

Daily Life with Christ. Love-4: Understanding the objective, universal, never-changing, eternal nature of love—Philosophy of Language and Socrates.

Before one can gain objective understanding of the universal and unchanging nature of love, one must escape from the world of idealism. It is incontrovertible that virtually all people in our modern world, including Christians, are idealist in one way or another.

You can test yourself to see if you are idealist by checking the statement that applies to you.

1. Do you encompass thought with being? In other words, are you a person who starts with thinking as a first principle and then move to external beings? Are words and thoughts first principles? Are words/thoughts/language direct objects of thought, which are then clothed with beings (extra-mental) objects?
2. Do you encompass being with thought? In other words, are you a person who first “connects” with beings in the world as the first principle and then move to thought? Are extra-mental objects the first principle, which are then clothed with words?

If you checked the first option, then you are an idealist—and the only “truth” that can be guaranteed in your system is coherence “truth” (all ideas cohere with one another). If you checked the second box, then you are a Realist—the only position that obtains correspondence truth (correspondence between things in the world and the person’s mind). In the first option, it is all about the mind and its contents. In the second option, it is all about the beings in extra-mental reality.

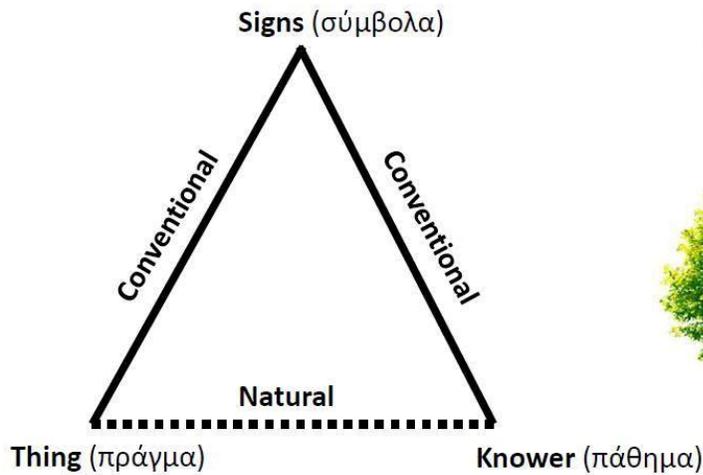
Most people pride themselves on being rational beings and will check (1) because the first sentence celebrates man in a very rational manner. However, Rationalism is a form of idealism. In Rationalism, a person’s thought is the ultimate determiner of what is. This rationalistic mind makes the human mind the first principle of reality. The problem with this is that it may or may not reflect extra-mental reality as such. Truth for the Rationalist is all about what makes sense to him.

The Realist (2) starts with reality, what is, and then proceeds to clothe reality in words. Words are used to describe what one first perceives in the extra-mental world. This has enormous implications for biblical exegesis.

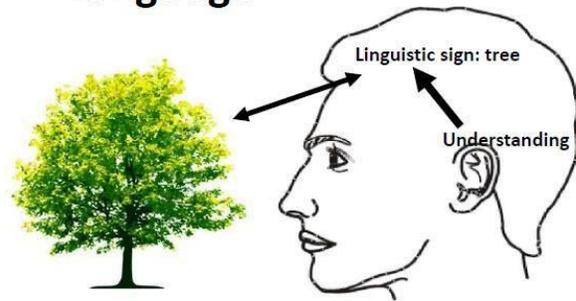
In the foundations of gaining objective understanding of truth, we are looking at the history of philosophy of language to illustrate the different theories of how language and thoughts map onto reality. We are examining five seminal individuals: Cratylus/Hermogenes/Socrates (non-realists, Idealists), Aristotle/Aquinas (Realists), and Ferdinand de Saussure (father of modern linguistics, structuralists).

Recall Cratylus and note how the first principle of thought is a word rather than reality. The word somehow is to unpack reality. As I have noted this method is commonly used in exegetical churches as they build reality on words.

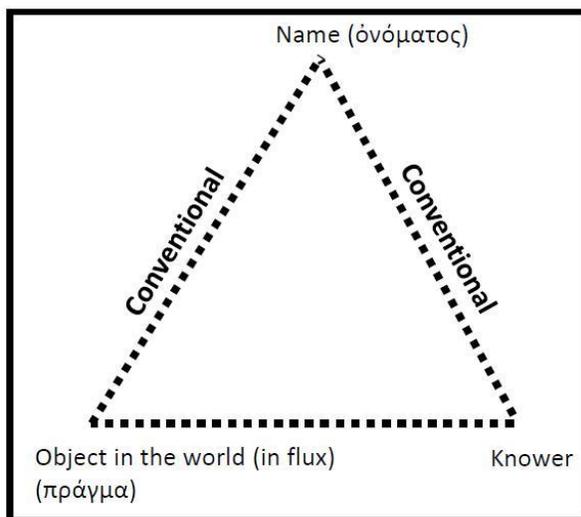
Figure 1: Cratylean Triangle of Reference



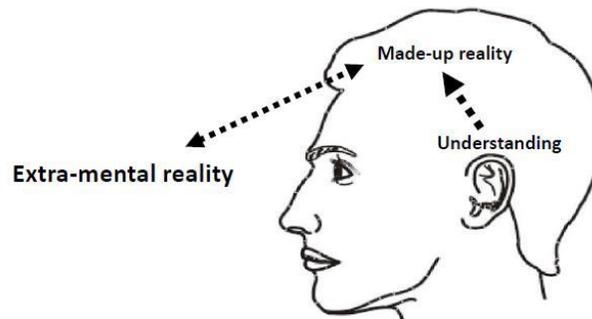
Cratylus' Philosophy of Language



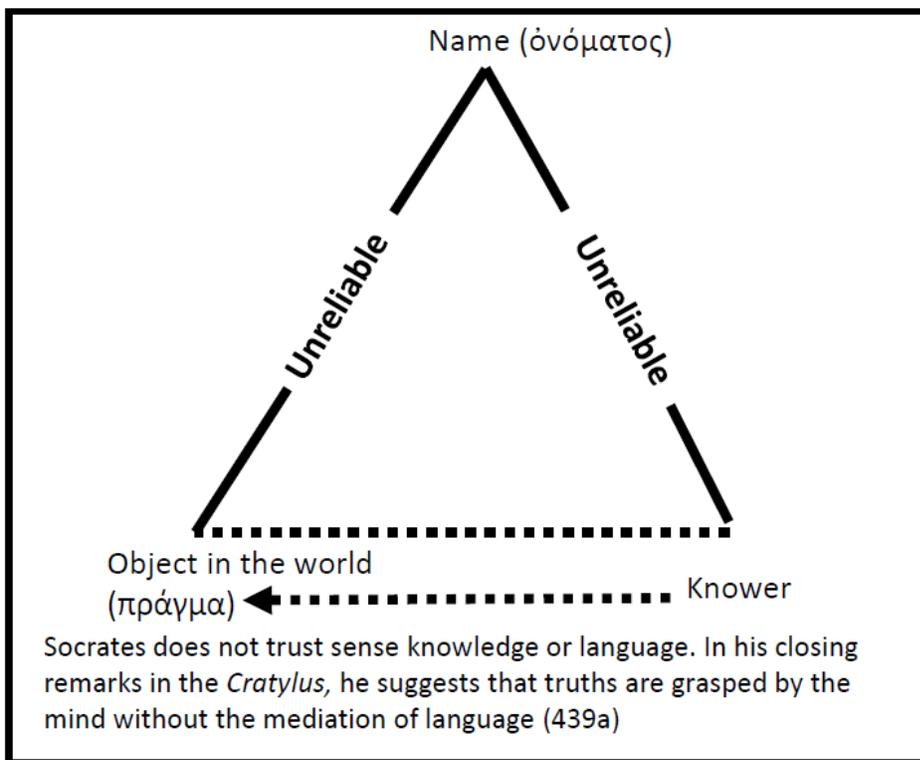
The second person we noted as Hermogenes. Note that the first principle begins with the mind, as with Cratylus. The difference is that with Hermogenes, one can just make up a word or phrase for reality. We see this in our relativistic society, in government propaganda, and in social issues—like the use of the term “gay” (an emotional word) to describe a sexual orientation. We also see this in liberal as well as prosperity churches, which make up words and phrases (from Jesus just being a man in liberal churches, to unbiblical views of “victory” in prosperity churches) to describe their own view of Jesus, God, the spiritual life and reality as such.



Hermogenian Philosophy of Language



The third person in this study is Socrates. As you can see in the semantic triangle below, he believed that neither the name of something nor direct knowledge of the world could give a person true knowledge of extra-mental reality. Each person was born with innate knowledge—inside knowledge. In this theory, every person comes preloaded with inside secret knowledge. In Plato’s version a person lived in a former life, and when he encountered sensible things in the world, this innate prior knowledge would be actualized, enabling him to recognize universals. Different versions of this are found in Christianity. For example, many Reformers and presuppositionalists do not think we can gain true knowledge from the world as it is (about man or God as such). God gives us natural knowledge innately and directly. Again, the source is not the world, but God Himself. As an aside, it is not difficult to see why these movements downplay apologetics—for in this system one cannot gain direct natural knowledge of God from creation as such, contrary to Romans 1:20.



Grace and truth,

Pastor Don