus' name underscore the referent's instrumental role in the cosmos (see Hes. *Op.* 1–4, Aesch. *Ag.* 1485–87, Pind. *Isthm.* 3.4–5, Aesch. *Supp.* 584–85, and Eur. *Or.* 1635). Other examples are found at Eur. *Bacch.* 275–76 (see also *Phoen.* 683–86) and Hdt. 2.52.1.

For analyses of ὀνόματα based on significant effects that their referents have on mortals, see Aesch. *Pers.* 205–6 and Hom. *Od.* 19.562–67. Elsewhere names are tied to entities (animate or inanimate) with which an individual or group is associated. These might be entities used in the performance of actions (Hom. *Il.* 7.138–41, *Od.* 2.93–110 [see also 19.137–56 and 24.128–48], Eur. *Hipp.* 307–10 [see also 582–83, 1131–34, cf. 1166]); or an article of clothing that an individual or group is said to wear (Hom. *Od.* 5.228–32, Hdt. 4.107). Finally, a characteristic of the place from which an individual hails may ground an assignment (Hom. *Od.* 1.180–81), and the ὄνομα of a natural, inanimate entity might be traced to an important individual with whom it is linked (Aesch. *PV* 732–34).

13. For literary references see n. 10.

14. For relevant literary observations see n. 12.

15. See Aesch. *PV* 910–12.

16. See Hdt. 2.52.1.

17. See Hom. *Il.* 5.844–45.

18. Here one may consult Eur. *Bacch.* 275–76 and *Phoen.* 683–86.

19. See Hom. *Il.* 5.775–76 and 14.277–88 (cf. Eur. *Hel.* 31–36 and 241–51).

20. Pertinent literary reflections include Aesch. *Ag.* 1080–82, Eur. *Or.* 121, 955–56, and Soph. *OT* 919–21.

21. See Hes. *Th.* 195–98 and Eur. *Tro.* 989–90. Plato registers his preference for Hesiod's analysis.

22. See Hom. *Od.* 13.330–32. Notably, Plato begins by mentioning Homer's interpreters.

23. See Aesch. *Sept.* 944–46.

24. The literary tradition does not have a technical philosophical notion of individual natures, according to which one seeks and employs a rigid set of necessary and sufficient conditions for making identifications. Instead, authors operate with a loose, non-technical notion according to which a particular individual, either mortal or divine, is widely recognized by a salient characteristic or power. Thus construed, individual natures play a central role in the *Cratylus*.

explains the fitness of terms' constitution.<sup>25</sup> He insists, however, that terms' application will be misguided if one does not determine which entities are naturally basic. Only entities that are both unchanging and unchangeable satisfy that description (439C7–440D3).

By the end of the *Cratylus* it is clear that etymologies cannot aid one reliably in the apprehension of Platonic natures, that is, Forms. While some analyses may be suggestive, many others will lead one astray by fostering misconceptions and disagreements about reality itself. It is surely no accident that Plato uses his treatment of the term δίκαιον (412C–413D), whose referent plays a crucial role in his ontology, as a vehicle for suggesting that analyses of terms' descriptive content cannot resolve disputes about φύσεις. Plato returns to this issue in the final section of the dialogue (438–440), where he states explicitly that what is required is movement in the opposite direction, namely, from natures to ὀνόματα.

In addition to sketching his conception of reality, Plato hints at his own approach to the issue of correctness. Taking beauty as an example, he first urges us to seek access to changeless Forms (439D3–6), then diagnoses a fundamental shortcoming in individual sensibles (439D8–11):

Can we appropriately call something “beauty” if that thing is always withdrawing . . . or is it not in fact necessary that at the very same moment we speak of it, it straightaway changes into something else and withdraws, and in no way remains in the same state?

Ἄρ' οὐδ' οἷόν τε προσεπιπεῖν αὐτὸ ὀρθῶς, εἰ αἰεὶ ὑπεξέρχεται . . . ἢ ἀνάγκη ἅμα ἡμῶν λεγόντων ἄλλο αὐτὸ εὐθὺς γίνεσθαι καὶ ὑπεξίεναι καὶ μηκέτι οὕτως ἔχειν;

Plato suggests that individual sensibles' ontological deficiency precludes their being properly (i.e., unqualifiedly) spoken of as “beautiful.” His statement at 439D8–11, interpreted against the backdrop of D3–6, implies that one cannot make judgments of fitness of the same type about Forms and particulars. These final comments move in the direction of an alternative theory of appropriateness insofar as they point both to the existence of a hierarchy in the application of certain ὀνόματα and to the important role of ontological considerations in any given judgment of correctness. Although what Plato says here could serve as the germ of, or point of departure for, a positive account of fitness, it is itself a far cry from the presentation of such a theory. One must consult the *Phaedo* for a more elaborate description of Plato's metaphysical stance and the specification of its associated linguistic commitments.<sup>26</sup>

## II. POURING NEW WINE INTO OLD SKINS: Eponymy IN LITERATURE AND IN THE *PHAEDO*

In the *Phaedo*, Plato presents his own theory of the basis on which ὀνόματα are assigned correctly to their referents. As has long been recognized, this theory centers on the eponymy or “named-after” relation. Thus, at a crucial point in the dialogue Plato notes that Forms exist and that “the other things,

25. For a defense of the view that the *Cratylus* endorses convention, see Schofield 1982.

26. Additional discussion of the *Cratylus*' outcome is provided in Levin 1995, 107–11.

participating in them, are named after the Forms themselves” (τούτων τᾶλλα μεταλαμβάνοντα αὐτῶν τούτων τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἴσχειν, 102B1–2). Subsequently, he articulates a general and fundamental contrast between things that have opposites, which are named after those opposites (ἐπονομάζοντες αὐτὰ τῇ ἐκείνων ἐπωνυμίᾳ), and “those opposites themselves from whose inherence in them the things named receive their appellations (ἔχει τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν)” (103B6–8).

While Heraclitus and Parmenides are Plato’s precursors in key respects, and despite the fact that they evince an interest in issues of naming, neither frames his linguistic concerns in the way Plato does or invokes eponymy as a solution to those problems he does identify. Literary eponymy constitutes a previously unexplored antecedent of Platonic usage. In what follows I comment on literary practice and the *Phaedo*’s new, technical construction of eponymy.<sup>27</sup>

Literary instances of eponymy fall into multiple categories. The first consists of instances in which individuals give their ὀνόματα to other individuals, groups of individuals, places or parcels of land, natural inanimate entities (e.g., bodies of water), and human constructions or practices.<sup>28</sup> Second, natural inanimate entities are the eponyms of individuals, peoples, other natural inanimate entities, and places or bodies of land.<sup>29</sup> Third, places or parcels of land give their ὀνόματα to a range of entities, among them places, animals, and natural inanimate entities.<sup>30</sup> Fourth, a parcel of land may receive its name from a people.<sup>31</sup> Finally, writers offer a range of judgments of appropriateness.<sup>32</sup>

The centerpiece of Platonic metaphysics in the middle dialogues is a dichotomy between reality and appearance and an account of their connection. Forms, qua φύσεις or οὐσίαι, are the constituents of reality proper and hence the primary entities in Plato’s framework. In contrast, the relevant classes of entities in the spatiotemporal realm derive their natures from Forms due to a relation to εἶδη that is identified as “participation.” These entities may be designated as “secondary” due to this fundamental dependence on Forms, and to the fact that they share those natures only partially. Terms such as καλόν and ἀγαθόν have, therefore, a twofold application, insofar as they may be used in locutions referring either to Forms or to their participants. The application is “primary” in the case of Forms, due to their status as primary entities, and “secondary” in that of participants, since those entities’ natures are both derivative and incomplete.

While the fact that the framework of eponymy accommodates primary and secondary referents makes it potentially valuable to Plato, its employment for philosophical purposes necessitates the modification of literary practice. In literary usage, the identity of primary and secondary entities

27. For extensive consideration of literary and Platonic eponymy, see Levin, forthcoming.

28. Examples are found at Pind. *Isthm.* 7.24, Hom. *Il.* 20.230, Eur. *El.* 1275, Aesch. *PV* 839–41, and Soph. *El.* 282–85.

29. See Hom. *Il.* 4.474–77, Hdt. 4.184.3–4, 1.145, and Pind. *Pyth.* 1.30–32, respectively.

30. For examples see Eur. *Hel.* 149–50, Hdt. 7.40.3, and 7.121.1.

31. See Hdt. 4.204.

32. For examples one may consult Aesch. *Supp.* 250–53 and Hom. *Od.* 18.5–7.



varies extensively, and it is possible for the eponym and recipient to be singular or plural. Moreover, there are no fixed criteria determining which types of entities can play each role, and which kinds may serve as *relata*. The same type of entity (e.g., a group of individuals) may even function in both primary and recipient capacities.

Plato establishes firm criteria governing the identity of entities in the two roles. They must be on different planes of existence, and the distinction he articulates in entities' ontological status precludes that interchangeability of roles noted in literary eponymy. In addition, while the eponym must invariably be singular, its *nominata* constitute a plurality either in reality or by potential. Moreover, Plato's stipulation of the ways in which the primary entity or Form is prior generates criteria for the correct application of its ὄνομα to a class of recipients. Plato's approach is most similar to those instances of literary usage in which individuals give their names to groups. From his perspective, however, even this type of case exhibits fundamental shortcomings. First, the eponym's location in or connection to the spatio-temporal world bars it from having that priority over the derivative ὄνομα-bearer that must always support the "named-after" relation. In addition, the secondary entities here do not exhaust the scope of possible *nominata* in Plato's scheme, but instead constitute only a subset thereof.

The foregoing discussion makes clear that although Plato rejects decisively literary antecedents that he views as philosophically unpromising, he does not hesitate to embrace notions that do have potential. As we have seen, in his philosophy of language Plato in fact does both. In the *Cratylus*, he criticizes the literary tradition's use of etymology. Moreover, Plato's disbelief in the philosophical value of an attempt at its reconstruction is evident both in the fundamental nature of his challenge to literary practice and in the fact that what hints he does provide at the close of the dialogue of the form his own theory will assume point in quite a different direction. The *Cratylus'* engagement with the literary tradition thus terminates in Plato's rejection of one manifestation of its handling of fitness. In the *Phaedo*, in contrast, where Plato seeks a framework in which to express his own insights about ὁρθότης, he concludes that a modified version of a second key literary device, namely, eponymy, is best suited to capture the semantics of the Form-participant relation. In what follows I turn to *Republic* 5, where, for a third time, Plato treats the issue of appropriateness against a literary backdrop. In this case, as we will see, Plato's theory of the proper allocation of sociopolitical and familial roles leads him to assign an important philosophical position to a revamped construction of yet another device prominent in literature.

### III. FUNCTIONAL TERMS: PLATO'S REVISION OF LITERARY USAGE IN LIGHT OF HIS CONCEPTION OF THE IDEAL πόλις

When Plato turns in *Republic* 5 to the procreation and rearing of children (461D2–E2), he makes the assertion that

a man will call all children born in the tenth or seventh month after he became a bridegroom his sons (if they are male) or daughters (if they are female), and all of them will

call him father. He will call their children his grandchildren, and they, in turn, will call the members of the group to which he belongs grandfathers and grandmothers. Moreover, they will call those offspring born at the time when their mothers and fathers were producing children their sisters and brothers. The result will be that of which we spoke, namely, that the relevant groups avoid sexual relations with one another.

ἀφ' ἧς ἂν ἡμέρας τις αὐτῶν νομφίος γένηται, μετ' ἐκείνην δεκάτω μηνὶ καὶ ἐβδόμῳ δὴ ἂν γένηται ἔκγονα, ταῦτα πάντα προσερεῖ τὰ μὲν ἄρρενα υἱεῖς, τὰ δὲ θήλεα θυγατέρας, καὶ ἐκεῖνα ἐκεῖνον πατέρα, καὶ οὕτω δὴ τὰ τούτων ἔκγονα παίδων παῖδας, καὶ ἐκεῖν' αὖ ἐκείνους πάππους τε καὶ τηθάς, τὰ δ' ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ χρόνῳ γεγονότα, ἐν ᾧ αἱ μητέρες καὶ οἱ πατέρες αὐτῶν ἐγένων, ἀδελφάς τε καὶ ἀδελφοὺς, ὥστε, ὃ νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν, ἀλλήλων μὴ ἄπτεσθαι.

The following discussion of Plato's view of the family sets it against the backdrop of literary reflections for the purpose of illustrating both where he aligns himself with them and where the realization of his philosophical purposes necessitates his breaking new ground. Here, in contrast to the discussions of etymology and eponymy, I focus exclusively on tragedy.<sup>33</sup>

Plato, like the poets, distinguishes sharply between the descriptive and prescriptive levels in the application of functional terms. He takes quite seriously the prescriptive or normative use of these terms in tragedy, and incorporates the idea, emphasized repeatedly there, that biological connections are not ultimately decisive when the goal is to determine who may properly be said to be mutually "related" as, for example, mother and daughter.<sup>34</sup> Most specifically, he accepts the idea that biological ties are neither a sufficient nor even a necessary condition for the ascription of kinship ties in the case of those guardians and their progeny who will populate the ideal state.<sup>35</sup> Plato is not content merely to specify that children born to guardians will be taken over by officials chosen for this task (460B7–8) since this arrangement is compatible, at least in principle, with parents' still having some relationship with progeny they know to be their own. Plato insists that this recognition itself must not occur, prescribing that "no parent will know his own offspring, nor will any child know its parent" (μῆτε γονέα ἔκγονον εἰδέναι τὸν αὐτοῦ μῆτε παῖδα γονέα, 457D2–3). He adds that when a mother who is nursing is brought to the crèche in which her infant has been placed, the presiding officials "will go to great lengths to ensure that mothers do not learn who their children are" (πάσαν μηχανὴν μηχανώμενοι ὅπως μηδεμία τὸ

33. In so doing, I of course do not claim that it constitutes the only relevant precedent, but simply that it is a pertinent and important antecedent in the present context. For discussions of this difficult section of *Republic* 5, see, e.g., Adam 1902, 292–315; Grube 1927; Cornford 1941, 155–68; Rankin 1965; Bloom 1968, 384–88; and Halliwell 1993, 155–82. For consideration of changes in Plato's recommendations concerning marriage between the *Republic* and *Laws*, see Fortenbaugh 1975.

34. Here one may cite a common thread, i.e., a marked de-emphasis on biology, running through Plato's treatment both of the family and of women's nature and possible role in the ideal πόλις.

35. In the literary tradition, where words like "mother" and "son" often have normative force, the existence of biological connections is not sufficient or even required for terms' proper employment; one considers instead whether an individual performs the duties implied by the term in question. Clytemnestra's progeny, for example, question the appropriateness of calling her "mother" (see Aesch. *Cho.* 189–91, *Soph. El.* 271–74, 595–98, 1145–56 [esp. 1154], 1194; cf. Eur. *Or.* 557–59 and 585–86); this concern about appropriateness is also raised with respect to Deianira (see *Soph. Trach.* 817–18 and 1064–67). These remarks indicate that being someone's mother in the biological sense is not sufficient to generate an entitlement to be addressed by the appellation in question; rather, one's character and actions provide the

αὐτῆς αἰσθηθεῖται, 460C9–D1). As Plato stresses at 461D–E, kinship distinctions in his ideal state are to be based, not on biological ties, but instead on those conventions established by its founders.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, like the tragedians, Plato distinguishes explicitly between being someone's kin in name only, and performing the actions characteristic of one with a given role (463C9–D6):

As legislator, will you stipulate merely that they use the relevant kinship terms, or will you insist that they also do all the things that are implied by those terms? For example, must they show to those designated as their fathers the same respect, solicitude, and obedience currently due to parents? Won't they be held in low esteem by gods and men if they do anything less, since they will have acted against the dictates of piety and justice?

πότερον αὐτοῖς τὰ δνόματα μόνον οἰκεία νομοθετήσεις, ἢ καὶ τὰς πράξεις πάσας κατὰ τὰ δνόματα πράττειν, περὶ τε τοὺς πατέρας, ὅσα νόμος περὶ πατέρας αἰδοῦς τε περὶ καὶ κηδεμονίας καὶ τοῦ ὑπήκοον δεῖν εἶναι τῶν γονέων, ἢ μήτε πρὸς θεῶν μήτε πρὸς ἀνθρώπων αὐτῶ ἄμεινον εἶσθαι, ὡς οὔτε ὅσια οὔτε δίκαια πράττοντος ἄν, εἰ ἄλλα πράττοι ἢ ταῦτα;<sup>37</sup>

Following the tragic poets, Plato assumes that it is possible—and in crucial instances desirable—for people who lack biological connections to one another nevertheless to establish and sustain a whole series of kinship relations (463C–E).<sup>38</sup>

Even as Plato builds in crucial ways on literary practice, he also diverges from it in key respects. Above all one may cite the metaphysical foundation

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definitive criterion in light of which judgments of fitness are made. For similar remarks involving the term “daughter,” see Eur. *Tro.* 766–71; with regard to “son,” see Soph. *OC* 1323–24 and 1367–69, cf. Soph. *Trach.* 1199–1205. Admetus reproaches both his parents at once for their failure to offer themselves up to die in his place. Since Alcestis makes the sacrifice that Admetus believes to be their responsibility, he concludes that it is she—rather than they—to whom the appellation “parent” is appropriate. For relevant passages, see Eur. *Alc.* 636–49 and 658–68; the fact of his parents’ advanced age is clearly pertinent (see 634–35, 648–50, and 669–72). Admetus’ expressed doubts about his parentage do not appear to reflect genuine concerns on the biological plane; rather, his substantive complaints all involve his parents’ failure to meet what he views as their obligations toward him as their son. For discussion of this issue, see Griffith 1978. This case is noteworthy for its introduction of the idea that one who has a non-biological kinship relation to the speaker may nevertheless be entitled to an appellation denoting biological ties based on considerations of attitude and behavior.

Finally, one may cite the relation between Ion and the priestess at Delphi (see Eur. *Ion* 49–51, 1324–25, and 1363). The participle in l. 1324 has clear concessive force (ὁ τεκοῦσα παρ); hence, the import of Ion’s remark is that although the priestess is not his biological parent, she deserves to be greeted as “mother” based on her treatment of him. In l. 1363, in turn, ὡς combines with ἴσον to suggest that in the priestess’ view their relationship does not loosely approximate that of mother and son while necessarily falling short, but that in all essentials the relationship has achieved that status. While both readily acknowledge the absence of a biological tie, their remarks show that the priestess’ attitude and conduct generate a justification for her being called by the appellation of “mother.” This case shows that, far from being sufficient to ground judgments of fitness involving functional terms, neither biological nor other kinship ties between “relatives” are even required.

36. Cf. Bloom 1968, 385 for an emphasis on the conventional foundation of the family.

37. In terms of literary precedents, Electra, for example, insists that Clytemnestra μήτηρ καλεῖται: μητρί δ’ οὐδὲν ἐξισοῖ (Soph. *El.* 1194); here the discrepancy between appellation and conduct or attitude is quite explicitly formulated. In remarks calling to mind those of Electra, but focusing on Deianira, Hyllus exclaims: ὄγκον . . . ἄλλως δνόματος τί δεῖ τρέφειν μητρῶον, ἥτις μηδὲν ὡς τεκοῦσα ὄρα; (Soph. *Trach.* 817–18).

38. Plato and the poets differ, however, in their views about the composition of the two groups, and in their reasons for making assignments to them. For Plato the crucial distinction is between guardians and producers, since he does not include the latter in *Republic* 5’s proposal.

of his discussion, which ultimately governs all of the *Republic's* proposed innovations. Most briefly put, the connections are as follows: The ground of everything is Plato's conviction that Forms constitute natures (φύσεις) proper. Using his view of reality as a foundation, Plato divides human nature into types, evaluating each based on its capacity to apprehend these natures. Those individuals judged most favorably are in the best position, due to their understanding, to inject order into the realm of Forms' participants. If they are to be motivated and prepared for this undertaking, through their upbringing and education it must become "second nature" to them to view the state as though it were a single, living organism whose "health" (i.e., order and unity) is in fact their paramount concern. This can happen only if they are not distracted by private concerns, whether these be emotional attachments or worries about the accumulation and loss of wealth. As Plato argues in *Republic* 5 prior to his discussion of kinship ties, both women and men can serve as philosopher-rulers, and, more generally, as guardians. In his view, members of both sexes are best able to perform their social functions if marriage and procreation are regulated so as to promote a social and political unity that is far more than the mere sum of its parts.<sup>39</sup> Hence, having started with the theory of Forms, one arrives eventually at those prescriptions formulated at *Republic* 461D–E.

In addition, while one may extract generalizations concerning poets' views from their remarks about functional terms and their referents, these generalizations are not offered by poets themselves, who remain content to analyze the phenomena on a case-by-case basis. Plato's metaphysical framework not only lends his inquiry a systematic character absent from poets' reflections, but also constitutes the backdrop and justification for all of his proposals. Furthermore, in contrast to tragedy, which concentrates on kinship relations, Plato's theory emphasizes a close connection between the treatment of social roles—most notably ruling—and matters of kinship; hence, his assessments of fitness occur with respect to both sets of functional terms.

It is worth noting, finally, that there may be a connection between Plato's treatments of eponymy and functional terms insofar as those properly called "rulers" are viewed as such due to their awareness that a key range of terms have primary and secondary referents. In *Republic* 5, Plato lays great weight on the distinction between philosopher-rulers and those so-called "lovers of wisdom" (actually φιλόδοξοι, 480A) who are merely enamored of appearances (476A9–B2; cf. 480A):

I distinguish accordingly those about whom you were just now speaking, the lovers of spectacles, lovers of crafts, and men of action, from those who are the actual focus of our argument and who alone merit the appellation "philosophers."

Ταύτη τοίνυν . . . διαίρω, χωρίς μὲν οὐς συνδῆ ἔλεγε φιλοθεάμονάς τε καὶ φιλοτέχνους καὶ πρακτικούς, καὶ χωρίς αὐτὸν περὶ ὧν ὁ λόγος, οὐς μόνους ἂν τις ὀρθῶς προσείποι φιλοσόφους.

39. For Plato's emphasis on the close relation between the first and second "waves" discussed in *Republic* 5, see 457C–D. The community of wives and children among the guardians is identified as a crucial cause of unity in the πόλις (464A).

At a critical point in his elucidation of this distinction (476C9–D3), Plato identifies the philosopher as

the one who believes that there is something beautiful in itself and can discern both it and the things that participate in it, never mistaking its participants for it or it for its participants.

ὁ . . . ἡγούμενός τέ τι αὐτὸ καλὸν καὶ δυνάμενος καθορᾶν καὶ αὐτὸ καὶ τὰ ἐκείνου μετέχοντα, καὶ οὔτε τὰ μετέχοντα αὐτὸ οὔτε αὐτὸ τὰ μετέχοντα ἡγούμενος.

To solidify this division between philosophers and all others, Plato articulates a systematic distinction between faculties and their proper objects, emphasizing that, unlike Forms themselves, participants in Forms—that is, the objects of opinion—are both F and not-F because they always partake (ἔξεται) qualifiedly of the characteristics in question (479A–B). As previously discussed, Plato introduces eponymy in the *Phaedo* explicitly to provide the semantics of the Form-participant relation, making clear there that philosophers—as the only ones with knowledge of Forms—will also be the sole individuals who understand that terms referring to them have a twofold application and hence how to make it properly. Thus, *Republic* 5 not only introduces a new dimension in Plato’s discussion of appropriateness against a literary backdrop, it may also take Plato’s reaction to literary sources one step further by underscoring an essential relation between his own two revised constructions of literary practice.

The foregoing inquiry emphasizes Plato’s critical engagement with literary sources in three central areas as he develops his philosophy of language, alongside the theory of Forms, in the middle dialogues. As we have seen, this recourse to literary precedents issues, in both the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, in revamped versions of notions prominent in literature. While Plato finds it most fruitful to rely on philosophical sources in the articulation of his theory of Forms, I hope to have shown that, when it comes to crucial developments in his philosophy of language, it is to literary sources that he turns. By bringing the latter debt to the fore, this article supplements earlier accounts of the historical sources of Plato’s theories. Above all, by exhibiting his threefold concern with literature in the development of his philosophy of language, it shows that Plato’s occupation with it is far more extensive and thoroughgoing than previously recognized.<sup>40</sup>

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40. I am grateful to the Editor and anonymous referees of *CP* for their helpful comments.

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