

Daily Life with Christ. Love-2: Understanding the objective, universal, never-changing, eternal nature of love—Philosophy of Language and Cratylus (part 2).

It is unfortunate that the clear majority of Christians today are idealists without realizing it. This includes Bible-believing Christians who love the LORD and take the Word of God very seriously. Yes, one can love the LORD and have great errors in thinking about Truth, the Bible, God, and the spiritual life—even though that error will undermine a thriving and robust life in God that can only be obtained by proper knowledge and proper love.

What is especially egregious is when believers who are very serious about studying the Word of God in the original languages often become idealists without realizing it. In fact, in many cases the more they study the Word of God in the original, the greater number of false views of God, the spiritual life, and theology they gain. It is one thing to be mixed up about God's message to man if one does not care, it is quite another when believers are really serious, and the more they study, the more error they gain. This is indeed lamentable.

I am the last person to cast stones at those who are idealists, those who build reality on words, for I was once an idealist and operated fully within the ancient Cratylean and modern Ferdinand de Saussurian philosophy of language. I have spent enormous amount of time, almost 40 years of my life exegeting Scripture, without a clue that I was an idealist who had been captured by worst influences of anti-realism. My aim in this lesson is to enable others who really desire Truth to free themselves from pernicious influences that end up distorting our view of God, man, the spiritual life, and creation.

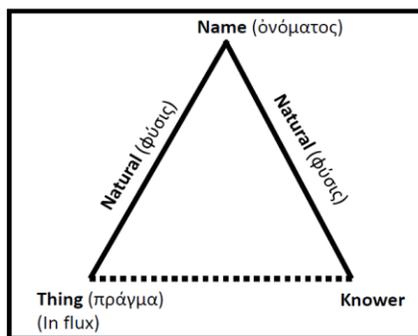
Before we examine Cratylus again and noting the basic nature of idealism, let us see in Scripture how meaning is not inherently in a word in some Platonic sense (where the meaning of the word follows the word wherever it goes). It is very common among Christian Greek scholars to teach believers that love/*agapao* in the Greek means to love God unconditionally with a spiritual kind of love. Based on the examples below, that teaching is manifestly false. Look at how *agapao* is used in the following verses:

John 3:16-19 For God so loved (*ἠγάπησεν*, from *agapao*) the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. . . . And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved (*ᠠ᠗απήσαν*, from *agapao*) darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

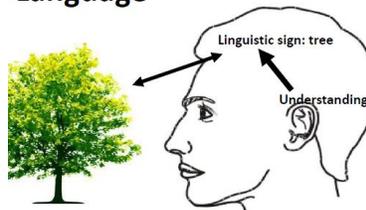
2 Timothy 4:8-10 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved (*ᠠ᠗απήκόσιν*, from *agapao*) His appearing. . . . for Demas has forsaken me, having loved (*ᠠ᠗απήσας*, from *agapao*) this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica-- Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.

Now to idealism. Broadly speaking, idealism is when the direct object of one's knowing is a word or concept (which is linked to countless other concepts) rather than objective reality as such. By definition, then, anyone who bases their ultimate understanding on dictionaries or lexicons are idealists. Again, a person is an idealist if the word and its definition is the object of understanding, a person's knowledge is based on an idea (the word or definition) and not reality as such. Notice in the first diagram below, that the object of the "knower" is the name/word. He gets his knowledge of objective reality by the name, not the thing in the world. So, all he has to do is examine the etymology of the word/name to find out the nature of the "thing" in the world. Note the dotted line between the knower and the thing in the world. Consider how common this method is in exegetical movements: if one wants to find out what "love" (or "justice") is, all he needs to do is look up the Hebrew or Greek word for love or justice and it will directly reveal the nature of the thing/love in the world. There is absolutely no confidence in looking at love in world to define its basic nature. Consider how blinding and anti-intellectual this is—to be cut off from reality as such. Consider just how idealistic and subjective it is to base reality on the word/name. Again, in idealism, the direct object is the word/definition, not the extra-mental thing in reality as such.

Figure 1: Cratylean Triangle of Reference



Cratylus' Philosophy of Language



Let us take a metaphysical object that is easier to illustrate than love (love has an objective and discernable nature based on a complex of relations, which is based on objective nature of creatures) like a tree as per the second illustration. One might say "of course, they know what a tree is because they can see it." However, regardless of what one sees, note that the understanding is primarily based on the linguistic sign "tree," which is determined by one's linguistic community (as per dictionaries). Regardless of what he sees, the object of his knowledge is tied up in the idea of "tree," seeing is merely an occasion after the fact, not that important. His knowledge and thoughts of tree are all based on words that he learned in his culture. In Cratyleanism, there is no way for him to directly know the tree in a metaphysical way, where treeness comes to exist in him (I will show how this is done in a later lesson). In other words, all of his knowledge of tree is mediated by words about trees. Anytime knowledge is mediated by words (which are culturally determined), one lost any rational right to objective truth or knowledge. May God deliver us from idealism, which is so deceiving and so damaging to our understanding of God's Word and the external reality in which we find ourselves!

In His Grace,

Pastor Don