Plato's problems and Plato's problem

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John E. Joseph: *Limiting the Arbitrary: Linguistic Naturalism and its Opposites in Plato's* Cratylus *and Modern Theories of Language*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: 2000.

1. Linguistic naturalism

John E. Joseph's intriguing thesis is made explicit early, and provides centripetal coherence to this book from cover to cover. His thesis is that western language science has persistently analyzed language, or specific aspects of language, using as a prime analytic instrument the contrastive categories of what is "natural" versus not "natural." Elaborated in diverse ways, that dichotomy has suffused scholarly and popular understanding of language ever since Plato's *Cratylus*. Joseph examines many instantiations of "linguistic naturalism and its opposites," including Greek argumentation about *physis* versus *nomós*; Marcus Terentius Varro's distinction between *declinatio naturalis* and *declinatio voluntaria*; Descartes' (purported) rationalism versus Locke's (purported) empiricism; Jakobson's contrast between "unmarked" and "marked" linguistic features; Chomsky's designation of some grammatical properties as "core" and others as "periphery." Not all who have participated in distinguishing what they take to be natural in language from diverse forms of the non-natural have been conscious of the effects of this dichotomy—much less the history of the dichotomy—on their thought. But to Joseph, debate about linguistic naturalism is "an intellectual continuity that runs through centuries of Western writings on language" (p. 5). A remarkably sophisticated version of it

sprang out of the ground in Plato's dialogue. Since then linguistic naturalism has flowed right down to the present day in a path determined by the contours of the varied intervening intellectual cultures.

Joseph's thesis has obvious appeal, promising as it does both breadth and focus. It makes good on that promise, in that it anchors readers to a secure point of reference from which they can review the whole glamorous parade of western language science. This is a rich and rewarding book.

2. Plato's problems and problems with Plato

The book is not, however, evenly rewarding at every point. Joseph begins from a commitment that Plato's *Cratylus* is "arguably still the greatest philosophical treatment" (p. 5) of linguistic naturalism. Accordingly, an exegesis of *Cratylus* takes up the first three of the book's six chapters, constituting Part One. Part Two consists of three independent chapters, each of which follows across time a particular stream of argumentation about what is, and isn't, natural in language. Joseph calls Chapter 4 "Natural grammar and conventional words, from Aristotle to Pinker"; Chapter 5, "Natural dialect and artificial language, from Varro to Chomsky"; Chapter 6, "Invisible hierarchies, from Jakobson to Optimality Theory." It is significant that although their starting-points differ, all three chapters of Part Two converge at their end-points on the contemporary scene in linguistics, in particular, the contemporary American scene which presupposes the salience of Chomskyan generative linguistics. That fact is consistent with an overall impression that Joseph identifies his central audience as participants in that scene, or at least engaged observers or critics of it. But even granted that the text holds together thematically, it is my sense that not all of the guises of linguistic naturalism will equally capture the imaginations of that audience. In particular, many contemporary linguists may find Part Two—in various proportions—startling, provocative, enlightening, and disconcerting; but they may simply be nonplussed by Joseph's devotion of the whole first half of the book to *Cratylus*.

Plato's famous dialogue is a debate among three ancient Greek scholars, Cratylus, Hermogenes, and Socrates, about whether language is essentially governed by *physis* ("nature"?) or by *nomós* ("convention"?). The debate mostly consists of Socrates' equally skeptical questioning first of Hermogenes, to whom the conventionalist position is conventionally attributed, and then of Cratylus, who in the usual retelling is a believer that words are what they are by the hand of nature. Modern commentators have disagreed about whether Plato presents Hermogenes' view as prevailing, or that of Cratylus. Some have judged the whole discussion to be inconclusive: Plato, through Socrates, dissects problems inherent to the conventionalist view of language, then likewise with the problems which arise if words are taken to be products of nature; but he does not resolve those problems.

Joseph sees a lot more going on than these standard readings of *Cratylus*. He inches over the text, assiduously revealing layers of complexity both underneath any facile divide between nature and convention, and in the positions of all three parties to the debate, shaped as they were by ancient Greek cultural and political life. One of Joseph's chief conclusions is that Plato ultimately finds that neither nature nor convention alone can be made responsible for human language. This interpretation of *Cratylus* may have already been anticipated, though not in the full complexity of Joseph's analysis. Moreover, Joseph champions the under-appreciated middle section of the dialogue, which investigates whether etymology is a legitimate source of knowledge about the world. Modern readers may look askance at Plato's discussion of whether the correct name for a certain species of bird is that given to it by (Greek) humans or by (Greek) gods (p. 40), or whether a calf miraculously born to a mare should be called a "calf" or a "foul" (p. 43). But to Plato these questions, and etymological matters in general, were very consequential. Joseph shows Plato working through these questions systematically to exhaust any possibility that words reveal the nature of their referents. The conclusion is that "one cannot come to a better understanding of reality by studying language" (p. 88).

Although Joseph works hard to make Plato's dialogue and its importance accessible, there are a number of obstacles which may prevent modern linguists from fully investing

themselves in it. One is simply that Plato was writing for, and within, a vastly foreign culture.

Modern medical technology may soon create calves miraculously born to mares, but nowadays

what to name such offspring would seem like the least of the problems which would result. At a

point a bit later in the text, Socrates argues that an object could have various names, each

potentially legitimate as long as the name somehow captures the essence of the object. Socrates

illustrates what it means for a name to have the requisite fidelity to its referent by pointing out

that the names for letters of the (Greek) alphabet incorporate the sound associated with the letter

itself. For instance, the word *beta* names the letter "B," crucially including the /b/ initial. But, as

Joseph points out, how could this principle be extended to determine whether the name for, say,

the color "red" legitimately represents its referent? Or, for that matter, the name for any object,

action, or condition which happens not to be intrinsically associated with a sound? Joseph

remarks that "Socrates pushes on as if there were no logical problem" (p. 46) here. But there is a

problem here. In this matter as in many others, it is asking a lot of a modern readership to

willingly suspend incredulity so as to try to understand Plato on his own terms. Joseph expects

readers to do that, and more: he wants us to take seriously Plato's approaches to questions about

what is and isn't natural in language, because we are still raising versions of those questions

today. That Joseph repeatedly highlights how the local political, literary, and religious

background informed all three parties to the dialogue signals that he is conscious of the gap

which separates our intellectual world from that of *Cratylus*. Still, Joseph may not fully succeed

in helping readers across that gap. It is a gap defined by matters of substance like those

exemplified above, and by matters of rhetoric like what counts as an effective argument in

ancient Greek philosophy versus twenty-first century linguistic science; together these

differences obstruct appreciation of Plato's problems. In a sense, Joseph's (only) partial success

at mitigating the foreignness of *Cratylus* counts as evidence in support of a point this book

makes repeatedly, by implication: that linguistic naturalism, ubiquitous as it may be, is

necessarily re-constructed in the context of a specific culture.

That *Cratylus* is alien in both content and style of argumentation is one problem which a contemporary audience has to get beyond in order to recognize the relevance of the matters which Plato addresses. Readers face another difficulty, too. Plato's meditation on linguistic naturalism does not settle the problems he articulates, at least not in a way which subsequent discussion of language has built on. This shows up in that few references to Plato's work surface in Part Two. Even though later scholars have returned to many of the same issues, Joseph doesn't—and doesn't need to—keep looking back to *Cratylus* to make sense of what followed it. So Plato's dialogue seems not only culturally intractable, but also not indispensable to more recent versions of linguistic naturalism.

For these reasons, Part One may fall short of establishing pride of place for Plato in the history of linguistic naturalism, at least from the point view of many readers. One wonders whether Joseph might have turned the book upside down, first analyzing linguistic naturalism in the familiar idioms of Pinker, Chomsky, or Optimality Theory, then moving backward incrementally toward Plato. To do so would have been awkward rhetorically, and might have done violence to Joseph's commitment that the history of linguistics is always integral to the discipline itself (p. 201). On the other hand, organizing the book in reverse chronological order might have better accommodated the readership which most needs not only to read Joseph's book, but to be dazzled by it, and out of that experience to be inspired to reconsider the study of language within its historical context.

3. Plato's problems after Plato

In Part Two, "After *Cratylus*," Joseph's narrative branches into three case studies of linguistic naturalism as it has been asserted, defined, or denied in various domains. Each of these three chapters is extremely interesting. If anything can reveal to modern linguists the power and allure of the history of their discipline, this material should do the job. As an experiment in reading history backward both through time and through the space of Joseph's

text, I will indicate some of the contents of Chapters 6 and 5 by summarizing them in reverse chronological order, before dwelling more fully on Chapter 4.

The theme of Chapter 6 is Roman Jakobson's theory of markedness, and its use as a means of accounting for both linguistic commonalities and differences by bringing into play a notion of relative degrees of naturalness. The chapter ends with a review of Optimality Theory's proposal that languages employ a common set of constraints but rank those constraints differently. Preceding that, Joseph refers to attempts by iconicity and prototype theories to explain why languages share what they share, and earlier to Joseph Greenberg's implicational universals as an attempt to define what languages share. Joseph analyzes in more detail the waxing and waning of Chomsky's "core" versus "periphery" distinction and its descendants. The chapter starts out with a careful analysis of the development of Jakobsonian markedness. Jakobson seems to have brought the idea into being in response to a passing remark in a letter sent to him from Nikolaj Trubetskoy. Joseph represents Jakobson as seizing upon markedness so as to put some boundaries around Saussure's troublesome notion of arbitrariness. Jakobsonian markedness tries to resolve "the cognitive dissonance between the arbitrary and the natural" (p. 183) passed down from Saussure. It asserts the priority of the natural over the conventional, that is, of an unmarked default feature or property (as one might now call it) over other, correlated, options each bearing some distinctive "mark." In Joseph's view, Jakobson's prioritization of the natural was seminal to all the subsequent work detailed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 5 addresses naturalness versus conventionality in a different domain, namely the character and value imputed to a "natural" form of a particular language—variously defined— versus that imputed to an "unnatural" or artificial version of it. Joseph sees the Chomskyan concept of "E-(xternalized) language" as an example of the latter because it is a socio-cultural epiphenomenon, as opposed to Chomskyan "I-(nternalized) language," which is an innate cognitive structure. Juxtaposed against this version of linguistic naturalism is George Orwell's work on language and politics, which asserts that "there is in non-standard language something that standard language tries to exclude, and that nevertheless is deeply human" (p. 162). Joseph

also discusses earlier conceptualizations of these matters. Some, like Orwell, identify a "standard" language to be one which is necessarily arbitrary, imposed by external authority and therefore inorganic to what is "natural." On the contrary, others have aligned what is taken to be "standard" with the sense of a naturally-occurring language lacking artifice. The particular texts in which Joseph traces these shifting alignments are by Saussure, Joachim Du Bellay, Dante, and Varro.

In Chapter 4, the most fully developed in Part 2, Joseph examines attempts to locate the seat of what is natural in language. Varro made an influential contribution. Writing in the first century BCE, he considered the issue already 300 years old in that he attributed a conventionalist, "anomalist," position to the Stoic philosophers of Pergamon as opposed to the naturalist, "analogist," position of grammarians in Alexandria. But Varro re-framed the debate by replacing the basic question which divided anomalists from analogists—"Is language a product of convention or of nature?"—with a new question, "Which parts of language are conventional, and which natural?" Varro's answer is that words are "voluntary" (i.e. conventional, idiosyncratic) whereas grammar (essentially, modern morphosyntax) is natural (i.e. productive, predictable). In the Renaissance, the two-part association of words with convention, versus grammar with nature, was "doubled" (p. 105) by implicating particular syntactic categories: nouns came to be identified with conventional, arbitrary reference, while verbs were taken to be the heart of a language's grammar, and hence emblems of linguistic regularity and systematicity.

From here, onward into multiple varieties of linguistic naturalism: Descartes, Locke, the Port Royal grammarians, Condillac, Rousseau, Bentham, the historical-comparativists, Humboldt, Saussure—a kaleidoscopic array of opinions about the identity and significance of what counts as "natural," and not "natural," in language. Like the view inside a kaleidoscope, the same inventory of elements periodically shifts and re-combines to produce a novel arrangement which still retains some properties of the preceding arrangement. In Saussure, for example, invocation of the venerable term "natural" recedes. Joseph writes that, overtly,

Saussure "passes beyond conventionalism to assert the radical arbitrariness of language" (p. 126). But since to Saussure language as a system is socially determined and beyond the control of individual will, the notion of *langue* covertly fills the role of nature, serving as a foil to his trademark conceptualization of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.

Chapter 4 concludes with Joseph's analysis of how linguistic naturalism in these terms has been manifest in the last two decades of the twentieth century. In the 1980s generative grammarians constructed a model of human linguistic capacity founded on a universal computational system which constrains the grammars of all languages. That system, Chomskyan universal grammar, constitutes a human cognitive faculty. It is neither learned nor taught, but innate; in a word, natural. The lexicon of each language, on the other hand, is a repository of idiosyncratic facts, necessarily learned by exposure. Chomsky's dichotomy is easy for Joseph to incorporate into linguistic naturalism, because by "associating the grammatical and functional with what is natural, and the lexical with what is arbitrary, conventional, or local," it instantiates "a tradition so deeply entrenched in Western linguistic thought as to pass for common sense" (p. 137). Likewise, Joseph finds some of Steven Pinker's work consistent with linguistic naturalism, although that work shifts the location of the contrast between nature and convention into the lexicon (thereby distinguishing degrees of naturalness within what is otherwise taken as the locus of the conventional). Pinker (1999) argues that English regular past-tense verb forms like *played* are stored and processed differently than irregular past-tense forms like *swam* or *put*. Regulars are created by a general morphosyntactic rule which suffixes the base form of a verb with *-ed*. Irregulars are stored and processed as fixed units, intrinsically marked for past tense rather than generated by suffixation. Thus regular verbs are the products of a rule acting exceptionlessly, while irregulars are irreducible units fixed by convention and acquired individually. Pinker supports his claim with myriad psycholinguistic experiments. But even before the results are in, his conclusion seems plausible; it is amenable to our common sense, made familiar to us in advance by its participation in the long-standing tradition which analyzes language into the contrasting categories of what is natural—regular, systematic, productive—and what is not.

4. Plato's problems and Plato's Problem

But wait a minute, says Joseph: that's just the problem! A problem at the heart of Plato's problems defining the roles of nature versus convention—problems which, in different guises, became Varro's problems, Locke's problems, Saussure's problems, Orwell's problems, Pinker's problems—is that we can't take for granted that a real dichotomy exists independent of our historically-engineered common sense. In an important section at the end of Chapter 4, Joseph raises four questions. Holding back one of the four for the moment, three of them are: (a) "Can any version of naturalness itself be 'natural,' or must it always and only be known to us as a historical product?"; (b) "For any particular conception of the natural, is it based on criteria that are directly observable? If not, how can it be verified, or falsified?"; and (c) "Given that the languages and dialects of the world vary to the extent that for any structure we postulate for a particular dialect, we cannot rule out the possibility of finding its exact opposite in some other dialect, how can any 'natural' structure be postulated without ultimately leading to the implication that some dialects are less natural than others?" (p. 140). As long as we unthinkingly incorporate the assumptions or assertions of Plato or Varro or Saussure or Pinker (etc.) about what is linguistically "natural" versus "non-natural," so long we just presuppose answers to (a), (b), and (c) without addressing the matters these questions pose.

Is this a problem? Clearly, Joseph thinks so; he makes it his goal to help us "acknowledg[e] our engagement in this age-old debate [so] that we can genuinely begin to pass beyond it" (p. 140). What about for that portion of the readership of *Limiting the Arbitrary* whose intellectual milieux are at the end-points of Chapters 4 (Pinker), 5 (Chomsky), or 6 (Optimality Theory)? At the risk of stereotyping a hypothetical (and therefore defenseless) cohort, I would suspect that such readers may be strongly invested in sustaining their version(s) of linguistic naturalism, and not at first be liable to "pass[ing] beyond" it. By a curious coincidence not mentioned by Joseph, the well-spring of generativist linguistic naturalism is a concept for which Chomsky coined the name "Plato's Problem."[1] Chomsky's Plato's Problem is

not the problems that Plato confronts in *Cratylus*. Rather, Chomsky's Plato's Problem refers to a passage in the dialogue *Meno* in which Socrates elicits from an uneducated slave boy the principles of geometry. To Chomsky, this passage demonstrates the longevity of questions about how it is that "we know so much, given that the evidence available to us is so sparse" (Chomsky 1986, p. xxvii). Plato solves Plato's Problem by attributing the boy's surprising grasp of geometry to a human capacity to recollect knowledge derived from a previous existence. Chomsky's solution to Plato's Problem with respect to language is that human cognition subsumes an innate linguistic faculty. That is to say, children exhibit surprising understanding of language because humans have inborn, unconscious, knowledge of language and of its limits, received as a gift of nature. The goal of generative linguistics is to specify the contents of that knowledge.

All this is relevant to the reception of Joseph's exposition of Plato's problems in *Cratylus*. For generative linguists, Chomsky's solution to Plato's Problem answers Joseph's question in (a), "Can any version of naturalness itself be 'natural'?" with a flat "Yes." Generativists impute elaborate innate—that is, "natural"—linguistic endowment to human beings. There is not full consensus on the details, scope, or cognitive status of that endowment, of course. But to use one classic example from Chomsky (2000, p. 93), for generativists, it is a "natural" fact about language that speakers interpret the pronoun *he* as potentially coreferential with *Bill* in (1) below, but not so in (2).

(1) Bill thinks he is a nice guy

(2) He thinks Bill is a nice guy

"Naturalness" resides in the different relationship between *Bill* and *he* in (1) versus (2) in the sense that that same difference shows up in structurally-parallel pairs of sentences in all other languages (Reuland & Everaert 2001); and in the sense that untutored 3-year old children treat *he* as if it can refer to *Bill* in (1) but not in (2).[2] This makes the contrast between (1) and (2) qualitatively different from (say) the purely local, conventional, property of English that both *Bill* and *guy* usually refer to males. In response to Joseph's question (b), the naturalness of this

version of linguistic naturalism is warranted by the cross-linguistic universality of these facts about pronouns and referential nouns, and by the status of those facts as knowledge possessed by children without, apparently, being learned by them. Both of these warrants have been empirically investigated, and to the satisfaction of many, verified.

So for readers coming out of this milieu, answers to Joseph's first two questions may seem to be at hand, and so securely at hand as to obviate the value of understanding how Plato or Varro or Saussure might have either asked or answered those questions differently. Joseph's question in (c) would likely not really be felt either: from the vantage point of Chomskyan universal grammar, it is NOT the case that for every structural property of language X, there exists a language Y without that property, or with its converse. It is claimed, for example, that no language includes sentences analogous to (2) in which the pronoun can refer to the same person as *Bill*. Rejecting what Joseph states as given in posing (c) removes the basis for the question of how to deal with languages of apparently varying degrees of naturalness.[3]

A readership of generative linguists would therefore approach Joseph's book cautiously, unlikely to readily accept the challenge to "pass beyond" linguistic naturalism. Still, it would take a pretty hardened cognitive-scientific mindset to resist the sheer intrigue of Joseph's multiple panoramic narratives of the nature / convention dichotomy. Many modern linguists feel secure in their conviction that linguistics as it is now has supplanted the linguistics of the past. Such a conviction does not necessarily destroy one's susceptibility to the appeal of the knowing something about the past; it only devalues its worth and renders it self-referential. Joseph asks readers to go quite a bit beyond this, to think closely about how present-day linguistics is continuously re-created within the context of the past. What more might be done to promote historically-informed conversation about linguistic naturalism?

5. Talking about talking about linguistic naturalism

For Joseph's thesis to get the attention it deserves, there seem to me to be at least two ways forward. The first would be to give more prominence to a fourth question which Joseph

asks, (d): "If some part of language is to be reckoned as somehow less natural than another, how can it have come into being except through processes that themselves ultimately depend on natural faculties?" (p. 140). Or, in words Joseph uses earlier in the book, "Can we really assert that anything human beings do is more natural than anything else they do, on a basis that is not ultimately normative, even if not intended as such?" (p. 5). Modern generative linguistics is less well defended against this question, compared to (a), (b), or (c), so that it may be the most likely entry into the imaginations of Joseph's readers. It is important to capitalize on that kind of opening, if we are to have a satisfying conversation about the problems analyzed in *Cratylus* in the context of modern linguistics where, to many, Chomsky's solution to Plato's Problem obviates Plato's problems.

Opportunities for conversation about linguistic naturalism would probably also be enhanced if a few small bugs could be worked out of Joseph's exposition. That conversation requires at least two kinds of competence. First, one needs to have tried to make what Joseph labels the "major conceptual leap" (p. 140) necessary to identify and objectify linguistic naturalism. Second, one needs to accurately understand what is entailed in particular species of linguistic naturalism, if they are to probe the effects of dichotomizing the natural versus the conventional in those instances. Joseph argues eloquently for the importance of the critical conceptual leap, and he models most of what else is needed to be a party to this conversation. But there is still some room for improvement. Take a passage on pp. 3–4 in which he introduces a first example of "Recent versions of naturalness and the paradox they pose." Joseph refers to Richard Kayne's (1994) book *The Antisymmetry of Syntax*, written for generative syntacticians. In Joseph's words: "Kayne argues from theoretical principles that all sentences in all languages start out with the [word order SVO (subject / verb / object)], after which some languages allow O or V (or both) to move leftward to produce other orders" (p. 4). Joseph goes on to comment that:

> Somewhat surprisingly, linguists have not voiced much caution about a proposal
> which could be read as suggesting that SVO languages are closer to the "natural"
> order that proceeds directly out of the hard-wiring of the brain than are languages

with other, less natural orders [like SOV or VSO, presumably created by

movement]. [...] some languages have more movement to undertake than others,

and it is a matter of time before someone suggests that the non-SVO languages

are wasteful of cerebral energy... (p. 4)

Joseph then launches into a critique of the linguistic naturalism he sees as following from Kayne's proposal, which culminates when he asks, (d), "Can we really assert that anything human beings do is more natural than anything else they do...?" (p. 5).

Thus Joseph leads up to his key question by first adverting to Kayne's proposal that all languages are underlyingly SVO, then stating that "it is a matter of time" before that proposal becomes a criterion for attributing differential degrees of naturalness to different languages. In this way, he makes Kayne indirectly responsible for what sounds like an especially pernicious instance of linguistic naturalism. But wait a minute! Has anyone actually used Kayne's proposal to assert the superior naturalness of SVO languages over languages with other word orders? Kayne's own *The Antisymmetry of Syntax* certainly contains no such claim. Three published reviews are likewise innocent.[4] In the years since 1994, has this notion "be[en] read" into Kayne's text, since Joseph represents this as something we can expect "in a matter of time"? Not as far as I can see. The shifting winds of theoretical fashion have blown some of Kayne's argument out of relevance, but not all of it so far as to be out of sight. A search in a single database (*www.webofscience.com*) for the years 1994 to 2001 yields over 200 journal citations for *The Antisymmetry of Syntax*. The vast majority appear in works by and for Kayne's core audience, generative syntacticians. A random sample of about 20% of these citations reveals no evidence whatsoever that Kayne's work has been interpreted to prioritize SVO languages, or to suggest that "non-SVO languages are wasteful of cerebral energy." Nor is there any difference on this score between literature which cited Kayne soon after the publication of his book, and literature written as much as eight years later.

Taking another tack, I examined citations of *The Antisymmetry of Syntax* in journals addressed to readers outside of Kayne's target audience. My aim was to see whether Joseph's assertion, that "it is a matter of time" before Kayne's proposal is extrapolated to prioritize SVO word order, would be demonstrated by the attenuation of disciplinary space rather than by the passage of time. Again, nothing. References to Kayne's work in journals as far afield from generative linguistics as *American Zoologist, The Journal of Gerontology, TESOL Quarterly, Language in Society,* and *Perceptual and Motor Skills* all turned up no evidence of differential attribution of naturalness to SVO versus non-SVO languages.[5]

In short, Joseph seems to have erred: Kayne (1994) has not led to claims that non-SVO languages are unnatural or "wasteful of cerebral energy." This is a small matter, granted that Joseph brings it forward at the very outset of his exposition of linguistic naturalism, a moment when a reader can indulge a writer's exuberant overstatement. Moreover, Joseph never mentions Kayne again.[6] Still, even this small matter is significant as a measure of the intellectual distance between Joseph and some of his readership. Generative linguists would be very unlikely to extrapolate Kayne's claims in the manner which Joseph predicts as inevitable, since they do not calculate amounts of "cerebral energy" in defining the distinctions between surface SVO and SOV or VSO word orders, or in accounting for the consequences of differences in word orders. That particular instantiation of linguistic naturalism is wholly absent from Kayne's proposal and (apparently) from its reception.

I think it is worthwhile trying to bang out a few such dents, because to do so may facilitate the kind of conversation which *Limiting the Arbitrary* makes possible. At best, parties to the conversation are those who have made the "major conceptual leap" into recognizing linguistic naturalism, and who have taken along with them to the other side first-hand knowledge of linguistics that incorporates a particular dichotomization of the natural versus the non-natural. At the very least, *Limiting the Arbitrary* succeeds in

sensitizing one to the many invocations of the term "natural" which imbue literature on linguistics. Reading Chomsky's (2000) *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (which appeared too late to be treated by Joseph) is a different experience before versus after reading *Limiting the Arbitrary*. For instance, one is struck by the fact that in Chomsky's index only the term "language" is cited more often than the term "natural" and its morphological derivatives. It is equally revealing to study how John Searle (2002) employs the word "natural" and its kin in his critique of Chomsky's book. All kinds of opportunities like these to see the familiar in a new light present themselves to readers willing to ask how and to what extent a particular proposal or approach depends on linguistic naturalism. Joseph argues persuasively for the value of raising these questions.

^Notes

¹ Chomsky himself represents this simply as "Plato's problem," but along with others I will use an upper-case "P" to distinguish the specific reference of this expression as Chomsky employs it.

² See Guasti (2002, pp. 300–308) for a summary of the relevant research on child language.

³ It should be clear that the distance between these answers to (a), (b), and (c) and those which Joseph might supply does not depend solely on the contrasting interpretations of the pronouns in (1) and (2). I take that contrast only as a malleable microcosm representing the whole research approach of generative linguistics.

⁴ See Slavcheva (1995), Cinque (1996), and Johnson (1997).

⁵ A search for citations of Kayne·(1994) in *www.webofscience.com* provides bibliographical details.

⁶ Joseph does, however, return to some of the substance of what he imputes to Kayne. He mentions a seventeenth-century claim that specific word orders are more natural than others on p. 111, and adverts to speculations about differences in languages entailing differences in cognition on pp. 133, 138, and 139.

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