

Class #1 - In-Class Readings

Plato 1:

Stranger: [T]here are two sorts of intimation of being which are given by the voice.

Theaetetus: What are they?

Stranger: One of them is called nouns, and the other verbs.

Theaetetus: Describe them.

Stranger: That which denotes action we call a verb.

Theaetetus: True.

Stranger: And the other, which is an articulate mark set on those who do the actions, we call a noun.

Theaetetus: Quite true.

Stranger: A succession of nouns only is not a sentence any more than of verbs without nouns...I mean that words like "walks," "runs," "sleeps," or any other words which denote action, however many of them you string together, do not make discourse.

Theaetetus: How can they?

Stranger: Or, again, when you say "lion," "stag," "horse," or any other words which denote agents. Neither in this way of stringing words together do you attain to discourse, for there is no expression of action or inaction, or of the existence of existence or non-existence indicated by the sounds, until verbs are mingled with nouns. Then the words fit, and the smallest combination of them forms language, and is the simplest and least form of discourse (*Sophist* 2-3).

Plato 2:

Stranger: We agreed that every sentence must necessarily have a certain quality.

Theaetetus: Yes.

Stranger: And what is the quality of each of these two sentences?

Theaetetus: The one, as I imagine, is false, and the other true.

Stranger: The true says what is true about you?

Theaetetus: Yes.

Stranger: And the false says what is other than true?

Theaetetus: Yes.

Stranger: And therefore speaks of things which are not as if they were?

Theaetetus: True (*Sophist* 4).

Socrates in *Phaedo*

When I had wearied of investigating things, I thought that I must be careful to avoid the experience of those who watch an eclipse of the sun, for some of them ruin their eyes unless they watch its reflection in water or some such material. A similar thought crossed my mind, and I feared that my soul would be altogether blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with each of my senses. So I thought I must take refuge in discussions and investigate the truth of things by means of words (*Phaedo* 99e).

Carroll 1 (Explaining Meanings of Words)

Alice: You seem very clever at explaining words, Sir. Would you kindly tell me the meaning of the poem called 'Jabberwocky'?

Humpty Dumpty: Let's hear it. I can explain all the poems that were ever invented - and a good many that haven't been invented just yet.

Narrator: This sounded very hopeful.

Alice: *'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.*

Humpty Dumpty: That's enough to begin with. There are plenty of hard words there. 'Brillig' means four o'clock in the afternoon - the time when you begin broiling things for dinner

Alice: That'll do very well. And 'slithy'?

Humpty Dumpty: Well, 'slithy' means 'lithe and slimy.' 'Lithe' is the same as 'active.' You see it's like a portmanteau - there are two meanings packed up into one word.

Alice: I see it now. And what are 'toves'?

Humpty Dumpty: Well, 'toves' are something like badgers - they're something like lizards - and they're something like corkscrews.

Alice: They must be very curious looking creatures.

Humpty Dumpty: They are that. Also they make their nests under sun-dials. Also they live on cheese.

Alice: And what's to 'gyre' and to 'gimble'?

Humpty Dumpty: To 'gyre' is to go round and round like a gyroscope. To 'gimble' is to make holes like a gimlet.

Alice: And 'the wabe' is the grass-plot round a sun-dial, I suppose?

Narrator: Alice was surprised at her own ingenuity.

Humpty Dumpty: Of course it is. It's called 'wabe,' you know, because it goes a long way before it, and a long way behind it...

Carroll 2 (Precision #1)

Humpty Dumpty: So here's a question for you. How old did you say you were?

Alice: Seven years and six months.

Humpty Dumpty (triumphantly): Wrong! You never said a word like it!

Alice: I thought you meant 'How old *are* you?'.

Humpty Dumpty: If I'd meant that, I'd have said it.

Narrator: Alice didn't want to begin another argument, so she said nothing.

Carroll #3 (Precision #2)

Humpty Dumpty: The piece I'm going to repeat was written entirely for your amusement.

Narrator: Alice felt that in that case she really *ought* to listen to it, so she sat down, and said...

Alice (rather sadly): Thank you.

Humpty Dumpty: *In winter, when the fields are white, I sing this song for your delight...only I don't sing it."*

Alice: I see you don't.

Humpty Dumpty: If you can *see* whether I'm singing or not, you've sharper eyes than most.

Narrator: Alice was silent