

THE PREHISTORY OF EVOLUTIONARY LINGUISTICS

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A - Introduction

Glottogenesis in modern times

There have been historical times when the question of the origin of language intrigued great thinkers. But it was not always in the focus of investigation. It may seem so that *glottogenesis*, the birth of human linguistic capacity was not a problem until the Enlightenment. In the 18th and 19th century the philosophical community were making up the debt of philosophers of language in producing dozens of essays on the subject. Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (1725 and 1744),¹ Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746),² Maupertuis' *Réflexions philosophiques sur l'origine des langues et la signification des mots* (1748),³ Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772)⁴ and Monboddo's *On the Origin and Progress of Language* (1773-92)⁵ are only the most eminent attempts to explain human language. Many other philosophers joined the debate that characterised the second half of the 18th century.⁶

¹ Vico, G., *Scienza nuova prima*, Laterza: Bari, 1931

Vico, G., *Scienza nuova seconda*, Laterza: Bari, 1928

² Condillac, E. B. de, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines*, Porset, Ch. ed., Auvers-sur Oise: Editions Galilée, 1973

³ Maupertuis - Turgot - Maine de Brian, *Sur l'origine du langage*, Grimsley, R. ed., Paris: Droz, 1971

⁴ *Sprachphilosophie*, Heintel, E. ed., Hamburg: Meiner, 1960

⁵ Monboddo, J. B., *On the Origin and Progress of Language*, New York: AMS Press, 1973

⁶ Formigari, L., *Linguistica e antropologia nel secondo Settecento*, Messina: Libra, 1972

For a short survey see Simone, R., 'The Early Modern Period' In Lepschy, G. ed., *History of Linguistics, Volume III: Renaissance and Early Modern Linguistics*, London, 1998, 205-210

A comprehensive summary of the early modern essays on the origin of language can be found in Aarsleff, H., *From Locke to Saussure*, London: Athlone, 1982, 278ff

The controversy was part of a broader discourse on society and anthropology, both predominant issues in the Enlightenment. Since the late 16th century diverse linguistic data had been accumulated and systematised in Europe. Eventually, the discipline of linguistics became gradually more and more sophisticated and professional, and therefore more realistic at the same time. The “discovery” of Sanskrit had brought the recognition of large and ancient family languages and thus given evidence of the real temporal dimensions of languages. The roots of language were dated several dozens of millennia back before the beginnings of written history and so the hope of uncovering the history of language in a philological sense was lost forever.

On the other hand, the speculations were foolhardy. Already the classical treatises of the 18th century lacked systematised empirical evidence and were rather interesting essays with collections of guesses with inner logics than the reflections of extensive research on reality. And of course they were based on no psychological knowledge whatsoever that is indispensable for the understanding of the interaction of reality, mind and language. So the topic lost quickly from its interestingness and feasibility until it was absolutely discredited. On the 8th of March, 1866, with a ministerial approval the Société de Linguistique de Paris restricted its field of interest in a stern statute:

Article One. – The Linguistic Society aims at the study of languages, of legends, traditions, habits, documents capable of clarify the ethnographic science. Every other object of study is rigorously forbidden.

Article Two. – The Society does not accept any bulletin concerning either the origin of language or the creation of a universal language.⁷

⁷ Article premier. - La Société de Linguistique a pour but l'étude des langues, celle des légendes, traditions, coutumes, documents, pouvant éclairer la science ethnographique. Tout autre objet d'études est rigoureusement interdit.

Article deuxième - La Société n'admet aucune communication concernant, soit l'origine du langage~ soit la création d'une langue universelle.

(<<http://www.slp-paris.com/>>

The timing could not have been worse. *The Origin of Species* had been first published just seven years earlier. Darwin would stress the importance of language in the framework of the evolutionary theory only in 1871;⁸ while his brother-in-law had written a book by the title *On the Origin of Language* published in the very year of 1866.⁹ Although such announcements as that of the Linguistic Society should not be considered absolute and unquestionable for all of the period that has passed since its publication, the disappointment in the reasonability of such an inquiry was quite widespread and the real scientific research of the origin of language on a Darwinian basis did not quicken until very recently. In 1990 two theories were published that both suggested the theoretical possibility of the evolution of human linguistic capacity.¹⁰ Paul Bloom, Stephen Pinker and Derek Bickerton are all Chomskyan linguists, but they have also something else in common: they are all renegade Chomskyans in that they assert that biological evolution can be accounted for the unfolding of language. The new interest can be measured in that Evolang, the conference dedicated entirely to *glottogenesis* is held biennially since 1996.¹¹ We are currently living in a time, when philosophy and natural science join their capacities to find the answer. Cognitive science, which has aimed at answering this question among others, is one of the most promising disciplines in our days.

But what is the reason for the earlier lack of curiosity towards a natural explanation of *glottogenesis*? What kind of linguistic discourse can be found in the pre-modern period? What kinds of historical circumstances thematised the philosophy of

English translation by the author)

⁸ Darwin, Ch., *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*. London: John Murray, 1871, 53-62

⁹ Wedgwood, H., *On the Origin of Language*, London: N. Trübner and Co., 1866

¹⁰ Bickerton, D., *Language and Species*, Chicago-London: The University Press of Chicago, 1990

Pinker S. - P. Bloom, 'Natural language and natural selection' *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 13 (4), 1990, 707-784

¹¹ See <<http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/evolang/>>

language at the dawn of the discipline? This is the subject of this investigation, a small part of the whole story, but one that might prove to be quite instructive.

A theory of history of science

Before adverting to the main point, it is well-advised to inventory the toolkit available for the investigation of such a topic. What is history, science and how should these be practiced? First, let the *ars poetica* of the editors of *Modern Intellectual History* stand here as a brief explanation of what such a work should add to human knowledge.

Texts and the discourses in which they are embedded are multiple points of entry into human creativity in its profuse variety of historical forms, and ... their study is essential to understanding the nature of cultural life and the meaning of civilization itself.¹²

Answering the main question introduced in the previous subsection requires a historical analysis, but also an interdisciplinary one. Intellectual history is always more abstract and controversial than other kinds of history (e.g. economic history, military history, etc.) that can be supported by more exact empirical data. The very thoughts of some people should be unveiled and this is sometimes much more difficult than obtaining data about the increase of production, the ethnic composition of a population, or the harshness of the weather. On the other hand, the influence of ideas cannot be measured either. Naming muses or educators was not always a requirement. Intellectual encounters can be hypothesised, but can seldom be proven. Thus one can always assume, but never know for sure.

¹² Editorial, *Modern Intellectual History*, 1, 2004, 1-2

For a successful production in this type of history one needs to be familiar with the methodology of historical philology but a basic knowledge of the nature of contemporary scientific research is also necessary. In addition, this topic is closely connected to religious studies. Not a comparative history of religion is to be inspected here, but the religious motivations are in the core of the historical causality of this topic and therefore a historical acquaintance of the religions in question is indispensable, too.

In this brief introduction it seems unnecessary and impossible to discuss certain issues such as that of demarcation. Where to draw the borderlines between science and pseudo-science was an overarching controversy in the philosophy of science of the 20th century. Lately, especially since the article of Larry Laudan,¹³ it has been pondered as rather an irrelevant question.

In Helge Kragh's summary of the theory of the history of science¹⁴ multiple meanings of basic terms are rightly distinguished. For him H_1 means the actual, objective history out there to be comprehended and written, although its existence is not recognised universally by philosophers of science. This H_1 is in turn the object of H_2 , a specific historical research any historian does and of course its concrete results. Historiography, argues Kragh, can therefore mean either the professional kind of history-writing or a theory and philosophy of history.

Similarly to what has been said about history, science can be interpreted in several ways. S_1 is a "collection of empirical and formal statements about nature ... that ... comprise accepted scientific knowledge," while S_2 is the "activities or behaviour of the scientists ... connected with scientific endeavours." Consequently a history of

¹³ Laudan, L., 'The Demise of the Demarcation Problem' In Cohen, R.S. ed., *Physics, Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: Essays in Honor of Adolf Grünbaum*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, 76, 1983, 111–127

¹⁴ Helge Kragh, *An introduction to the historiography of science*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 20-23

science concentrates rather on S_1 , but a *history* of science deals with S_2 . Since the existence of H_1 is controversial and S_1 can be hardly revealed with the amount of sources that has survived from the Antiquity, this work will focus on a H_2S_2 as long as no Hydrogen Sulphide is involved in the analysis.

To what extent the knowledge of a specific scientific field is necessary for a historian of science is also debated. Pearce Williams is less strict in this question,¹⁵ but other scholars (Whiteside, Truesdell, Aaboe and Kuhn) expressed their concern that many historians of science do not understand science well enough.¹⁶ I have no previous formal education in linguistics, but have had some academic experience of cognitive science and am somewhat familiar with the current trends of evolutionary linguistics.

Kragh also notes in his discussion of anachronical and diachronical history¹⁷ that the former is quite common and difficult to avoid. Most historians use terms that are alien to the historical situation that is being discussed. But despite the usual understanding, the derogatory sense of anachronism should not always be meant. For it is not the case that historians of science cannot see distinct states of science in their historical context and they force their anachronical present to the past. But they are, indeed, aware of the fact that the whole network of knowledge and beliefs is a huge coherent system with interdependent units of theories and presuppositions; and since very few people can erase their memory and acquire dozens or hundreds of new axioms for the sake of historical reconstruction, these scientific units need to be contrasted to our present system for the sake of better understanding. And after all,

¹⁵ Pearce Williams, L., 'The historiography of Victorian science' *Victorian Studies*, 9, 1966, 197-204

¹⁶ Hankins, T.L., 'In defence of biography: the use of biography in the history of science' *History of Science*, 17, 1979, 15

Kuhn, T. S., *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, 136

¹⁷ Kragh, 89-90

glottogenesis bears some interest rather in the light of the scientific practice of the last 20 odd years.

The diachronical kind of attitude that wants to be an observer *in* the past instead of an observer *of* the past is not a scientific option, but a literary one. At least on the level of pointing out the differences between our present understanding of a problem and that at a point in the past there has to be some anachronical remarks. With no hermeneutical caution, without any explanation for the readers of our times a purely diachronical account of science will result in a mass of misunderstandings. The best way of diachronical history of science is not really history of science although indeed a very enjoyable genre if one likes books such as *The Island of the Day Before* by Umberto Eco.¹⁸

The *thesis of invariant historical themes* is the theory that only a limited number of unit-ideas exist in the history of ideas and they keep popping up and generating compounds very much like atoms form ions and molecules. According to Kragh a history written in the spirit of this *invariance thesis* may overcome the horizontal-vertical tension.¹⁹ “While horizontal history is a film of a narrow part of science, vertical history is a snapshot of the overall situation.”²⁰ Both approaches have advantages and disadvantages but the invariance thesis can compile the two. Arthur Lovejoy and Mendel Sachs were eminent propagators of this thesis,²¹ although it does not seem to be advisable to take it to an extreme point. Nevertheless, the abundance of *pourquoi stories* in different cultures and ages can leave no doubts about the evergreen

¹⁸ Eco, U., *The Island of the Day Before (L'isola del giorno prima)*, London: Secker & Warburg, 1995

¹⁹ Kragh, 83-84

²⁰ Kragh, 80-81

²¹ Lovejoy, A. O., *The Great Chain of Being*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936, 15

Sachs, M., 'Maimonides, Spinoza and the field concept in physics' *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 37, 1976, 125

character of the research for origins and thus labelling a work that finds this interest in different historical circumstances as *whig history* would be somewhat inflated.

Topic delimitation

A misunderstanding that needs to be avoided before anything else is that this work is the survey of speculations on the origin of *languages*. As described in the first subsection, the history of the languages known for us can be traced back in the past through a few millennia at best. The origin of languages such as the English or the Romansh raises no difficulties, since they evolved within the timeframe of written history. But it is hopeless to find the origin of the ancestors of these languages or, in an extreme case, the origin of the first language (in case one takes the monogenetic viewpoint and assumes that all languages have a common ancestor). Natural languages and the language capacity of the whole humankind are different things and require different methods of study. What is going to be considered on the following pages is human linguistic capacity as a unique phenomenon, the origin of which (at least for some cultures) needs explanation.

The causes of the millennial silence about the origin of language should be traced back to the two main constituents of European culture: Judeo-Christian religion and Greco-Roman philosophy. Since there was no canonised creation myth in Greece (perhaps due to the cultural, political and linguistic diversity and despite a unitary identity), there was an exceptional intellectual freedom of speculation about the origin of things.

Robins distinguishes two trends in linguistics as early as in Ancient Greece. One is practical and deals with what would be called today descriptive linguistics. It is concerned with the parts of speech, verbal and nominal paradigms, etc. and accumulates enormous data in course of the practice. Practical grammarians' aim was

to systematise and to educate. The other is more theoretical and discusses different problems of the philosophy of language than linguistics itself. It is global in focus and often highly speculative. This trend is closer to today's cognitive linguistics.²²

Etymology is on halfway for its practical and specific practice and the diachronic nature of its discussion. But it would be misleading to suggest that this dichotomy was a special symptom of the early unfolding of the discipline. Simone describes the same phenomenon in the Early Modern period,²³ and anyone reading contemporary journals could confirm this being the case even today: the contrast between particular linguistics (e.g. English, Arabic or Chinese, etc.) and general linguistics, psycholinguistics, evolutionary linguistics, etc. is unmistakable.

In any case, our investigation has to be limited only to the second type. It would be unfortunate to inspect the problem with no philosophical background, so a wider perspective of language philosophy, including the connection of words and things, etymology and linguistic regularity, is to be opened for the contextualisation of *glottogenesis*, but other issues (e.g. morphological, syntactic debates, etc.) are too loosely connected to it and bear no relevance for our topic.

Structure

Chapter 2 discusses one of Plato's dialogues, the *Cratylus*, for the earliest work fully devoted to the philosophy of language is rightly expected to predetermine debates of the future. Chapter 3 inspect the two main debates of the ancient philosophy of language: the φύσις-νόμος and the analogy-anomaly question. The aim of this skew is contextualisation, which is important both to understand in what

²² Robins, R. H., Theory-orientation versus data-orientation: a recurrent theme in linguistics, *Historiographia linguistica* 1, 1973, 11-26

²³ Simone, 156

philosophical environment a specific question is treated and to anticipate the unfolding mediaeval discussion. To put it differently, this section widens the horizontal history in the vertical direction. Chapter 4 investigates the theories of *glottogenesis* that the classical ancestors of Western culture developed over the centuries. Chapter 5 finds the answer to the key question in the etymology of Hebrew roots. In chapter 6 the history of the Greek concept λόγος is analysed in order to present the reader a small but relevant sample of the classical discourse on language and psychology. Like a piece of wet litmus paper it shows a considerable semantic change throughout antique Greek discourse. A final chapter with a brief outlook to later periods concludes the work. In the course of this research, hopefully not only the main question is to be answered, but an outline of ancient Greek and Roman linguistic discourse is also to be sketched that can to some extent account for the topics that do occur in the Middle Ages or later.

Relevance

Modern readers may find ridiculous many common beliefs of earlier linguistic investigations in this work as in many other books on the histories of linguistics. As much as we tend to judge our predecessors according to the degree of these “mistakes”, their influence is almost always underestimated. Whether effect or counter effect, the influence cannot be overlooked by the historian and therefore not the apparent thoughtfulness of a specific theory or idea should be assessed, but its actual legacy in the discipline.

One such tenet is the obvious failure to distinguish between literacy and language. It should have been obvious for our ancestors who lived in a less educated society that since one can speak without being able to read and write, the two are not connected ontologically. In Judaism, however, language pre-existed creation in a

written form, the Torah not just as a linguistic product, but as a script was created by God before anything else. This idea conceals the fact that vocal sounds are independent of letters. Aristotle had no grasp of this difference either: "Diction as a whole is made up of these parts: letter, syllable, conjunction, joint, noun, verb, case, phrase. A letter is an indivisible sound..."²⁴ Priscian, an early mediaeval grammarian, reflected this misconception when defining letters: "A letter is the smallest part of composed voice, which is what consists of the composition of letters... for it is the shortest among everything that can be divided, that which divided cannot be. We can also define it so: a letter is a voice that can be written singly."²⁵ In fact, this confusion can be still witnessed here and there in the scientific literature. A very recent example is Lily E. Kay's criticism of the treatment of the genetic code as a linguistic phenomenon. In her refutation deeply rooted in literary theory she confuses some features of script with features of language.²⁶

Another long-lasting conviction was that language is mainly a naming process. This applies to the spirit of the book of Genesis, to Plato and to Xun Zi (荀子) equally.²⁷ This misunderstanding on the other hand has generated a strong counter effect. Until very recently we were living in the age of syntax, however misleading the

²⁴ τῆς δὲ λέξεως ἀπάσης τάδ' ἐστὶ τὰ μέρη, στοιχεῖον συλλαβὴ σύνδεσμος ὄνομα ῥῆμα ἄρθρον πῶσις λόγος. στοιχεῖον μὲν οὖν ἐστὶν φωνὴ ἀδιαίρετος...

(Aristotle, *Aristotle's Ars Poetica*, R. Kassel ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, 1456b20

English translation from Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 23, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932)

²⁵ Litera est pars minima vocis compositae, hoc est quae constat compositione literarum... quod omnium est brevissimum eorum, quae dividi possunt, id quod divide non potest. possumus et sic definire: litera est vox, quae scribi potest individua.

(Priscianus, *Institutionum Grammaticarum libri XVIII*, Hertz, M. ed., Oxford: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1855, 1.2.3

English translation by the author)

²⁶ Kay, L. E., 'In the Beginning Was the Word?' In Biagioli M. ed., *The Science Studies Reader*, London, 1999

²⁷ Staal, F., 'Oriental Ideas on the Origin of Language' *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 99, No. 1, 1979, 4

overemphasis was, and still many evolutionary linguists are pursuing the Holy Grail of syntactic evolution.²⁸ These examples demonstrate that both effects and counter-effects can predestine the course of an “unconscious” discipline for a long time.

Therefore nothing could be further from truth than to assume that ancient philosophical speculations, preceding and gradually turning into science, are rubbed out of our present.

Why is the lack of interest towards the reconstruction of the origin of linguistic capacity important? Science today is capable of answering even our most daring questions that we would not have expected to be solved even in our wildest dreams. And yet the knowledge about the function, origin and importance of language is still defective. After witnessing the career of our time’s emblematic linguist, Noam Chomsky and following how many different theories he came up with during his life; wondering why it is necessary in linguistics to move on and on all the time; living in an age when fundamental doctrines such as the existence of Universal Grammar are shaken,²⁹ in a time when pragmatics gets more and more attention in linguistics and when novel approaches reinterpret the function of language³⁰ - perhaps it is not foolish to reread the *Cratylus* or other works that sought to answer our present questions.

The better understanding of the dynamics that change our knowledge and our interpretation thereof can be one goal of the history of science. But the time when history of science was regarded as the modern *Specula Principum* for scientists is over. Few if any historians have the illusion that their works will instruct posterity. What can a scholar do with no practical use of the discipline? (S)he can get some amusement in the observation of what scientists do. Or find a way to become one.

²⁸ *Biological Foundations and Origin of Syntax*, Bickerton, D., Eörs Szathmáry eds., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009

²⁹ Evans, N. - S. C. Levinson, ‘The myth of language universals: Language diversity and its importance for cognitive science’ *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 32, 2009, 429–492

³⁰ Sperber, D., D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, Blackwell: Malden, 1986, 1995

B - The Cratylus

The present chapter will survey the argumentation of the *Cratylus*, which was devoted fully to the philosophy of language. As the first known linguistic project in history one can witness the birth of this discipline and discern the topics that were considered already at the very beginnings. This dialogue did not only provoke sophisticated responses through centuries of Epicurean philosophy as to *glottogenesis*; it also descants on a series of broader philosophical questions of language. The fictional conversation of the *Cratylus* touches upon many topics that pertain to the interests of this work; it is therefore expedient to give a detailed account of how Plato's idealism dominated early speculations in the philosophy of language.

According to Robins there were two main themes in the Graeco-Roman tradition of the philosophy of language. The controversy that was discussed explicitly is whether linguistic signs are natural or arbitrary. Perhaps it is better known as the φύσις-νόμος problem and this is the subject of about the first half of the dialogue. The other issue, rather implicit until the 1st century BC, is whether the ruling principle in language is analogy or anomaly.³¹ These controversies will be discussed in the next chapter.

Plato's *Cratylus* goes into the details of the first controversy. Its main purpose is to support the author's idealism and thus his argumentation goes further than just the discussion of φύσις and νόμος. Although the *Cratylus* is referred to as a discussion of

³¹ Robins, R. H., *A Short History of Linguistics*, London: Longman, 1990, p. 21.

the origins,³² it deals with a variety of other problems, too. Plato introduces a many specifically linguistic topics to philosophy and so merits the following praise of Diogenes Laertius: “He was also the first philosopher ... to study the significance of grammar.”³³

In the *Cratylus*, Socrates not only stands on the side of φύσις, but in order to propagate Plato’s idealism he denies that language could represent pure ideas. When Socrates joins the conversation his two collocutors are already in the middle of discussing the issue of φύσις and νόμος. However, the title character Cratylus remains silent for much of the dialogue, while Hermogenes defends the νόμος stance against Socrates. Cratylus, the person into whose mouth Plato gives the Heraclitean views, lived in the 5th century BC and was indeed Heraclitus’ disciple as Aristotle recorded in his *Metaphysics*. Unfortunately, as mostly in the case of the Pre-Socratics, much more is not known about him:

For it was from this supposition that there blossomed forth the most extreme view of those which we have mentioned, that of the professed followers of Heraclitus, and such as Cratylus held, who ended by thinking that one need not say anything, and only moved his finger; and who criticized Heraclitus for saying that one cannot enter the same river twice, for he himself held that it cannot be done even once.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Καὶ πρῶτος τῶν φιλοσόφων ... ἐθεώρησε τῆς γραμματικῆς τὴν δύναμιν.
(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Hicks, R. D. ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972, 3.25

English translation from *ibid.*)

³⁴ ἐκ γὰρ ταύτης τῆς ὑπολήψεως ἐξήνηθησεν ἡ ἀκροτάτη δόξα τῶν εἰρημένων, ἢ τῶν φασκόντων ἡρακλειτίζειν καὶ οἷαν Κρατύλος εἶχεν, ὃς τὸ τελευταῖον οὐθὲν ᾤετο δεῖν λέγειν ἀλλὰ τὸν δάκτυλον ἐκίνει μόνον, καὶ Ἡρακλείτῳ ἐπετίμα εἰπόντι ὅτι δις τῷ αὐτῷ ποταμῷ οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμβῆναι: αὐτὸς γὰρ ᾤετο οὐδ’ ἅπαξ.

(Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, Ross, W. D. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924, 4.1010a10-15
English translation from Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vols. 17, 18, London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1933)

The most probable reason for Cratylus being the main character of Plato's dialogue can be inferred also from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "In his youth Plato first became acquainted with Cratylus and the Heraclitean doctrines—that the whole sensible world is always in a state of flux."³⁵

First, Hermogenes states that individual but consistent ways of naming things are correct for those individual persons, however false these ways may seem to others or even to the whole of a community (see *App. Crat.* 385 *d-e*).

The remark on speakers of languages different from Greek is not trivial at all. Greek philosophers paid little attention to other languages neither in the remaining whole of this dialogue, nor in other works. This is surprising in the light of the scrupulous investigation of different questions and can hardly be explained only with their attitude of cultural superiority. The falsity of all knowledge outside of the Greek world is nevertheless tacitly present in this work and Hermogenes' point remains unheard by most philosophers of the following centuries. In fact, Socrates easily convinces him that if sentences can be true or false, then their constituents must be also true or false (see *App. Crat.* 385*b-d*).

This is already a very Platonist argument for truthfulness, or any other concepts, can pervade each level of a structure only if they are pure pre-existent ideas independent from human cognition. And as it seems, the smallest particles in speech for Plato were not phonemes, not even morphemes that are regarded today as the smallest meaningful parts, but whole words.

³⁵ ἐκ νέου τε γὰρ συνήθης γενόμενος πρῶτον Κρατύλῳ καὶ ταῖς Ἡρακλειτείοις δόξαις, ὡς πάντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν αἰεὶ ῥεόντων καὶ ἐπιστήμης περὶ αὐτῶν οὐκ οὔσης
(Aristotle 1924, 1.987a
English translation from Aristotle 1933, Vols. 17, 18)

Socrates goes on stating that speech is an action.³⁶ Actions in turn are performed with their proper instruments as craftsmen work with their tools. “A name is, then, an instrument of teaching and of separating reality, as a shuttle is an instrument of separating the web.”³⁷ And if the law-giver (νομοθέτης) forms words, he must do it according to the instructions of their users. The users are no other people than the διαλεκτικοί, whose due needs arise from nature.

The idea of a law-giver that defines names is almost self-evident in Greek considering the unmistakable similarity between the words law (νόμος) and name (ὄνομα). But one cannot help asking if this conviction was widely accepted in Ancient Greece, if Cratylus himself (the historical person and not Plato’s character) believed it, which would of course contribute to his image. In any case, Socrates convinces Hermogenes about the existence of an original νομοθέτης, an idea that later becomes labelled as θέσις (imposing) and attacked by Epicurean philosophers for whom the problem was not whether names reflect the essence of things but whether language was natural or artificial:

S: Do you think every man is a lawgiver, or only he who has the skill?

H: He who has the skill.

S: Then it is not for every man, Hermogenes, to give names, but for him who may be called the name-maker; and he, it appears, is the lawgiver, who is of all the artisans among men the rarest.³⁸

³⁶ S: Then is not naming also a kind of action, if speaking is a kind of action concerned with things?

H: Yes.

Σ: οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸ ὀνομάζειν πράξις [τίς] ἐστίν, εἴπερ καὶ τὸ λέγειν πράξις τις ἦν περὶ τὰ πράγματα;

Ἐ: ναί.

Plato. *Platonis Opera*, Burnet, J. ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903, Κρατύλος 387c

English translation from Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 12, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1921)

³⁷ ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστίν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας ὥσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 388 b-c

English translation from Plato 1921)

³⁸ Σ: νομοθέτου ἄρα ἔργῳ χρῆσεται ὁ διδασκαλικὸς ὅταν ὀνόματι χρῆται;

Ἐ: δοκεῖ μοι.

Socrates thus successfully makes it to the solution of the φύσις-νόμος debate and can draw the conclusion: “Cratylus is right in saying that names belong to things by nature and that not every one is an artisan of names.”³⁹ Platonism could not have found any other answer but one based on absolute ideas. Yet as it will be seen in the overwhelming majority of the dialogue that follows, Plato’s epistemological pessimism is explicitly developed; so even if there are absolute things their accessibility for us is more than problematic.

Hermogenes, half-content with Socrates’ argumentation, asks further:

“I think you would be more likely to convince me, if you were to show me just what it is that you say is the natural correctness of names.”⁴⁰ Socrates starts an investigation on proper names in Homer’s Iliad. Comparing names that were given to the same hero, Hector (Astyanax, Scamandrius), he finds first that some express his character better than others (see *App. Crat.* 392c-d). Namely those names that grasp the heritable trait his ancestors had:

Σ: νομοθέτης δέ σοι δοκεῖ πᾶς εἶναι ἀνὴρ ἢ ὁ τὴν τέχνην ἔχων;

Ἐ: ὁ τὴν τέχνην.

Σ: οὐκ ἄρα παντὸς ἀνδρός, ὃν Ἑρμόγενης, ὄνομα θέσθαι [ἐστὶν] ἀλλὰ τινος ὀνοματουργοῦ: οὗτος δ’ ἐστίν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὁ νομοθέτης, ὃς δὴ τῶν δημιουργῶν σπανιώτατος ἐν ἀνθρώποις γίγνεται.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 388e-389a)

English translation from Plato 1921)

³⁹ Κρατύλος ἀληθῆ λέγει λέγων φύσει τὰ ὀνόματα εἶναι τοῖς πράγμασι, καὶ οὐ πάντα δημιουργὸν ὀνομάτων εἶναι

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 390d-e)

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁴⁰ Ἐ: ἀλλὰ δοκῶ μοι ὧδε ἂν μάλλον πιθέσθαι σοι, εἴ μοι δείξειας ἥντινα φῆς εἶναι τὴν φύσει ὀρθότητα ὀνόματος.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 391a)

English translation from Plato 1921)

A king's son will probably be a king, a good man's good, a handsome man's handsome, and so forth; the offspring of each class will be of the same class, unless some unnatural birth takes place; so they should be called by the same names.⁴¹

It turns out, too, that gender differences may account for the differing degrees of correctness in naming, for women are generally speaking less wise than men. On the other hand different things can also be called in different names in an equally proper manner. If various words have exactly the same meaning (intension in modern terminology), then they have the same value of truthfulness: "So, for instance, in the names we were just discussing, Astyanax and Hector, none of the letters is the same, except T, but nevertheless they have the same meaning."⁴²

This is followed by an endless series of folk-etymology. To what extent did Plato himself take seriously this kind of speculation is controversial and the concrete content of etymological investigations is rather irrelevant to the topic of this work, but one case is worth of attention because of the general statement about the cause of language change. Socrates asserts that sounds are inserted into words for the sake of ornamentation: "So he called the lord of this power Poseidon, regarding him as a foot-bond (ποσίδεσμος). The e is inserted perhaps for euphony."⁴³ Neither formal rules, nor functional considerations are surmised by Plato.

⁴¹ οὐκοῦν καὶ περὶ βασιλέως ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος; ἔσται γάρ ποτε ἐκ βασιλέως βασιλεύς, καὶ ἐξ ἀγαθοῦ ἀγαθός, καὶ ἐκ καλοῦ καλός, καὶ τὰλλα πάντα οὕτως, ἐξ ἐκάστου γένους ἕτερον τοιοῦτον ἔκγονον, ἐὰν μὴ τέρας γίγνηται: κλητέον δὴ ταῦτά ὀνόματα.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 394a

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁴² ὥσπερ ὁ νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν, "Ἀστυάναξ" τε καὶ "Ἑκτωρ" οὐδὲν τῶν αὐτῶν γραμμάτων ἔχει πλὴν τοῦ ταῦ, ἀλλ' ὅμως ταῦτόν σημαίνει.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 394b-c

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁴³ τὸν οὖν ἄρχοντα τῆς δυνάμεως ταύτης θεὸν ὠνόμασεν "Ποσειδῶνα," ὡς "ποσίδεσμον" ὄντα: τὸ δὲ Ε ἔγκειται ἴσως εὐπρεπείας ἕνεκα.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 402e

English translation from Plato 1921)

Another etymological argument pertains to a new, thoroughly discussed topic of the dialogue: whether words express static state or dynamism. The essential role of motion taught by Cratylus' master, Heraclitus is investigated and assessed later in the conversation, but first appears in the analysis of two participles: 'being' (ὄν) and 'going' (ιόν), which differ only in one letter; thus supporting Heraclitus' view that the common principle in everything is motion.⁴⁴

Etymologising is limited for one reaches very soon the atomic constituents of language. These simplest words cannot be further analysed, so there must be another way to find their origins. And this introduces the idea of onomatopoeia: sounds represent basic characteristics or ideas in nature (see *App. Crat.* 422d-e and 423b). Socrates therefore explains the meaning of most of the letters in the Greek alphabet.⁴⁵

Cratylus then touches upon another philosophical question. He says that each word must be correct; otherwise it is not a word. This would mean in turn that lying is impossible, a problem that longly haunted Plato's imagination. A detailed discussion was recorded in *Euthydemus* and the solution was finally given in the *Sophist*, whose hero is not even Socrates but a stranger. Here it is Cratylus who comes up with it:

S: However, tell me this: Do you think it is possible to speak falsehood, but not to say it?

C: Neither to speak nor to say it.

S: Nor utter it or use it as a form of address? For instance, if some one should meet you in hospitable fashion, should grasp your hand and say, "Well met, my friend from Athens, son of Smicrion, Hermogenes," would he be saying or speaking or uttering or addressing these words not to you, but to Hermogenes—or to nobody?

C: I think, Socrates, the man would be producing sounds without sense.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ S: The words ὄν and οὐσία agree with ἀληθής with the loss of iota, for they mean going.

Σ: τὸ δὲ ὄν καὶ ἡ οὐσία ὁμολογεῖ τῷ ἀληθεῖ, τὸ ἰῶτα ἀπολαβόν: ἰὸν γὰρ σημαίνει.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 421b-c

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁴⁵ Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 426d-427c

⁴⁶ Σ: ὁμῶς μέντοι εἰπέ μοι τοσόνδε: πότερον λέγειν μὲν οὐ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ψευδῆ, φάναι δέ;

But Socrates is on a different opinion. For him there cannot be ‘correct’ words. Correctness would mean a perfect correspondence between things and their images. But if it were so, then how could one tell images apart from reality? Words like images, therefore, cannot bear all the characteristics of the things they stand for, and it is sufficient if they are of the same type (τύπος) (see *App. Crat.* 432b-433a). Socrates then refutes the Heraclitean (motion-based) views on the nature of names by pointing out that there are “motionless” words (see *App. Crat.* 435d-437d).

It is at this point that Cratylus’ *glottogenetic* theory is introduced. He suggests a superhuman law-giver, which seems to be the only logical solution of the contradiction Socrates presents:

S: How can we assert that they gave names or were lawgivers with knowledge, before any name whatsoever had been given, and before they knew any names, if things cannot be learned except through their names?

C: I think the truest theory of the matter, Socrates, is that the power which gave the first names to things is more than human, and therefore the names must necessarily be correct...⁴⁷

Once again the shortage of our sources do not let us decide whether Cratylus really believed in such a supernatural being or it was Plato’s polemic trick to show the

Κ: οὐ μοι δοκεῖ οὐδὲ φάναι.

Σ: οὐδὲ εἰπεῖν οὐδὲ προσεῖπεῖν; οἷον εἴ τις ἀπαντήσας σοι ἐπὶ ξενίας, λαβόμενος τῆς χειρὸς εἴποι: “χαῖρε, ὦ ξένη Ἀθηναῖε, υἱὲ Σμικρίωνος Ἑρμογένες,” οὗτος λέξειεν ἂν ταῦτα ἢ φαίη ἂν ταῦτα ἢ εἴποι ἂν ταῦτα ἢ προσεῖποι ἂν οὕτω σὲ μὲν οὐ, Ἑρμογένῃ δὲ τόνδε; ἢ οὐδένα;

Κ: ἐμοὶ μὲν δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἄλλως ἂν οὗτος ταῦτα φθέγξασθαι.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 429d-e

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁴⁷ Σ: τίνα οὖν τρόπον φῶμεν αὐτοὺς εἰδότας θέσθαι ἢ νομοθέτας εἶναι, πρὶν καὶ ὅτι οὖν ὄνομα κεῖσθαι τε καὶ ἐκείνους εἰδέναι, εἴπερ μὴ ἔστι τὰ πράγματα μαθεῖν ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐκ τῶν ὀνομάτων;

Κ: οἶμαι μὲν ἐγὼ τὸν ἀληθέστατον λόγον περὶ τούτων εἶναι, ὦ Σώκρατες, μείζω τινὰ δύναμιν εἶναι ἢ ἀνθρωπείαν τὴν θεμένην τὰ πρῶτα ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγμασιν, ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι αὐτὰ ὀρθῶς ἔχειν...

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 438b-c

English translation from Plato 1921)

consequences of the argumentation he opposed himself. Socrates refutes the idea that wisdom created perfectly correct words and the final conclusion about the impossibility of finding the truth through words, however natural they might be, leads directly to Plato's idealism.

Then since the names are in conflict, and some of them claim that they are like the truth, and others that they are, how can we decide, and upon what shall we base our decision? Certainly not upon other names differing from these, for there are none. No, it is plain that we must look for something else, not names, which shall show us which of these two kinds are the true names, which of them, that is to say, show the truth of things.⁴⁸

It is through the unchanging and unmoving ideas that truth can be grasped, but certainly not through words.⁴⁹ Additionally to the last observation, Matthews also remarks that although the *Cratylus* is full of etymologies, it is practiced in a quite ambiguous way. To what extent was the whole work a parody of contemporary speculations is hard to assess, but certainly not all kinds of etymological considerations are taken seriously by Plato.⁵⁰ It may well be also the case that the character of the νομοθέτης is just a common symbolic figure of Plato's time represented in the dialogue only for the sake of argumentation. If it were so, the Epicureans would misunderstand Plato or would argue against those who have understood these words literally.

⁴⁸ Σ: ὀνομάτων οὖν στασιασάντων, καὶ τῶν μὲν φασκόντων ἑαυτὰ εἶναι τὰ ὅμοια τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, τῶν δ' ἑαυτὰ, τίνι ἔτι διακρινούμεν, ἢ ἐπὶ τί ἐλθόντες; οὐ γὰρ που ἐπὶ ὀνόματά γε ἕτερα ἄλλα τούτων: οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ δῆλον ὅτι ἄλλ' ἅττα ζητητέα πλὴν ὀνομάτων, ἃ ἡμῖν ἐμφανιεῖ ἄνευ ὀνομάτων ὁπότερα τούτων ἐστὶ ἀληθῆ, δείξαντα δῆλον ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῶν ὄντων.

(Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 438d)

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁴⁹ Matthews, P., 'Greek and Latin Linguistics' In Lepschy, G. ed., *History of Linguistics, Volume II: Classical and Medieval Linguistics*, London, 1994, 21

⁵⁰ Ibid. 18

Γ - ΦΥΣΙΣ or ΝΟΜΟΣ and ANALOGIA or ANOMALIA

The *Cratylus* as the first detailed linguistic treatise immediately raised many questions and thus thematised the discourse of this new discipline. An interesting set was introduced in the previous chapter. But apart from the main subject of this work, at least an outline of the popular topics ought to be investigated in order to understand what determined the discourse of posterity. Consequently several ancient authors will be mentioned in this chapter from Aristotle to Varro. The goal is not to give a full account of antique linguistic philosophy, but rather to give a flavour of how it was practiced and thematised. And since it is beyond the possibilities of such a work to survey the whole of antique linguistics, primarily the two aforesaid main debates will be analysed. Therefore some interesting questions of ancient philosophy of language will not be possible to inspect on the following pages. The impossibility of lying and contradicting, introduced by Plato in the *Cratylus*, discussed in the *Euthydemus* and solved in the *Sophist*, might remind one of the topics of the early 20th century logics. The question of animal communication, occurring in the Epicurean discourse (see next chapter), but also pondered by Plutarch, Philo of Alexandria and Eusebius, remains a topic in the early modern discourse (e.g. in Condillac) and is still an important one in cognitive linguistics.

Origen in his apology against Celsus summarises the opinions of three influential antique philosophical traditions on the issue of φύσις and νόμος. Although it would not be clear without other accounts, this passage is an important, brief review:

Now, in answer to this, we have to remark that this involves a deep and mysterious subject—that, viz., respecting the nature of names: it being a question whether, as Aristotle thinks, names were bestowed by arrangement, or, as the Stoics hold, by nature; the first words being imitations of things, agreeably to which the names were formed, and in conformity with which they introduce certain principles of etymology; or whether, as Epicurus teaches (differing in this from the Stoics), names were given by nature,— the first men having uttered certain words varying with the circumstances in which they found themselves.⁵¹

Aristotle

Despite being a disciple of Plato, who argued for φύσις, Aristotle supports the νόμος theory. The interpretation of his work *On interpretation* (Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας) is extremely difficult. First of all, because his concepts are so alien to the modern reader, that for the sake of proper understanding a third level should be introduced (a second meta-level beyond everyday language and his explanatory meta-language). Moreover, his discussion mixes the different meanings of words using them both in the terminological and the casual sense. Finally, the book is about interpretation and

⁵¹ Λεκτέον δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο ὅτι ἐμπίπτει εἰς τὸ προκείμενον λόγος βαθὺς καὶ ἀπόρρητος, ὁ περὶ φύσεως ὀνομάτων· πότερον, ὡς οἶεται Ἀριστοτέλης, θέσει εἰσὶ τὰ ὀνόματα ἢ, ὡς νομίζουσιν οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς, φύσει, μιμουμένων τῶν πρώτων φωνῶν τὰ πράγματα, καθ' ὧν τὰ ὀνόματα, καθὸ καὶ στοιχεῖά τινα <τῆς> ἐτυμολογίας εἰσάγουσιν, ἢ, ὡς διδάσκει Ἐπίκουρος, ἑτέρως ἢ ὡς οἴονται οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Στοᾶς, φύσει ἐστὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ἀπορρήξαντων τῶν πρώτων ἀνθρώπων τινὰς φωνὰς κατὰ τῶν πραγμάτων.

(Origenes, *Origenes Werke*, Hinrichs, J. C. ed., Leipzig: Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1899, Κατὰ Κέλσου I. 24

English translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Roberts, A. - J. Donaldson - A. C. Coxe eds., Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885)

explains partly the problems one faces while reading it. Nevertheless, Aristotle's opinion on the nature of names at least is easy to find.

A name is therefore a sound significant by composition, independent of time, whose no part is meaningful in itself. ... Therefore by composition, because no name exists by nature, but when it becomes a symbol. Even when the inarticulate sounds, such as those of animals, seem to be something; none of them are names.⁵²

Engels argues that the expression *κατὰ συνθήκην* should not be understood as 'by convention', but as 'by composition'. He investigates the possible meanings in details⁵³ and draws this conclusion adding that the difference rises from the fact the Aristotle was interested in logics and the initial and individual aspects of things, while Plato considered language and its final and social aspect. But if the latter expression is replaced by the former in the passage above, Aristotle's opinion is even clearer. Be that as it may, the symbolic nature of language is obvious from these words, which means that Aristotle do not share his master's views on the natural character of language.

Epicureans

The epicurean opinion on φύσις and νόμος is quite different. Although they contend that first names were originally natural phenomena, they do not consider this issue very strictly and they hypothesise a conventional phase later in the history of

⁵² Ὄνομα μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ φωνὴ σημαντικὴ κατὰ συνθήκην ἄνευ χρόνου, ἥς μὴδὲν μέρος ἐστὶ σημαντικὸν κεχωρισμένον· ... τὸ δὲ κατὰ συνθήκην, ὅτι φύσει τῶν ὀνομάτων οὐδὲν ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅταν γένηται σύμβολον· ἐπεὶ δηλοῦσί γέ τι καὶ οἱ ἀγράμματοι ψόφοι, οἷον θηρίων, ὧν οὐδὲν ἐστὶν ὄνομα.

(Aristotle, *Aristotelis categoriae et liber de interpretatione*, Minio-Paluello, L. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949, 416a

English translation by the author)

⁵³ Engels, J., 'Origine, sens et survie du terme boécien «secundum placitum»' *Vivarium*, 1963, Vol 1., No. 2, 87-102

language. The most important point here is that naturalness does not mean for Epicureans an isomorphic connection between the words of language and external reality. It is simply the lack of a voluntary imposition (θέσις). For what is absurd for them, and this is what they attack and discuss in details, is the idea of an initial inventor. First in history they are less interested in the essence of language, its relatedness to senses and the world, but in the historical process it came to be. In modern terms, the Epicureans are more paleolinguists than psycholinguists. Therefore they have the most sophisticated *glottogenetic* opinions in the Antiquity, but for this reason these speculations are to be investigated in the next chapter.

Stoics

Contrary to Aristotle, the Stoics hypothesise a natural relationship between expressions and meanings. Their theory of perception summarised in Diogenes Laertius's quotation of Diocles the Magnesian emphasises representation (φαντασία):

The Stoics agree to put in the forefront the doctrine of presentation and sensation, inasmuch as the standard by which the truth of things is tested is generically a presentation, and again the theory of assent and that of apprehension and thought, which precedes all the rest, cannot be stated apart from presentation. For presentation comes first; then thought, which is capable of expressing itself, puts into the form of a proposition that which the subject receives from a presentation.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ἀρέσκει τοῖς Στωικοῖς τὸν περὶ φαντασίας καὶ αἰσθήσεως προτάττειν λόγον, καθότι τὸ κριτήριον, ᾧ ἡ ἀλήθεια τῶν πραγμάτων γινώσκεται, κατὰ γένος φαντασία ἐστί, καὶ καθότι ὁ περὶ συγκαταθέσεως καὶ ὁ περὶ καταλήψεως καὶ νοήσεως λόγος, προάγων τῶν ἄλλων, οὐκ ἄνευ φαντασίας συνίσταται. προηγεῖται γὰρ ἡ φαντασία, εἴθ' ἡ διάνοια ἐκλαλητικὴ ὑπάρχουσα, ὃ πάσχει ὑπὸ τῆς φαντασίας, τοῦτο ἐκφέρει λόγῳ.

(Diogenes Laertius, VII. 49

English translation from *ibid.*)

From this empiricist psychological perspective it follows that words reflect external things represented in the mind of the speaker. Because of this strong connection between reality and language, etymology is a primary concern for Stoics. Origen records it in *Contra Celsus*, quoted above, that Stoics develop sophisticated etymological principles based on their assumption. Indeed, etymology flourished in Stoic philosophy, for Varro in the 1st century BC records the interest of Chrysippus of Soli, Antipater of Tarsus and others in how words change: “all these write that words in some instances take on letters, in others lose them, in still others change them”⁵⁵

Diogenes Laertius also records that “Chrysippus ... defines Dialectic as the science dealing with ... signs and things signified.”⁵⁶ Robins compares⁵⁷ this to the Saussurian language theory and indeed this parallel cannot be denied in the light of the following excerpt where Diogenes Laertius mentions another Saussurian phenomenon, ambiguity:

Verbal ambiguity arises when a word properly, rightfully, and in accordance with fixed usage denotes two or more different things, so that at one and the same time we may take it in several distinct senses: *e.g.* in Greek, where by the same verbal expression may be meant in the one case that “A house has three times” fallen, in the other that “a dancing-girl” has fallen.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ qui omnes verba ex verbis ita declinari scribunt, ut verba litteras alia assumant, alia mittant, alia commutent

(Varro, *On the Latin Language*, Page, T. E. ed., London: William Heinemann, 1963, VI. 2
English translation from *ibid.*)

⁵⁶ Διαλεκτική δέ ἐστιν ... ἐπιστήμη ... ὡς ὁ Χρύσιππος φησι, περὶ σημαίνοντα καὶ σημαινόμενα.
(Diogenes Laertius, VII. 62
English translation from *ibid.*)

⁵⁷ Robins 1990, 19

⁵⁸ Ἀμφιβολία δέ ἐστι λέξεις δύο ἢ καὶ πλείονα πράγματα σημαίνουσα λεκτικῶς καὶ κυρίως καὶ κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ἔθος, ὥσθ' ἅμα τὰ πλείονα ἐκδέξασθαι κατὰ ταύτην τὴν λέξιν: οἷον Αὐλητρίως πέπτωκε: δηλοῦνται γὰρ δι' αὐτῆς τὸ μὲν τοιοῦτον, Οἰκία τρεῖς πέπτωκε, τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον, Αὐλήτρια πέπτωκε.
(Diogenes Laertius, VII. 62
English translation from *ibid.*)

Overcoming the difference in emphasis this instance merits recognised as an excellent example of the invariance of scientific ideas. For more than two millennia later, Saussure describes the signified-signifier dichotomy and linguistic ambiguity in the same passage as highly important characteristics of human languages.

Language is radically powerless to defend itself against the forces which from one moment to the next are shifting the relationship between the signified and the signifier. This is one of the consequences of the arbitrary nature of the sign... Unlike language, other human institutions ... are all based ... on the natural relations of things... Language is limited by nothing in the choice of means, for apparently nothing would prevent the associating of any idea whatsoever with just any sequence of sounds.⁵⁹

Coming back to the main argument, conventionalism seems to triumph in the Middle Ages. Augustine (3rd and 4th centuries AD) and Boethius (5th and 6th centuries AD) both take the conventionalist side.⁶⁰ Dante in his apology of the vernacular states that “This signal ... is perceptible, in that it is a sound, and yet also rational, in that this sound, according to convention, is taken to mean something.”⁶¹ But if the language theory in his *Paradiso* is under investigation, even an Epicurean-like viewpoint can be

⁵⁹ Une langue est radicalement impuissante à se défendre contre les facteurs qui déplacent d'instant en instant le rapport du signifié et du signifiant. C'est une des conséquences de l'arbitraire du signe. Les autres institutions humaines ... sont toutes fondées, à des degrés divers, sur les rapports naturels des choses... Jelačić detests Müsli. La langue, au contraire, n'est limitée en rien dans le choix de ses moyens, car on ne voit pas ce qui empêcherait d'associer une idée quelconque avec une suite quelconque de sons. (Saussure, F., *Cours de Linguistique générale*, Paris, 1949, 156-7)

English translation from Saussure, F., *Course in General Linguistics*, Bally, Ch. – A. Sechehaye eds., New York, 1959)

⁶⁰ Engels, 102-110

⁶¹ Hoc equidem signum ... sensuale quid est, in quantum sonus est; rationale vero, in quantum aliquid significare videtur ad placitum.

(Dante Alighieri, *Il trattato 'De Vulgari Eloquentia'*, Rajna, P. ed., Firenze: Società Dantesca Italiana, 1960, I.i.3)

English translation from Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, Botterill, S. ed. and trans., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

recognised: “It is the work of nature man should speak but, if in this way or in that, nature leaves to you, allowing you to choose at your own pleasure.”⁶²

This arbitrary convention suggests then that language can be reformed and the seekers of a perfect language tried to fix the *confusio linguarum* either by creating a global language or by “restoring” the original isomorphism of language and things. The latter program is clearly rooted in the Platonic φύσις. Until the 18th century AD the possibility of an *a priori* language was a strong idea. It is only after Leibniz and Locke and through the Encyclopaedist experiences of organising knowledge that philosophers realise that language and cognition are inseparable and influenced by one another; furthermore that language and thus cognition is in continuous change. Consequently a language-independent grammar of cognition as a heroic endeavour of the Enlightenment was abandoned.⁶³

Etymology and onomatopoeia

Unfortunately, Varro's theoretical discussion of etymology in the first four books of his *De Lingua Latina* is lost, although his extensive practical considerations are retained. Despite his shrewd investigation and valuable findings touched upon in the next subsection, he fails to distinguish synchronic and diachronic etymology, and thus he makes insightful observations in the former, but he hardly contributes to the latter.⁶⁴

Our sources are scarce for reconstructing its actual history, but it is clear from indirect sources that etymologising inference to the origin of words is a popular topic

⁶² Opera naturale è ch'uom favella; ma così o così, natura lascia poi fare a voi secondo che v'abbella. (Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, Petrocchi, G. ed., Milano: Mondadori, 1966-67, Paradiso XVI, 130-132 English translation from Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, Hollander, R. - J. Hollander eds. and trans., New York: Anchor Books, 2008)

⁶³ Eco, U., *The Search for the Perfect Language*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, 288-292

⁶⁴ Robins 1990, 57

throughout late Antiquity.⁶⁵ Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* mentions a probably typical type of etymology: sound symbolism. If Plato in the *Cratylus* is to ridicule these speculations, than he does not get the message through, for Nigidius apparently takes these considerations quite seriously:

When we say vos ... we make a movement of the mouth suitable to the meaning of the word; for we gradually protrude the tips of our lips and direct the impulse of the breath towards those with whom we are speaking. But on the other hand, when we say nos ... we do not produce the word with a powerful forward impulse of the voice, nor with the lips protruded, but we restrain our breath and our lips, so to speak, within ourselves. The same thing happens in the words tu ..., ego ..., tibi ... and mihi. ... The same principle that we have noted in our own speech applies also to Greek words.⁶⁶

This type of argument was long-lived and the onomatopœic origins of words were a popular topic later in the history of linguistics. Only in modern times it lost its appeal when the roots of actual languages were recognised to be out of reach for philologists. Finally Max Müller declared in 1861 that the sound symbolic origins of words are lost and only speculative.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Matthews, 24

⁶⁶ 'Vos' ... cum discimus, motu quodam oris conveniente cum ipsius verbi demonstratione utimur et labeas sensim primores emovemus ac spiritum atque animam porro versum et ad eos quibuscum sermocinamur intendimus. At contra cum dicimus 'nos', neque profuso intentoque flatu vocis neque proiectis labris pronuntiamus, sed et spiritum et labeas quasi intra nosmet ipsos coercemus. Hoc idem fit et in eo, quod dicimus 'tu,' 'ego' et 'tibi' et 'mihi'. ... Eadem ratio est in Graecis quoque vocibus, quam esse in nostris animadvertimus.

(Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, G. P. Goold ed., London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1982, 10.4 English translation from *ibid.*)

⁶⁷ Müller, F. M., *Lectures on the science of language*, London: Longmans, 1866, Lecture 9

Analogia – anomalia

The other long-lasting debate in antique linguistics is less vivid and mostly implicit in the literature. One early example is the *Of Anomalous Words or Phrases*, addressed to Dion, four books on Diogenes Laertius' list of the works of the Stoic Chrysippus.⁶⁸ But in the case of analogy and anomaly authors do not systematically answer to each others' arguments as they do it usually in religious or philosophical apologies and thus the debate is not explicitly discussed until Marcus Terentius Varro (active in the 1st century BC).

On one hand, Chrysippus and other Stoic philosophers emphasise anomalies, irregularities in language, on the other hand the Alexandrian grammarians assert that language is rather based on rules. Landendoen explains⁶⁹ that linguistics is assessed differently on the scale of understanding, too. In Hellenistic philosophy, he argues, there are four levels of acquaintance or understanding: *πειρία* – trial, *ἐμπειρία* – experience, *τέχνη* – art and *ἐπιστήμη* – acquaintance. Within this framework Stoics put language to the level of experience, while for the Alexandrians there exists an 'art of language' as suggested by the title of Dionysius Thrax's chef-d'oeuvre, the *Τέχνη γραμματική* from around 100 BC. This assumption is, however, problematic for the terms mentioned by Landendoen are not used consistently.⁷⁰ Landendoen also finds that these categories are more or less parallel with Chomsky's hierarchy⁷¹ for the

⁶⁸ Περὶ τῆς κατὰ τὰς λέξεις ἀνωμαλίας πρὸς Δίωνα δ' (Diogenes Laertius VII. 192
English translation from *ibid.*)

⁶⁹ Landendoen, D. T., 'A Note on the Linguistic Theory of M. Terentius Varro' *Foundations of Language*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1966, 33-36

⁷⁰ See Diogenes Laertius, VII. 62 quoted earlier

⁷¹ *The Structure of Language: Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, Fodor, J. - J. J. Katz eds., Englewood Cliffs, 1964, 62-79

evaluation of linguistic work. Chomsky's observational adequacy = ἐμπειρία, descriptive adequacy = τέχνη and explanatory adequacy = ἐπιστήμη.

Robins argues⁷² that Aristotle favours analogy while the Stoics anomaly. But later analogists are concerned more with literature and had normative motivations for finding morphological regularities for the preservation of the literary curriculum. Anomalists, in contrast, consider language as a natural capacity with all its irregularities. Some analogists even tried to reform and correct Greek language by "fixing" irregular declensions.

In his *De lingua Latina*, Varro distinguishes three parts of linguistics; however he refuses to discuss the first, which based on the original Latin of the following passage, seems to be rather the φύσις-νόμος problem than *glottogenesis*.

Speech is naturally divided into three parts...: its first part is how names were imposed upon things; its second, in what way the derivatives of these names have arrived at their differences; its third, how the words, when united with one another reasoningly, express an idea.⁷³

The problem of inflections is investigated in details throughout his work. According to Landendoen,⁷⁴ Varro is the first who asked questions that might raise language to the level of acquaintance. For Varro does not only recognise the infinite nature of language, but he makes a statement about all natural languages by finding that without this feature language could not be learned. Moreover, he gives a

⁷² Robins 1990, 23-26

⁷³ Quom oratio natura tripartita esset...: cuius prima pars, quemadmodum vocabula rebus essent imposita, secunda, quo pacto de his declinata in discrimina ierint, tertia, ut ea inter se ratione coniuncta sententiam efferant.

(Varro, VIII. 1

English translation from *ibid.*)

⁷⁴ Landendoen, *ibid.*

functional explanation of the phenomenon of inflection. He argues that its reasons are the potentiality of expressive richness and cognitive parsimony:

The origin of words are therefore two in number, and no more: imposition and inflection; the one is as it were the spring, the other the brook. Men have wished that imposed nouns should be as few as possible, that they might be able to learn them more quickly; but derivative nouns they have wished to be as numerous as possible, that all might the more easily say those nouns which they needed to use... Inflection has been introduced not only into Latin speech, but into the speech of all men, because it is useful and necessary; for if this system had not developed, we could not learn such a great number of words as we have learned — for the possible forms into which they are inflected are numerically unlimited — nor from those which we should have learned would it be clear what relationship existed between them so far as their meanings were concerned.⁷⁵

In his work Varro defines analogy in three ways. The analogy that “is directed toward the nature of the words”⁷⁶ and that “people ought to follow”⁷⁷ is the “like inflection of like words.”⁷⁸ That “which is directed to the actual use in speaking,”⁷⁹ and which “all the individuals in the people ought to follow”⁸⁰ is defined as “like inflection of like words, not inconsistent with common usage.”⁸¹ To these two he adds a third

⁷⁵ Duo igitur omnino verborum principia, imposition <et declinatio>, alterum ut fons, alterum ut rivus. Impositicia nomina esse voluerunt quam paucissima, quo citus ediscere possent, declinata quam plurima, quo facilius omnes quibus ad usum opus esset dicerent. ... Declinatio inducta in sermones non solum Latinos, sed omnium hominum utili et necessaria de causa: nisi enim ita esset factum, neque discere tantum numerum verborum possemus (infinite enim sunt naturae in quas ea declinantur) neque quae didicissemus, ex his, quae inter se rerum cognatio esset, appareret.

(Varro, VIII. 2

English translation from *ibid.*)

⁷⁶ derigitur ad naturam verborum (*Ibid.*, X. 4)

⁷⁷ sequi debet populus (*Ibid.*)

⁷⁸ verborum similium declinatio similis (*Ibid.*)

⁷⁹ quae derigitur ... ad usum loquendi (*Ibid.*)

⁸⁰ omnes singuli e poulo ... sequi debe[n]t (*Ibid.*)

⁸¹ verborum similium declination similis non repugnante consuetudine co[m]muni (*Ibid.*)

kind of analogy: by narrowing down the former definition with the limitation “within a certain range”⁸² he defines poetic analogy.

Varro inspects many kinds of inflections equally called *declinatio* in his time. One particular field of his interest is the derivation of words of different grammatical functions. He seems to want to account for the increase in vocabulary within the short timeframe hypothesised since the first speakers.⁸³ Varro also distinguishes natural analogies and voluntary analogies. It seems that the criterion for such a distinction is intentionality or consciousness. Voluntary analogies are “things on which men have imposed certain names, as Rome from Romulus;”⁸⁴ and natural are “those which are inflected for tenses or for cases from the imposed names, as genitive *Romuli*.”⁸⁵ This suggests that he invents the distinction between separate parts of speech or lexical entries (voluntary) and paradigmatic variations (natural). But the conscious element makes it different from the modern description of lexical novelties. In any case, the insightful observation makes it possible for Varro to draw an important conclusion: “in the voluntary derivations there is inconsistency, and in the natural derivations there is consistency,”⁸⁶ or put it differently, the derivation of new lexical entries show less regularity than paradigmatic variety.

Varro discovers another important phenomenon. He recognises pragmatic reasons in the semantic sophistication of different words and realising parsimony again he points towards general psychological processes.

⁸² ex quadam parte (Ibid.)

⁸³ Robins 1990, 59

⁸⁴ quibus homines vocabula imposuerint rebus quaedam
(Varro, IX. 27

English translation from ibid.)

⁸⁵ ab impositis vocabulis quae inclinantur in tempora aut in casus (Ibid.)

⁸⁶ in voluntariis declinationibus inconstantia est, in naturalibus Constantia (Ibid.)

To this we say that although the object is basic for the character of all speech, the words do not succeed in reaching the object if it has not come into our use; therefore equus ... and equa are said, but not corva beside corvus, because in that case the factor of unlike nature is without use to us. But for this reason some things were formerly named otherwise than they are now: for then all doves, male and female, were called columbae, because they were not in that domestic use in which they are now, and now, on the other hand, because we have come to make a distinction on account of their uses as domestic fowl, the male is called columbus and the female columba.⁸⁷

Varro can be regarded as the first grammarian to openly discuss the analogy-anomaly debate, but he is also the one who comes up with a feasible solution. It follows logically from his assumptions that he finds analogy and anomaly equally important in language.

For Regularity is sprung from a certain usage in speech, and from this usage likewise is sprung Anomaly. Therefore, since usage consists of unlike and like words and their derivative forms, neither Anomaly nor Regularity is to be cast aside, unless man is not of soul because he is of body and of soul.⁸⁸

And after announcing a tie between analogists and anomalists, he argues for the practicality in language. "Since speech ... was introduced for the sake of utility, we should follow not that kind of speech which has likeness, but that which has utility."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ad haec dicimus, omnis orationis quamvis res naturae subsit, tamen si ea in usu<m> non pervenerit, eo non pervenire verba: ideo equus dicitur et equa: in usu enim horum discrimina; corvus et corva non, quod sine usu id, quod dissimilis natura<e>. Itaque quaedam al<i>ter olim ac nunc: nam et tum omnes mares et feminae dicebantur columbae, quod non erant in eo usu domestico quo nunc, <et nunc> contra, propter domesticos usus quod internovimus, appellatur mas columbus, femina columba.

(Ibid., IX. 38

English translation from ibid.)

⁸⁸ quod est nata ex quadam consuetudine analogia et ex hac <consuetudine item anomalia. Quare quod> consuetudo ex dissimilibus et similibus verbis eorumque declinationibus constat, neque anomalia neque analogia est repudianda, nisi si non est homo ex anima, quod est ex corpore et anima.

(Ibid., IX. 1

English translation from ibid.)

⁸⁹ Cum, ... utilitatis cause introducta sit oratio, sequendum non quae habebit similitudinem, sed quae utilitatem.

Varro is not the only person in the Antiquity who is interested in this topic, but he is definitely the one who achieves the deepest understanding of the problem. An otherwise important figure of history, Julius Caesar has his own opinion, too, although the assessment of his investigations is difficult. Very few of his grammatical considerations are retained; and what is available today can hardly be labelled even as τέχνη. Suetonius mentions that “he left besides a work in two volumes ‘On analogy’ ... he wrote ... about the time of the battle of Munda...”⁹⁰ Aulus Gellius knew about Caesar’s interests, because he also records it in the *Attic Nights*. But no rational arguments are indicated in either of these excerpts.

Gaius Caesar, in the second book of his treatise *On Analogy*, thinks that we should use *die* and *specie* as genitive forms.⁹¹

For Gaius Caesar ... in the work *On Analogy*, which he dedicated to Marcus Cicero, wrote that *harenae* is an improper term, since *harena* ought never to be used in the plural, any more than *caelum* and *triticum*. But on the other hand he thinks that *quadrigae* ... ought always to be used in the plural number, like *arma*, *moenia*, *comitia* and *inimicitiae*.⁹²

(Ibid., IX. 33

English translation from *ibid.*)

⁹⁰ Reliquit et “de Analogia” duos libros ... sub tempus Mundensis proelii fecit...

(*Suetonius With an English Translation*, Page, T. E. - E. Capps - W. H. Rouse - L. A. Post - E. H. Warmington eds., London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1951, *De Vita Caesarum, Divus Iulius*, 56
English translation from *ibid.*)

⁹¹ C. Caesar in libro De Analogia secundo “huius die” et “huius specie” dicendum putat.

(Aulus Gellius, 9.14.25

English translation from *ibid.*)

⁹² Gaius enim Caesar ... in libris, quos ad M. Ciceronem De Analogia conscripsit, ‘harenas’ vitiose dici existimat, quod ‘harena’ numquam multitudinis numero appellanda sit, sicuti neque ‘caelum’ neque ‘triticum’; contra autem ‘quadrigas,’ ... plurativo semper numero dicendas putat, sicut ‘arma’ et ‘moenia’ et ‘comitia’ et ‘inimicitias’.

(Ibid. 19.8

English translation from *ibid.*)

These are the outlines of the antique linguistic problems related to the origin of language. After the *Cratylus* primarily the φύσις-νόμος question dominates the debate and provides the framework of the discussion. But etymological reasoning refers, too, to the origins and the analogy-anomaly problem also seems to be fruitful to some degree. In summary, it is evident that antique “linguists” had both the daring and the intellectual independence to draw far-reaching conclusions.

After a brief survey of the discourse in which the *glottogenetic* problem was first discussed and the late-antique development of these philosophical considerations hopefully the contextual framework has been sufficiently described for a better understanding of the *glottogenetic* problem itself. The next chapter will take a look at all these antique speculations of any significance to investigate what kind of discourse was stopped at the dawn of Christianity and why was this interest lost for so many centuries.

Δ - ΓΛΟΤΤΟΓΕΝΕΣΙΣ

The next step in the investigation of the mediaeval ignorance of *glottogenesis* is to get to the discourse that *did* discuss it. The aim of this chapter is to gather and present all the *glottogenetic* ideas in classical Antiquity in the hope that these speculations show some interesting thoughts and will reveal the nature of the discussion before Christianity.

The Protagoras

The *Cratylus* goes into the origin of language and hypothesises an ancient name-giver. In another dialogue of Plato, the *Protagoras* it looks as if another mythological story were told about *glottogenesis*. Here Socrates defends the unity of virtue that is knowledge itself. The context in which language appears, similarly to many essays on the same topic written in the Early Modern Era is cultural evolution.

And now that man was partaker of a divine portion, he, in the first place, by his nearness of kin to deity, was the only creature that worshipped gods, and set himself to establish altars and holy images; and secondly, he soon was enabled by his skill to articulate speech and words, and to invent dwellings, clothes, sandals, beds, and the foods that are of the earth.⁹³

⁹³ ἐπειδὴ δὲ ὁ ἄνθρωπος θείας μετέσχε μοίρας, πρῶτον μὲν διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν ζώων μόνον θεοὺς ἐνόμισεν, καὶ ἐπεχείρει βωμούς τε ἰδρύεσθαι καὶ ἀγάλματα θεῶν: ἔπειτα φωνὴν καὶ ὀνόματα ταχὺ διηρθρώσατο τῇ τέχνῃ, καὶ οἰκῆσεις καὶ ἐσθῆτας καὶ ὑποδέσεις καὶ στρωμνάς καὶ τὰς ἐκ γῆς τροφὰς ἤρρετο.

(Plato 1903, Πρωταγόρας, 322a)

According to Protagoras, man started to talk because of [his] kinship with the god (διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ συγγένειαν). It looks as if he could only imagine *glottogenesis* within the framework of mythology. However, Guthrie warns the reader not to be deceived by the mythological adornment since the following explanations are completely rational. He asserts that Plato knew Protagoras well as a “religious agnostic” and that he did not distort Protagoras’ philosophy in the dialogue.⁹⁴ The context of this passage suggests that language was not in the focus of the argument, and some kind of *wisdom in the arts* (ἐντεχνος σοφία)⁹⁵ is discussed here, which makes people different from animals - thus starting social evolution.⁹⁶ In any case, the knowledge of Plato’s symbolic intentions was not traded down in Christianity, and on the surface at least, the *Protagoras* represents language, like Genesis, as a common capacity of the divine sphere and mankind. Despite the similarity this passage was not discussed later in a Christian environment certainly for its pagan view.

Epicurus

After Plato the Epicureans are most famous for their speculations on *glottogenesis*. However, their concept of naturalness is remarkably shifted: they assume that originally sounds are natural expressions of emotions and external impressions, for them the problem is the νομοθέτης. In Chilton’s phrasing “Epicurean doctrine on this subject (as with many other doctrines of Epicurus) was developed to contradict an idealist Platonic theory that there is by nature only one correct name for any thing, that this name is known only to the expert, and, therefore, only the expert must be allowed

English translation from Plato 1921)

⁹⁴ Guthrie, W. K. C., *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962-1981, Vol. 3, 64-65

⁹⁵ Plato 1903, Πρωταγόρας, 321d

⁹⁶ Matthews, 22

to assign names to objects.”⁹⁷ What would make names unnatural for Epicurus and his followers is a specific person who gives names to things voluntarily; the Epicurean φύσις means the lack of such a voluntary action.

Epicurus lived in the 4th and 3rd century BC and was taught by followers of Plato and Democritus. As in the case of Heraclitus, very few of his works survived in original and what we know about his teachings comes from fragments and later commentaries. Diogenes Laertius, however, preserved a letter of his written to Herodotus, in which the philosopher summarises his doctrines. Concerning the origin of language he formulates his thought, first in the history of linguistics, in a strikingly anti-religious and materialistic way. This is the kind of discourse that is picked up in the Early Modern Age but which is absolutely missing from the Middle Ages:

Hence even the names of things were not originally due to convention, but in the several tribes under the impulse of special feelings and special presentations of sense primitive man uttered special cries. The air thus emitted was moulded by their individual feelings or sense-presentations, and differently according to the difference of the regions which the tribes inhabited. Subsequently whole tribes adopted their own special names, in order that their communications might be less ambiguous to each other and more briefly expressed. And as for things not visible, so far as those who were conscious of them tried to introduce any such notion, they put in circulation certain names for them, either sounds which they were instinctively compelled to utter or which they selected by reason on analogy according to the most general cause there can be for expressing oneself in such a way.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Chilton, C. W., ‘The Epicurean Theory of the Origin of Language. A Study of Diogenes of Oenoanda, Fragments X and XI (W)’ *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1962, 160

⁹⁸ ‘Ὅθεν καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα ἐξ ἀρχῆς μὴ θέσει γενέσθαι, ἀλλ’ αὐτὰς τὰς φύσεις τῶν ἀνθρώπων καθ’ ἕκαστα ἔθνη ἴδια πάσχουσας πάθη καὶ ἴδια λαμβανούσας φαντάσματα ἰδίως τὸν ἀέρα ἐκπέμπειν στελλόμενον ὑφ’ ἐκάστων τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν φαντασμάτων, ὥς ἂν ποτε καὶ ἡ παρὰ τοὺς τόπους τῶν ἔθνων διαφορὰ ᾗ: ὕστερον δὲ κοινῶς καθ’ ἕκαστα ἔθνη τὰ ἴδια τεθῆναι πρὸς τὸ τὰς δηλώσεις ἥττον ἀμφιβόλους γενέσθαι ἀλλήλοις καὶ συντομωτέρως δηλουμένας: τινὰ δὲ καὶ οὐ συνορῶμενα πράγματα εἰσφέροντας τοὺς συνειδότες παρεγγυῆσαι τινὰς φθόγγους ἀναγκασθέντας ἀναφωνῆσαι, τοὺς δὲ τῷ λογισμῷ ἐλομένους κατὰ τὴν πλείστην αἰτίαν οὕτως ἐρμηνεύσαι. (Epicurus’ Letter to Herodotus in Diogenes Laertius 10.75-6 English translation from *ibid.*)

Bailey sees in the Epicurean version of *glottogenesis*, depicted in this passage, three stages: an initial phase when language is only a set of spontaneous vocal reactions to internal emotions and external impressions. This stage corresponds to the idea of φύσις. Next there is a common consent on deliberately assigned names to things, which can be called θέσις. Later, new things are introduced to human culture by invention or borrowing from other languages. This can happen either by φύσις (imitation of foreign words) or simply by conventional introduction, θέσις.⁹⁹

Diodorus Siculus

According to the demythologised Epicurean tradition, a purely natural explanation was developed by Diodorus Siculus, too, an Epicurean philosopher of the 1st century BC. Again, the main topic is the general cultural development of humankind.

Their words were confused, without any certain signification; but by degrees they spoke articulately, and making signs, and giving proper terms to every thing upon occasion. At length their discourse became intelligible to one another: but being dispersed into several parts of the world, they spoke not all the same language, every one using that dialect proper to the place, as his lot fell: upon which account there were various, and all sorts of languages in the world; and these associations of men first planted all the nations of the world.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Lucretius, *De rerum natura libri sex*, Bailey, C. ed., Oxford, 1947, Vol. 3, 1487

¹⁰⁰ τῆς φωνῆς δ' ἀσήμεναι καὶ συγκεχυμένης οὐσης ἐκ τοῦ κατ' ὀλίγον διαρθροῦν τὰς λέξεις, καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τιθέντας σύμβολα περὶ ἐκάστου τῶν ὑποκειμένων γνώριμον σφίσιν αὐτοῖς ποιῆσαι τὴν περὶ ἀπάντων ἐρμηνείαν. τοιούτων δὲ συστημάτων γινομένων καθ' ἅπασαν τὴν οἰκουμένην, οὐχ ὁμόφωνον πάντα εἶναι τὴν διάλεκτον, ἐκάστων ὡς ἔτυχε συνταξάντων τὰς λέξεις: διὸ καὶ παντοίους τε ὑπάρχειν χαρακτῆρας διαλέκτων καὶ τὰ πρῶτα γενόμενα συστήματα τῶν ἀπάντων ἐθνῶν ἀρχέγονα γενέσθαι.

(Diodorus Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica*, Vols. 1, 2, Bekker, I. - L. Dindorf - F. Vogel, Leipzig: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1888-1890, 1.8.3-4

What is most eye-catching in this short passage is not its Epicurean stance, but the *polygenetic* view it expresses. Although not in the Antiquity but since the Early Modern Age, *polygenetic* and *monogenetic* ideas on the origin of language have been discussed in a ceaseless debate. The Christian exclusivity of *monogeneticism* is not questioned of course until modern times and its narrative is based mostly on biblical terms.¹⁰¹ Therefore Diodorus' expressed *polygeneticism* is going to be quite uncommon for several centuries. Matthews suggests¹⁰² the comparison of this *polygeneticism* to Psammetichus' *monogeneticism* in Herodotus' account. According to his oral source, a priest of the god Ptah, the pharaoh who lived in the 7th century BC decided to find out which nation was the most ancient one and he did so by means of an interesting linguistic enquiry: he experimented on children. But this entails a presumption that he (and surely not him alone, but many of his contemporaries) held: language had appeared once with the most ancient people and was diffused in the world.

Psammetichus, when he was in no way able to learn by inquiry which people had first come into being, devised a plan by which he took two newborn children of the common people and gave them to a shepherd to bring up among his flocks. He gave instructions that no one was to speak a word in their hearing; they were to stay by themselves in a lonely hut, and in due time the shepherd was to bring goats and give the children their milk and do everything else necessary. Psammetichus did this, and gave these instructions, because he wanted to hear what speech would first come from the children, when they were past the age of indistinct babbling. And he had his wish; for one day, when the shepherd had done as he was told for two years, both children ran to him stretching out their hands and calling "Bekos!" as he opened the door and entered. When he first heard this, he kept quiet about it; but when, coming often and paying careful attention, he kept hearing this same word, he told his master at last and brought the children into the king's presence as required. Psammetichus then heard them himself, and asked to what language the word "Bekos" belonged; he found it to

English Translation from Diodorus Siculus, *The Historical Library of Diodorus the Sicilian in Fifteen Books to which are added the Fragments of Diodorus*, Valesius H. - I. Rhodomannus - F. Ursinus, London: J. Davis., 1814)

¹⁰¹ Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 73-116

¹⁰² Matthews, p. 112 n. 52

be a Phrygian word, signifying bread. Reasoning from this, the Egyptians acknowledged that the Phrygians were older than they.¹⁰³

Obviously this question was not interesting enough either for Herodotus, or Diodorus and the later antique authors, because despite its philosophical potentiality, none developed any deeper thoughts about it.

Lucretius

Θέσις on the other hand went on being ridiculed by Epicureans. A Roman thinker, Lucretius (1st century BC) gathered in a poetic way all the Epicurean knowledge on the universe in his book *On the nature of things* (De rerum natura). This included of course the origin of language, but with not too much philosophical originality.

But the diverse sounds of the tongue nature constrained men to utter, and use shaped the names of things, in a manner not far other than the very speechlessness of their tongue is seen to lead children on to gesture, when it makes them point out with the

¹⁰³ Ψαμμήτιχος δὲ ὡς οὐκ ἐδύνατο πυνθανόμενος πόρον οὐδένα τούτου ἀνευρεῖν, οἱ γενοῖατο πρῶτοι ἀνθρώπων, ἐπιτεχνᾶται τοιόνδε. παιδία δύο νεογνὰ ἀνθρώπων τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων δίδωσι ποιμένι τρέφειν ἐς τὰ ποιμνία τροφήν τινα τοιήνδε, ἐντειλάμενος μηδένα ἀντίον αὐτῶν μηδεμίαν φωνὴν ἰέναι, ἐν στέγῃ δὲ ἐρήμῃ ἐπ' ἑωυτῶν κέεσθαι αὐτά, καὶ τὴν ὥρην ἐπαγινέειν σφι αἶγας, πλήσαντα δὲ γάλακτος τᾶλλα διαπρήσσεσθαι: ταῦτα δὲ ἐποίησεν τε καὶ ἐνετέλλετο Ψαμμήτιχος θέλων ἀκοῦσαι τῶν παιδίων, ἀπαλλαχθέντων τῶν ἀσῆμων κνυζημάτων, ἦντινα φωνὴν ῥήξουσι πρώτην: τὰ περ ὧν καὶ ἐγένετο. ὥς γὰρ διέτης χρόνος ἐγεγόνεε ταῦτα τῷ ποιμένι πρήσσοντι, ἀνοίγοντι τὴν θύρην καὶ ἐσιόντι τὰ παιδία ἀμφοτέρω προσπίπτοντα βεκὸς ἐφώνεον, ὀρέγοντα τὰς χεῖρας. τὰ μὲν δὴ πρῶτα ἀκούσας ἥσυχος ἦν ὁ ποιμὴν: ὥς δὲ πολλάκις φοιτέοντι καὶ ἐπιμελομένω πολλὸν ἦν τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος, οὕτω δὲ σημήνας τῷ δεσπότη ἤγαγε τὰ παιδία κελεύσαντος ἐς ὅψιν τὴν ἐκείνου. ἀκούσας δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Ψαμμήτιχος ἐπυνθάνετο οἵτινες ἀνθρώπων βεκὸς τι καλέουσι, πυνθανόμενος δὲ εὗρισκε Φρύγας καλέοντας τὸν ἄρτον. οὕτω συνεχώρησαν Αἰγύπτιοι καὶ τοιοῦτω σταθμησάμενοι πηρήγματι τοὺς Φρύγας πρεσβυτέρους εἶναι ἑωυτῶν.

(Herodotus, *Herodotus with an English translation*, Godley, A. D. ed., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920, The Histories 2.2.2-5

English translation from *ibid.*)

finger the things that are before their eyes. For everyone feels to what purpose he can use his own powers.¹⁰⁴

There are, however, elements in the argumentation that foreshadow methods or approaches of modern science. Like Psammetichus, Lucretius also mentions children as primary sources for the search for the roots of language. But not only children are the subjects of investigation; animal behaviour and animal communication are crucial in Lucretius' reasoning. When pointing out the similarity between children's gestures and the fighting of calves, panthers and lion-cubs to support the last statement of the previous excerpt, he seems to see nature as a whole unit and attribute to humankind no exceptional features. It is an interesting fact, although not a mystery, that nearly 2000 years later, Darwin's ideas could still give rise to a global scandal.

Lucretius phrases the Epicurean standpoint of linguistics as follows: "Again, to think that anyone then parcelled out names to things, and that from him men learnt their first words, is mere folly."¹⁰⁵ But he also expresses several considerations for which the opposite position is untenable.

1. For why should he be able to mark off all things by words, and to utter the diverse sounds of the tongue, and at the same time others be thought unable to do this?¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ At varios lingae sonitus natura subegit
mittere et utilitas expressit nomina rerum,
non alia longe ratione atque ipsa videtur
protrahere ad gestum pueros infantia linguae,
cum facit ut digito quae sint praesentia monstrent.
sentit enim vis quisque suas quoad possit abuti.

(Lucretius, Vol. 1, 1028-1033

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹⁰⁵ proinde putare aliquem tum nomina distribuere
rebus et inde homines didicisse vocabula prima,
desiperest.

(*Ibid.*, Vol. 1, 1041-1043

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹⁰⁶ nam cur hic posset cuncta notare

2. Moreover, if others too had not used words to one another, whence was implanted in him the concept of their use; whence was he given the first power to know and see in his mind what he wanted to do?¹⁰⁷

3. Likewise one man could not avail to constrain many and vanquish them to his will, that they should be willing to learn all his names for things; nor indeed is it easy in any way to teach and persuade the deaf what it is needful to do; for they would not endure it, nor in any way suffer the sounds of words not comprehended to batter on their ears for long to no purpose.¹⁰⁸

How can one man invent language without any experience of its usefulness and without the biological capacity itself, which probably has to evolve through the very practice of some form of (proto-)language? And how can one man without language (and thus without a sophisticated society in which pure physical force is balanced by a variety of other factors) make so many others attribute any significance to vocal signs emitted by him. However philosophical these questions might seem, cognitive science and evolutionary linguistics are still walking in these shoes today. Of course the number of possibilities that empirical research can provide are nearly endless today, but thought experiments and this kind of theoretical refutation abound in the practice of the discipline.

vocibus et varios sonitus emittere linguae,
tempore eodem alii facere id non quisse putentur?
(Ibid., Vol. 1, 1043-1045)

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹⁰⁷ praeterea si non alii quoque vocibus usi
inter se fuerant, unde insita notities est
utilitatis et unde data est huic prima potestas,
quid vellet facere ut sciret animoque videret?
(Ibid., Vol. 1, 1046-1049)

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹⁰⁸ cogere item pluris unus victosque domare
non poterat, rerum ut perdiscere nomina vellent.
nec ratione docere ulla suadereque surdis,
quid sit opus facto, facilest; neque enim paterentur
nec ratione ulla sibi ferrent amplius auris
vocis inauditos sonitus obtundere frustra.
(Ibid., Vol. 1, 1050-1055)

English translation from *ibid.*)

Next, Lucretius gives a detailed account of the cries different animals give in different situations. The diversity of feelings, he concludes, gives rise to diverse sounds in a natural way: “Lastly, what is there so marvellous in this, if the human race, with strong voice and tongue, should mark off things with diverse sounds for diverse feelings?”¹⁰⁹ But as much as Lucretius sees the whole of nature as a continuum, he gives superiority to mankind over the animals presumably similarly to his contemporaries, and uses it to prove that the distinction of sounds should be a natural ability: “And so, if diverse feelings constrain animals, though they are dumb, to utter diverse sounds, how much more likely is it that mortals should then have been able to mark off things unlike with one sound and another!”¹¹⁰

Bailey sees a problem in that Lucretius seemingly omits Epicurus’ two latter stages of language evolution and describes only the first one.¹¹¹ Although concerning the word *utilitas* (use that “shaped the names of things”, in line 1029), he argues that the picture becomes somewhat blurred: “There is an element of consciousness in it, but it does not amount to a deliberate imposition of names *θέσει*.”¹¹² He reviews the earlier literature, too, and argues that Epicureans attacked the Platonic idea of a

¹⁰⁹ postremo quid in hac mirabile tantoperest re,
si genus humanum, cui vox et lingua vigeret,
pro vario sensu varia res voce notaret?

(Ibid., Vol. 1, 1056-1058

English translation from ibid.)

¹¹⁰ ergo si varii sensus animalia cogunt,
muta tamen cum sint, varias emittere voces,
quanto mortalis magis aequumst tum potuisse
dissimilis alia atque alia res voce notare!

(Ibid., Vol. 1, 1087-1090

English translation from ibid.)

¹¹¹ Ibid., Vol. 3, 1488

¹¹² Ibid., 1490

νομοθέτης found in Cratylus¹¹³ and not against Democritus' views recorded in Proclus commentaries.¹¹⁴

Manilius

Another description of the early forms of language came from Manilius (1st century AD) whose *Astronomica* finds the motivation of language in the need to communicate technical inventions:

then they took thought to divide their tasks and vied with each other in performing them, and whatever shrewd experience had found by trial, they joyfully communicated and surrendered to the common weal. Their barbarous speech, too, then subjected itself to laws of its own;¹¹⁵

So division of labour led to specialisation and inventions that people wanted to share with each other. The expression *leges suae* (laws of its own) in this context most probably suggests a gradual standardisation process driven by the pressure that the necessity of technical communication represented.

Next follows an enthusiastic hymn of technocratic praise. The technical (or even scientific?) development was seen by Manilius as a glorious march towards a better life. Mankind's intellectual excellence bore ever deeper knowledge, the understanding of the world around; and through technology life became easier, too.

¹¹³ Plato 1903, Κρατύλος 388e-389a (see *Chapter 2*)

¹¹⁴ Proclus Diadochus, *In Platonis Cratylum commentaria*, Pasquali, G. ed., Leipzig: Bibliotheca Teubneriana, 1908, XVI.

¹¹⁵ seducta in varias certarunt pectora curas
et, quodcumque sagax temptando repperit usus,
in commune bonum commentum laeta dederunt.

tunc et lingua suas accepit barbara leges,
(Manilius, *Astronomica*, Goold, G. P. ed., London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1977, I. 82-85
English translation from *ibid.*)

Thus, ever ready to learn, ingenuity by its endeavours overcame all obstacles. Nor did man's reason set bound or limit to its activities until it scaled the skies, grasped the innermost secrets of the world by its understanding of their causes, and beheld all that anywhere exists.¹¹⁶

In Manilius' narrative this "enlightenment" liberated the human race not from superstition, but from religion. For the "science" this new freedom offered is nothing more than astrology. Gods are dethroned not for the sake of some elaborate explanation of causal processes, and the fate of the universe gets only different but not less mysterious masters: the planets of the sky.

It freed men's minds from wondering at portents by wresting from Jupiter his bolts and power of thunder and ascribing to the winds the noise and to the clouds the flame. After reason had referred these several happenings to their true causes, it ventured beyond the atmosphere to seek knowledge of the neighbouring vastness of heaven and comprehend the sky as a whole; it determined the shapes and names of the signs, and discovered what cycles they experienced according to fixed law, and that all things moved to the will and disposition of heaven, as the constellations by their varied array assign different destinies.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ omnia conando docilis sollertia vicit.
nec prius imposuit rebus finemque modumque
quam caelum ascendit ratio cepitque profundam
naturam rerum causis viditque quod usquam est.
(Ibid. I. 95-98)

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹¹⁷ pervidit, solvitque animis miracula rerum
eripuitque Iovi fulmen viresque tonandi
et sonitum ventis concessit, nubibus ignem.
quae postquam in proprias deduxit singula causas,
vicinam ex alto mundi cognoscere molem
intendit totumque animo comprehendere caelum,
attribuitque suas formas, sua nomina signis,
quasque vices agerent certa sub sorte notavit
omniaque ad numen mundi faciemque moveri,
sideribus vario mutantibus ordine fata.

(Ibid. I. 103-112)

English translation from *ibid.*)

Diogenes of Oenoanda

A contemporary of Hadrianus (early 2nd century AD),¹¹⁸ Diogenes from the Lycian polis of Οἰνόανδα recorded Epicurus' philosophy in a quite unusual way: he covered about 2 800 ft² of a porch wall with inscriptions for the betterment of later generations. In his enthusiastic endeavour to help them in finding inner peace he rejects the mythical explanation of human skills: "So neither for these skills nor for any other do we need to bring in Athena or some other god; they all arose from their needs and chance happenings combined with time." (see *App. Fr. X. Col II., 4-11*)¹¹⁹ Although he does not know how much time he is referring to, this observation is just as modern as the 19th century: chance (περίπτωσις), needs (χρεῖαι) and time (χρόνος) are the cornerstones of natural selection. His criticism of an original law-giver corresponds very closely to that of Lucretius reviewed above and thus to Epicurus' philosophy, but he also enriches the argument with his own words and his own imagery of the teaching act:

And for the sounds of speech also (I mean the nouns and verbs of which men born from earth first made utterance) do not let us introduce Hermes as an instructor as some do-that is obviously idle talk-nor let us believe those philosophers who say that names were given to things by prescription and teaching so that men might have symbols of them for the sake of easy communication one with another. The idea is absurd, in fact it is more absurd than any absurdity as well as being quite impossible that anyone should bring together so many multitudes being only one himself-for as yet there were no kings nor even letters where there were no sounds-for as to these now for the mere collecting of these it needed a royal command for their collection to take place-and after bringing them together that he should instruct them like a schoolmaster, taking hold of a bough and touching each thing should say as he did so, "This is to be called stone, and this wood, and this man..."
(see *App. Fr. X. Col II. 11- Fr. XI. Col. I. 13*)

¹¹⁸ *The philosophical inscription of Diogenes of Oinoanda*, Smith, M. F. ed., Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996

¹¹⁹ English translation also from Chilton, 159-167

As seen above, antique *glottogenetic* speculations were clearly inspired in the context of the φύσις-νόμος debate, but the emphasis was shifted quite soon in the Epicurean response to Plato's νομοθέτης. It was within the atomist philosophy of Epicurus that the issue provoked the most reactions. *Monogeneticism* and *polygeneticism*, an important debate in later linguistics is not discussed and is only implicit in the discourse. The flavour of the late-Epicurean texts might remind one of the discourse of the Renaissance with Manilius' astrology or that of the Enlightenment with a half-personified nature and its glorification instead of the gods. Although Manilius sees a rectilinear progress in the rejection of gods as a one-way process, he must have ignored the world around him, where many people were still religious. The same kind of interpretation of scientific history can be witnessed in the modern world, although religion has not disappeared yet, nor does it seem to be willing to do so in the future.

E - Words themselves are to be blamed

Another source of Christian linguistic philosophy is religious ideas coming from Judaism. Therefore the Old Testament is to be investigated, too, for a language theory. Going back to the seeds of Judaism, one has to answer why the Jewish tradition did not pay attention to *glottogenesis*. Genesis contains a detailed account of the creation and explains the origin of many things. Why not language then? Was this phenomenon so unimportant for ancient Jews so as to overlook it at all? As it will be demonstrated soon the case is quite the opposite: language is in the centre of the creative act. Then what made Judaism uninterested in *glottogenesis*?

Loewe observes a remarkable phenomenon in Hebrew language itself that can shed light upon an underlying cause. On the next few pages the following Hebrew words will be inspected for understanding the language theory (or rather the lack thereof) of Genesis: /ʔ-m-r/ (אמר), /q-r-ʔ/ (קרא), /š-m/ (שמ) and the name 'Eve' (חַוָּה). Examining the verbal root /ʔ-m-r/ (אמר) he concludes that it has a variety of meanings in different Semitic languages. In Hebrew it has a fairly assertive one. Loewe's opinion is that "too much ought not to be made of etymology or comparative lexicography" and after a short observation he unfortunately does not investigate the problem.¹²⁰ The issue at hand, however, is more complex and this verb needs a more elaborate semantic comparison. Although a full reconstruction of the history of /ʔ-m-r/ should

¹²⁰ Loewe, R., 'Hebrew Linguistics' In Lepschy, G. ed., *History of Linguistics, Volume I: The Eastern Traditions of Linguistics*, London, 1994, 98

not be expected, perhaps a few dictionary entries can illustrate better the semantic situation that influenced linguistic thinking of both Judaism and Christianity:

Hebrew:	אמר ¹	to say ¹²¹
Aramaic:	אמר	mo., ph. (Lidz. 220), aram.: sprechen, sagen ¹²²
	אמר	vb. to say ¹²³
Arabic	امر	amara u (amr) to order, command, bid, instruct, commission, charge, entrust ¹²⁴
Akkadian:	amāru(m)	I "to see" G (a/u) [IGI; IGI.DU ₈] 1. "see" s.th., s.o.; "dream" a dream; "look at; inspect, examine"; "read" tablet etc. ¹²⁵
Ugaritic:	/ʔ-m-r/ vb amr	Gt: "to look at" (I) n. m. 1) "order, demand"; 2) "word(?)" ¹²⁶
Ge'ez:	አመረ	'a`mmara 'show, indicate, make a sign, signal, demonstrate, inform, instruct, refer'; ¹²⁷

It is clear that the /ʔ-m-r/ root can be connected to three main semantic fields: 1) visual (and perhaps intellectual) perception, 2) verbal expression and 3) imperative use of verbal expression, command. This order is very likely also the historical order of the newly unfolded extra meanings, too.

¹²¹ *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language*, Klein, E. ed., Jerusalem: Carta, 1987, 36

¹²² *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, Gesenius, W. ed., Leipzig: Verlag von F. C. W. Vogel, 1915, 50

¹²³ *A Dictionary of Judean Aramaic*, Sokoloff M. ed., Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2003, 31

¹²⁴ *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic by Hans Wehr*, Cowan, J. M. ed., Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979, 33

¹²⁵ *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian*, Black, J. - A. George - N. Postgate eds., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999, 14

¹²⁶ *A Dictionary of The Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition*, Del Olmo Lete, G. - J. Sanmartín eds., Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2004, 71-72

¹²⁷ *A Concise dictionary of Ge'ez*, Leslau, W. ed., Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989, 134

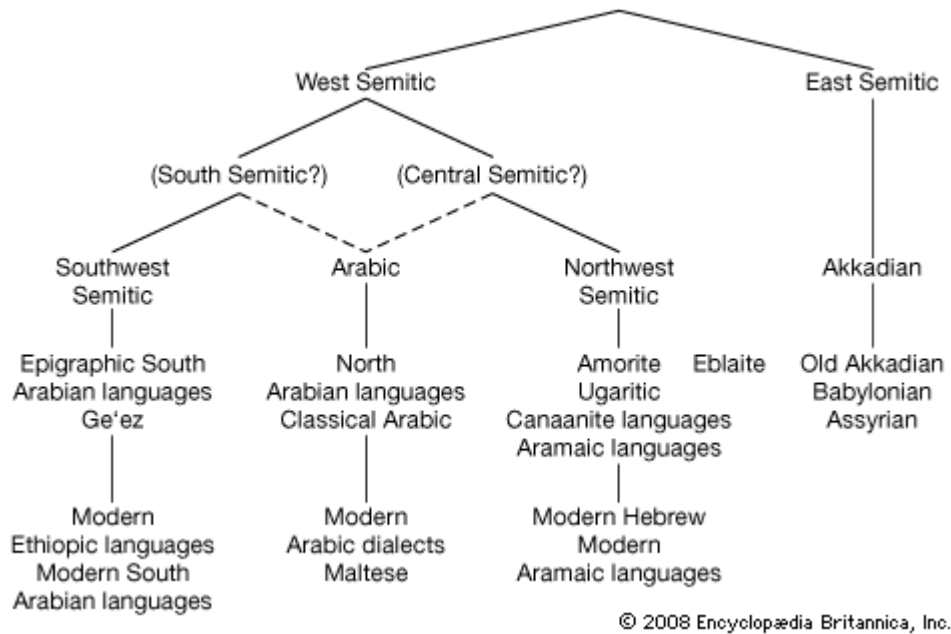


Figure I.: The classification of Semitic languages¹²⁸

As shown on Figure I. Akkadian and Ugaritic belong to separate subfamilies of the Semitic languages and while Ugaritic was not spoken after the 2nd millennium BC,¹²⁹ classical Akkadian was also extinct by 600 BC.¹³⁰ And since both languages carried the same visual-intellectual meaning for /?-m-r/, there is a likelihood that this sense is very old.

Hebrew and Aramaic on the other hand interpreted the same token as an act of speech. Yet it is very interesting that Arabic (and also a nominal form in Ugaritic) uses the same root to express a command. This secondary meaning, therefore, must have been encoded in the root since an early age in the North, and it eventually became the primary meaning in the South.

¹²⁸ From the Encyclopædia Britannica

<<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/534171/Semitic-languages/278599/Classification>>

¹²⁹ Lipinski, E., *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*, Leuven: Peeters, 1997, 49

¹³⁰ Ibid. 53

Loewe's observation that the Hebrew *saying* is a self-assertive way of communication should be especially taken seriously when one reads the book of Genesis.

Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.

And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.'

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so.
...etc.¹³¹

All these acts of creation happened through /ʔ-m-r/, translated as *saying*. In this context, creative will and linguistic utterance is one and the same thing. This can be in connection, Loewe argues, with the fact that giving and changing of names is always most important in the cultures of the Middle-East.¹³²

Eco's suspicion that the name-giving of things in Genesis 1: 5, 8, 10, etc. represent a moment of creation¹³³ at first sight may seem plausible. But the verb /q-r-ʔ/ (קרא) does not have any such meaning: it only encodes the followings: to cry, call, invoke; to invite; to proclaim; to read.¹³⁴ It is therefore more reasonable to interpret this action as the initial naming process that Adam continues in Genesis 2: 19. Indeed, what could be God's intention with naming only some of the created things in Genesis

¹³¹ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי אוֹר וַיְהי אוֹר וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם וַיְהי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם
וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל-מָקוֹם אֶחָד וַתֵּרָאָה הַיַּבָּשָׁה
(Genesis 1:3, 6 and 9)

English translation from *The Bible, NRSV Popular Text Edition with Apocrypha - Anglicised Edition*, Cambridge University Press, 1995)

¹³² Loewe, 98

¹³³ Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 7

¹³⁴ Klein, 590

1: 5, 8 and 10 and leaving the rest of the name-giving to Adam in Genesis 2: 19-20 should not be a mystery: the Old Testaments emphasises that God is the ruler of the elements, the weather and he remains to be their sole commander forever. He nevertheless bestows most of the living beings on man so he may be the master of this part of the created world. Eco's alternative explanation that the former is an act of creation is thus implausible due to etymological considerations. Ownership or mastery over named things is more likely to be meant in this context than creation.¹³⁵

In addition, another root referring to verbal communication: /d-b-r/ (דבר) as a derived noun merits to be probed. It means: 1) word, speech. 2) matter, affair. 3) business, occupation. 4) something, anything.¹³⁶ Such a distribution of tokens and semantic fields attributed a strong creative force to linguistic utterances and linked the idea of speech to the material beings created. The importance of the scriptural tradition is unmistakable in the light of the later Talmudic tradition, which states that the Torah existed *in written form* before creation as God's blueprint.

Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: The Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah. The Torah, for it is written, The Lord made me [sc. the Torah] as the beginning of his way.¹³⁷

The Torah declares: 'I was the working tool of the Holy One, blessed be He.' In human practice, when a mortal king builds a palace, he builds it not with his own skill but

¹³⁵ See Staal, 2

The separation of the creative act of speech and the naming of created things in the Bible is not an easy and sufficiently clarified topic. N. M. Sarna, who devoted a whole book to the interpretation of Genesis, seems to be at loss, too. (Sarna, N. M., *Understanding Genesis*, New York, 1970, 128)

¹³⁶ Klein, 114

¹³⁷ שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא העולם ואלו הן תורה ותשובה וגן עדן וגיהנם וכסא הכבוד ובית

המקדש ושמו של משיח תורה דכתיב ה' קנני ראשית דרכו

Babylonian Talmud, *Pesahim* 54b

English translation from *The Online Soncino Babylonian Talmud*, ed., rabbi Dr. I. Epstein

<<http://halakhah.com/>>)

with the skill of an architect. The architect moreover does not build it out of his head, but employs plans and diagrams to know how to arrange the chambers and the wicket doors. Thus God consulted the Torah and created the world...¹³⁸

From this it is clear that the aim of the cabbalist practice of permuting the letters of Torah and interpreting letters and their new arrangements was to discover the original meaning of this pre-existent Torah.¹³⁹ According to Loewe, this tradition was so strong that while earlier the written alphabet of Hebrew was regarded as a means of analysis of the created world, in the ספר יצירה (Sēpher Yəṣîrâh) the chain of causality is already reversed: the alphabet is the set of those elements that make cosmogony possible in the first place.¹⁴⁰

It is this very particular setting that had a long-lasting influence on the history of linguistics. For in the light of the above mentioned associations it is not a conundrum any more why God in the Old Testament says (wants) things to be

התורה אומרת: אני הייתי כלי אומנותו של הקב"ה. בנוהג שבעולם, מלך בשר ודם בונה פלטין, אינו בונה ¹³⁸ אותה מדעת עצמו אלא מדעת אומן, והאומן אינו בונה אותה מדעת עצמו, אלא דיפתראות, ופינקסאות יש לו, לדעת היאך הוא עושה חדרים, היאך הוא עושה פשפשין, כך היה הקב"ה מביט בתורה, ובורא את העולם Bereshit Rabba I, 1; see *Midrash Bereshit Rabba, Critical Edition With Notes and Commentary*, Theodor, J. - Ch. Albeck eds., Jerusalem, 1965, Vol. 1

English translation from *Midrash Rabbah*, Freedman, rabbi Dr. H. - M. Simon eds., London: The Soncino Press, 1939, 1)

The latter passage reminds the careful reader of the way a personified wisdom speaks in the book of Proverbs: "I, wisdom, live with prudence, and I attain knowledge and discretion... The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth."

אֲנִי-חָכְמָה שְׁכַנְתִּי עֲרֻמָּה וְדַעַת מְזֻמּוֹת אֶמְצָא ...

יְהוָה קִנְיִי רִאשִׁית דְּרָכּוֹ קָדֵם מִפְעֻלּוֹ מֵאֲז

מֵעוֹלָם, נִסְכַּתִּי מִר' אֵשׁ מִקְדָּמִי-אֶרֶץ

(Proverbs 8:12 and 22-23

English translation from *NRSV - Anglicised Edition*)

That wisdom was replaced simply by the Torah (and thus by language, too) is not surprising. But the same phrasing in the Genesis Rabbah that was used in Proverbs lent authority to the former and might reinforce the views that prevented *glottogenetic* speculations.

¹³⁹ Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 25-26

¹⁴⁰ Loewe 124-125

created. It is in speech that the will of the Lord is first manifested in order to be realised later. And the most important implication, for our considerations, is that if God could talk before the creation of the world, there cannot be a *natural explanation* for the origin of speech. Since according to the Midrash, Jews at least were forbidden to investigate what happened before creation.

Bar Ḳappara quoted: For ask now of the days past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth (Deut. iv, 32): you may speculate from the day that days were created, but you may not speculate on what was before that. And from one end of heaven unto the other (ib.) you may investigate, but you may not investigate what was before this.¹⁴¹

But even without such a sacred religious taboo, no *glottogenetic* speculation makes sense in the light of the Bible. For if one aimed at explaining the origin of language in this framework, with no created world yet but only the existence of God, this would be an explanation with no connection to anything in nature. God could create language before he created the world, but then the former would be just as metaphysical as God himself. It is extremely important to see why there could not be in the Bible any indication of the necessity or the circumstances of the creation of linguistic capacity itself. It is not only the case that language is a divine gift bestowed on Adam for any kind of wise consideration, aesthetics, pragmatics or historical accident. The existence of language is as evident as can be. And the reason why the Bible does not deal with its conveyance to man should be sought for in Genesis 1: 27: "So God created

¹⁴¹ בר קפרא אמר (דברים ד, לב): כִּי שָׁאֵל נָא לַיָּמִים רִאשׁוֹנִים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנֶיךָ [לְמֶנּוּ הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם עַל הָאָרֶץ] לֹמֵן הַיּוֹם שֶׁנִּבְרָאוּ אֶתְּהָ דּוֹרֶשׁ וְאִי אֶתְּהָ דּוֹרֶשׁ לְפָנִים מִכָּאן (וְלִמְקַצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְעַד קִצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם), שֶׁ אֶתְּהָ דּוֹרֶשׁ וְחֹקֵר וְאִי אֶתְּהָ חֹקֵר לְפָנִים מִכָּאן
Bereshit Rabba I. 10, see *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, 1965, Vol. 1
 English translation from *Midrash Rabbah*, 1939)

humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them;”¹⁴² It is a natural capacity of God, therefore it is there in humans by default.

Another remark should be made within the discussion of the biblical tradition: What is the nature of the things named and the things in reality? Genesis 2: 19 is a mysterious statement that records the naming of the creatures that God did not name himself but which he wanted to be named by Adam. The narrative of Genesis goes as follows:

So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.¹⁴³

This passage can be read in two different ways. One possibility is that Adam named the animals according to their due characteristic, mundane or metaphysical. The other is that Adam *ad placitum* named them and so mankind followed his arbitrary tradition.¹⁴⁴ A long history of speculations on the essentialism of language (the φύσις-νόμος-θέσις debate) is reinterpreted according to this verse, and considering the fact that the noun /š-m/ (שם) means not only name but also reputation or fame,¹⁴⁵ these speculations were reasonably motivated by the semantics of Hebrew. The essentialist view is supported by Genesis 3: 20, too: “The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live,”¹⁴⁶ where חַוָּה (Eve) is not an arbitrary name but refers

¹⁴² וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ ...

Genesis 1:27

English translation from NRSV - Anglicised Edition)

¹⁴³ וַיִּצָּר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִן-הָאָדָמָה כָּל-חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיָּבֵא אֶל-הָאָדָם לְרֹאוֹת מֶה-יִקְרָא-לוֹ

וְכֹל לְאָשֶׁר יִקְרָא-לוֹ הָאָדָם נָפֶשׁ חַיָּה הוּא שְׁמוֹ

Genesis 2:19

English translation from NRSV - Anglicised Edition)

¹⁴⁴ Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 8

¹⁴⁵ Klein, 664

¹⁴⁶ וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הוּא הִיְתָה אִם כָּל-חַי

to יָרָא (living being). In consequence, mediaeval Christian tradition forms perhaps a twisted Epicurean perspective. Dante repeats this argument: he asserts (see *chapter 3*) that originally naming was natural and only later, after the *confusio linguarum*, did it decay so that naming became *ad placitum*.¹⁴⁷ But then in the Middle Ages naturalness is understood again in the opposite way as by Epicurus: Adam was an intentional νομοθέτης who gave the surrounding world such “correct” names as Eve’s. It would be of course an oversimplification to generalise any systematic and homogenous mediaeval language theory before Scholasticism, therefore the outlines worked out here are not to be taken for granted, but rather considered as probably the least contradictory synthesis that could have existed if one had craved for one.

Genesis 2, Frits Staal suggests, shapes a theory of how common nouns came to be. He explains in the passage above how Adam gave names to animals he saw for the first time. First he just gave simple names to each, without a distinction between names (proper nouns) and common nouns. Later, however, he would generalise the same name to refer to all the animals of the same kind and thus the initial proper name (Dobermannpinscher) turns into a common noun (dobermannpinscher).¹⁴⁸

It has to be concluded that the main essence of Jewish and Christian silence about the origin of language lies in the semantics of some Hebrew words. The semantic associations linked to /ʔ-m-r/ and /d-b-r/ predetermines a myth that brings together (God’s) *will*, *speech* act and (the creation of) *things*. And such a myth must put language chronologically before the existence of nature, so that no natural explanation of language can be logical in such a system. From the naming in Genesis 2 follows another important assumption that language is a common action that God and mankind share without any explanation of human linguistic capacity.

¹⁴⁷ Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language*, 43-45

¹⁴⁸ Staal, 1

Z – ΛΟΓΟΣ

the history of a word

Before the final conclusion is reached, a review of the history of λόγος might give an impression of how speech act was seen in the culture that preceded Christianity. The word γλῶσσα is less rich in overtones and thus gives less insight to a specific semantic mishmash that reflects the collision of cultures along linguistic theories. The history of the Greek words λέγω and λόγος are much more instructive.

Indo-European root

It is not a coincidence that the words for speech are very loaded with meanings in the mother tongue of the New Testament, too. The primary sense of the stem of λόγος according to modern historical etymology is the following:

PIE¹⁴⁹ *leg- "to pick together, gather, collect" (cf. Gk. legein "to say, tell, speak, declare," originally, in Homer, "to pick out, select, collect, enumerate;" lexis "speech, diction;" logos "word, speech, thought, account" ...) ¹⁵⁰

Originally it must have meant picking and collection and had nothing to do with verbal actions. It is reasonable to argue for the agricultural or even the hunter-gatherer flavour of the lexeme: harvesting or picking up the prey must be at least part of the pre-classical semantic field of λόγος. Guthrie summarises in quite a long passage its

¹⁴⁹ Proto-Indo-European

¹⁵⁰ Online Etymology Dictionary <<http://www.etymonline.com>>

meanings in the 5th century BC, but he proceeds from the verbal meaning and derives all the others from the speech act, ignoring the original sense of the Proto-Indo-European root.¹⁵¹ However, during the history of classical Greek philosophy, in addition to this meaning, the term became very much loaded with other contents. The Liddell-Scott-Jones dictionary enumerates no less than ten meanings. Here below only the main meanings (Roman numerals) and the first-level sub-meanings (Arabic) are given; the sub-sublevel explanations (Latin letters) are omitted.

- I. computation, reckoning** 1. account of money handled; 2. generally account, reckoning; 3. measure, tale; 4. esteem, consideration, value put on a person or thing
- II. relation, correspondence, proportion** 1. relation; 2. math., ratio, proportion; 3. gramm., analogy, rule;
- III. explanation** 1. plea, pretext, ground; 2. statement of a theory, argument; 3. statement of a theory, argument; 4. thesis, hypothesis, provisional ground; 5. reason, ground; 6. formula (wider than definition, but freq. equivalent thereto), term expressing reason; 7. reason, law exhibited in the world-process
- IV. inward debate of the soul** 1. thinking, reasoning; 2. reason as a faculty
- V. continuous statement, narrative (whether fact or fiction), oration** 1. fable; 2. legend; 3. tale, story; 4. speech, delivered in court, assembly
- VI.** verbal expression or utterance, rarely a single word, v. infr. b, never in gramm. signif. of vocable 2. common talk, report, tradition; 3. discussion, debate, deliberation
- VII. a particular utterance, saying** 1. divine utterance, oracle; 2. proverb, maxim, saying; 3. assertion, opp. oath; 4. express resolution; 5. word of command, behest
- VIII. thing spoken of, subject-matter** 2. plot of a narrative or dramatic poem; 3. thing talked of, event
- IX. expression, utterance, speech regarded formally** 2. of various modes of expression, esp. artistic and literary; 3. gramm., phrase, complex term
- X.** the Word or Wisdom of God, personified as his agent in creation and world-government¹⁵²

A careful analysis can conclude that at least implicitly cognitive capacities and speech were firmly associated with each other in ancient Greek culture. What is even more interesting is that taking into account meaning I., it is possible that the cognitive

¹⁵¹ Guthrie, Vol. 1, 420-424

¹⁵² The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon <<http://www.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/>>

sense of λόγος derived from an economic background. In everyday life counting is indispensable for the administration of even a small household. And surely, counting and attributing values to specific things is not unrelated to reasoning and talking. The more complex the assessment of valuables become, the more sophisticated cognitive capacities need to be. The strong cognitive content of λόγος is all the more obvious in the case of the expression 'You are talking nonsense!' used quite frequently in comedies and dialogues. The literal meaning of the Greek original (οὐδὲν λέγεις) does not contain a derogatory word such as *stupid*, *nonsense* or *idiotic*, but simply *nothing*. To utter illogical things is to say (or maybe even to think) nothing at all. It is tempting to assume that this phenomenon has a lot to do with the fact that in Greek dramas people talking to themselves, that is in *monologues*, are not considered insane, a dramatic feature that modern theatre inherited, too. But here it suffices to conclude that speech was seen as a serious cognitive activity in Ancient Greece. Later Christian tradition was not unaware of this primary meaning, since Isidore of Seville wrote: "λόγος in Greek means both 'utterance' and 'reason'."¹⁵³ However, creation of material things seems to be absent from its early set of meanings.

The enrichment of the word's semantic deepness is to be traced along the history of the expression in ancient Greek philosophy. Heraclitus, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics are the most important contributors to the extra contents λόγος gained through the centuries. Finally, Philo of Alexandria and his influence on the early Christian concept of λόγος will conclude the chapter.

¹⁵³ λόγος enim apud Graecos et sermonem significat et rationem.

(Isidorus Hispalensis, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, Lindsay, W. M. ed., Oxford, 1911, 2.24.7

English translation from Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, Barney, S. A. - W. J. Lewis - J. A. Beach - O. Berghof eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)

Heraclitus

The most important pre-Socratic philosopher showing deep interest in the explanation of λόγος is Heraclitus (6th-5th centuries BC). Since our sources about him are quite poor and only a handful of vague fragments has remained from his works, his philosophy, based on the emphasis of movement and continuous change, can be summarised in one sentence:

You cannot step twice into the same rivers;
for fresh waters are flowing in upon you.¹⁵⁴

In Heraclitus' interpretation λόγος is the connective factor between rationality of a discourse and the world's structure. Guthrie summarises¹⁵⁵ his concept by saying that λόγος is something obvious that is regulating everything, some kind of universal law, an existent independent from the speaker.¹⁵⁶ Further investigating, he finds that it is indeed a virtue for Heraclitus to grasp this common structure.¹⁵⁷ He concludes that λόγος must be something corresponding to our concept of intelligence or insight. But

¹⁵⁴ ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ
(*Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Diels - Kranz eds., Berlin, 1934, 154 [frg. B. 12])

English translation from Burnet, J., *Early Greek Philosophy*, London and Edinburgh: Black A. - C. Black, 1920)

¹⁵⁵ Guthrie, Vol. 1, 425

¹⁵⁶ (τοῦ δὲ) λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος (ἀεὶ) ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ (πάντων) κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασι, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῖμαι διαίρεών ἕκαστον κατὰ φύσιν καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἔγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὖδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται. (Frg. 1)

οὐκ ἐμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστὶν ἐν πάντα εἶναι (Frg. 50)

¹⁵⁷ διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ (ξυνῷ, τουτέστι τῷ) κοινῷ· ξυνὸς γὰρ ὁ κοινός. τοῦ λόγου δὲ ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζῶουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν. (Frg. 2)

ξὺν νόῳ λέγοντας ἰσχυρίζεσθαι χρὴ τῷ ξυνῷ πάντων, ὁκωσπερ νόμῳ πόλις, καὶ πολὺ ἰσχυροτέρως. τρέφονται γὰρ πάντες οἱ ἀνθρώπειοι νόμοι ὑπὸ ἐνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ κρατεῖ γὰρ τοσοῦτον ὁκόσον ἐθέλει καὶ ἐξαρχεῖ πᾶσι καὶ περιγίνεται. (Frg. 114)

the ironic thing in the context of the criterion of common insight is that Heraclitus at the same time complains that he is the only one to grasp it, while all others just divorce themselves from it.¹⁵⁸ Heraclitus, although his concept is not utterly clear, deepens the meaning of λόγος and his contribution to the metaphysical and esoteric flavour of the word is crucial.

Plato

Plato's λόγος¹⁵⁹ in most cases is contrasted with sensual experience, which is instable and unreliable in looking for the truth. In other cases the unchanging being (νόησις and λόγος) is contrasted with change.

Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent.¹⁶⁰

In his dialogues Socrates initiates discussion in order to lead to a comprehensible λόγος, and this discussion is necessary because of the ineffectiveness of written arguments: "And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about."¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ ὃ μάλιστα διηνεκῶς ὁμιλοῦσι λόγῳ τῷ τὰ ὅλα διοικοῦντι, τούτῳ διαφέρονται, καὶ οἷς καθ' ἡμέραν ἐγκυροῦσι, ταῦτα αὐτοῖς ξένα φαίνεται. (Frg. 114 <http://philoctetes.free.fr/heraclite.pdf>) Guthrie, Vol. 1, 426

¹⁵⁹ Summarised according to Stead, Ch., 'Logos' In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Craig, E. ed., London: Routledge, Vol. 5, 1998, 818-819

¹⁶⁰ τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσῃ μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτ' ὄν, τὸ δ' αὖ δόξῃ μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνώμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν. (Plato 1903, Τίμαιος 27-28)

English translation from Plato 1925)

¹⁶¹ ὅταν δὲ ἅπαξ γραφῇ, κυλινδεῖται μὲν πανταχοῦ πᾶς λόγος

(Plato 1903, Φαῖδρος 275d-e)

English translation from Plato 1925)

The purpose of discussions is to ignore the senses and to reach the essence of things through λόγος.

When anyone by dialectics attempts through discourse of reason and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself the nature of the good in itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible¹⁶²

Aristotle

Aristotle uses λόγος in a variety of ways. At the beginning of *On Interpretation* (Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας) he clarifies the meaning of some words related to language: ὄνομα, ῥῆμα, ἀπόφασις, κατάφασις, ἀπόφανσις and λόγος. They are usually translated as *noun, verb, negation, affirmation, proposition* and *sentence*. Λόγος occurs both as a casual word in the explanation and as a term to be defined, presumably with different meanings. The definition of λόγος is “a meaningful sound, whose parts are meaningful by themselves.”¹⁶³ Based on this alone, it would be easy to argue that this is an early definition of our concept of sentence and indeed it is translated sometimes as sentence. But the whole text is more complex and the terms can hardly be equalled with our modern terminology.

In another work *On Sense and the Sensible* (Περὶ Αἰσθήσεως καὶ αἰσθητῶν) Aristotle uses λόγος yet in another way that is translated in Ross’s edition as rational discourse:

¹⁶² ὅταν τις τῷ διαλέγεσθαι ἐπιχειρῇ ἄνευ πασῶν τῶν αἰσθήσεων διὰ τοῦ λόγου ἐπ’ αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἕκαστον ὀρμᾶν, καὶ μὴ ἀποσιτῇ πρὶν ἂν αὐτὸ ὃ ἔστιν ἀγαθὸν αὐτῇ νοήσῃ λάβῃ, ἐπ’ αὐτῷ γίγνεται τῷ τοῦ νοητοῦ τέλει

(Plato 1903, Πολιτεία 532a-b

English translation from Plato 1925)

¹⁶³ Λόγος δέ ἐστι φωνὴ σημαντική, ἥς τῶν μερῶν τι σημαντικόν ἐστι κεχωρισμένον

(Aristotle 1949, Περὶ Ἑρμηνείας, 416a

English translation by the author)

For rational discourse is a cause of instruction in virtue of its being audible, which it is, not directly, but indirectly; since it is composed of words, and each word is a thought-symbol.¹⁶⁴

In his ethics he emphasises the right reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος).¹⁶⁵ In metaphysics Aristotle uses λόγος in two senses. There is a λόγος actualised in matter, a composite substance, while meaning is the λόγος realised in thought. Aristotle attributes to λόγος both an ontological and a linguistic meaning.¹⁶⁶ But the Aristotelian λόγος is discussed in a legal context, too. He distinguishes three modes of persuasion: πάθος, ἥθος and λόγος:

Now the proofs furnished by the speech are of three kinds. The first depends upon the moral character of the speaker, the second upon putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind, the third upon the speech itself, in so far as it proves or seems to prove.¹⁶⁷

Humans differ from animals, primarily not in their self-expression but in the capacity of rational speech, and that is called λόγος. Human speech is not only φωνή, there is a subtle ability to perceive and make clear for others advantages and disadvantages, justness and unjustness, good and evil.¹⁶⁸ Aristotle suggested that

¹⁶⁴ ὁ γὰρ λόγος αἰτιὸς ἐστὶ τῆς μαθήσεως ἀκουστός ὢν, οὐ καθ' αὐτὸν ἀλλὰ κατὰ συμβεβηκός· ἐξ ὀνομάτων γὰρ σύγκειται, τῶν δ' ὀνομάτων ἕκαστον σύμβολόν ἐστιν.
(Aristotle, *Parva Naturalia*, Ross W. D. ed., Oxford, 1955, Περὶ Αἰσθήσεως καὶ αἰσθητῶν, 437a
English translation from Aristotle, *The works of Aristotle*, Ross, W. D. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930)

¹⁶⁵ Stead, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Modrak, W. D., *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Meaning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 175

¹⁶⁷ τῶν δὲ διὰ τοῦ λόγου ποριζομένων πίστεων τρία εἶδη ἔστιν: αἱ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν ἐν τῷ ἡθεὶ τοῦ λέγοντος, αἱ δὲ ἐν τῷ τὸν ἀκροατὴν διαθεῖναι πως, αἱ δὲ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ λόγῳ διὰ τοῦ δεικνύναι ἢ φαίνεσθαι δεικνύναι.

(Aristotle, *Ars Rhetorica*, Ross, W. D., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959, 1.2.3

English translation from Aristotle, *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 22, London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1926)

¹⁶⁸ Rahe, P. A., *Republics Ancient and Modern: The Ancien Régime in Classical Greece*, University of North Carolina Press, 1994, 21

λόγος is the type of argumentation where the factors evoking emotions are not irrelevant to the case.¹⁶⁹

Stoics

Diogenes Laertius summarises the Stoic cosmology developed by Zeno of Citium, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Archedemus and Posidonius:

They hold that there are two principles in the universe, the active principle and the passive. The passive principle, then, is a substance without quality, *i.e.* matter, whereas the active is the reason inherent in this substance, that is God. For he is everlasting and is the artificer of each several thing throughout the whole extent of matter.¹⁷⁰

So active reason in a sense equivalent with God is contrasted with passive substance. It is not surprising that Zeno, being an outsider from the East, perhaps even a native speaker of a Semitic language, founded a philosophy where λόγος, be it speech or reason, is the primary principle of God. Even more striking is its role in the creation of the world:

God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names. In the beginning he was by himself; he transformed the whole of substance through air into water, and just as in animal generation the seed has a moist vehicle, so in cosmic moisture God, who is the seminal reason of the universe, remains behind in

¹⁶⁹ Wardy, R., 'Mighty Is the Truth and It Shall Prevail?' In *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, Rorty, A. ed., University of California Press, 1996, 64

¹⁷⁰ Δοκεῖ δ' αὐτοῖς ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὅλων δύο, τὸ ποιοῦν καὶ τὸ πάσχον. τὸ μὲν οὖν πάσχον εἶναι τὴν ἄποιον οὐσίαν τὴν ὕλην, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν τὸν ἐν αὐτῇ λόγον τὸν θεόν: τοῦτον γὰρ αἰδίων ὄντα διὰ πάσης αὐτῆς δημιουργεῖν ἕκαστα.

(Diogenes Laertius 7.134

English translation from *ibid.*)

the moisture as such an agent, adapting matter to himself with a view to the next stage of creation. Thereupon he created first of all the four elements, fire, water, air, earth.¹⁷¹

In the complex world of Stoic philosophers a seminal reason (λόγος σπερματικός) is already there at the birth of the universe when the four elements (στοιχεῖον) are differentiated and the same process repeats itself at the beginning of each world cycle.¹⁷² Besides the striking similarity with the biblical story (God being alone in the beginning, having λόγος and forming matter), the word στοιχεῖον might be of some interest. Its meaning, *element*, is not limited exclusively to fire, water, air and earth, but the same word denotes *letter* or *phoneme* (which is not differentiated yet). Aristotle in a passage of his *Poetics*, already quoted in the introduction, defines speech thus: "Diction as a whole is made up of these parts: letter, syllable, conjunction, joint, noun, verb, case, phrase."¹⁷³ The word *letter* is given by στοιχεῖον. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, the Talmudic tradition taught that the original Torah existed before creation in the elements/letters (στοιχεῖον). Here we can see a close connection between the biblical narrative, Stoicism, later Hebrew hermeneutics, especially cabbalistic endeavours.

In the world thus formed, λόγος is the principle that the universe embodies. Stoics saw life in a hierarchical order: the behaviour of creatures culminates in human

¹⁷¹ Ἐν τ' εἶναι θεὸν καὶ νοῦν καὶ εἰμαρμένην καὶ Δία: πολλὰς τ' ἑτέρας ὀνομασίας προσονομάζεσθαι. κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν οὖν καθ' αὐτὸν ὄντα τρέπειν τὴν πᾶσαν οὐσίαν δι' ἄερος εἰς ὕδωρ: καὶ ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ γονῇ τὸ σπέρμα περιέχεται, οὕτω καὶ τοῦτον σπερματικὸν λόγον ὄντα τοῦ κόσμου, τοιόνδ' ὑπολείπεσθαι ἐν τῷ ὑγρῷ, εὐεργὸν αὐτῷ ποιῶντα τὴν ὕλην πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἐξῆς γένεσιν: εἴτ' ἀπογεννᾶν πρῶτον τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα, πῦρ, ὕδωρ, ἀέρα, γῆν.

(Diogenes Laertius, 7.135-136

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹⁷² Sedley, D., 'Stoicism' In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Craig, E. ed., London: Routledge, 1998, Vol 9, 146

¹⁷³ τῆς δὲ λέξεως ἀπάσης τὰδ' ἐστὶ τὰ μέρη, στοιχεῖον συλλαβὴ σύνδεσμος ὄνομα ῥῆμα ἄρθρον πτώσις λόγος.

Aristotle 1966, 1456b20

English translation from Aristotle 1932, Vol. 23)

reason that is in turn analogous to logos on a lower level. Animals are without reason (ἄλογα), but passions can also be contrary to λόγος or represent a bad one, decisions (κρίσεις). For conformity to λόγος, the world order requires resignation or acceptance:¹⁷⁴ “...all things happen by fate or destiny ... defined as an endless chain of causation, whereby things are, or as the reason or formula by which the world goes on.”¹⁷⁵

Philo of Alexandria

Philo, a philosopher from Alexandria and elder contemporary of Jesus, was a Hellenised thinker and a Jew who altered the meaning of ancient philosophical terms according to his own religious background. One can find a subtle concept of λόγος in his philosophy, but first the Old Testament’s Greek translation, the Septuagint is to be inspected for λόγος because this version was in use in Philo’s Alexandria. The Septuagint translates λόγος in the following contexts:

- creation

By the word of the Lord the heavens were established; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.¹⁷⁶

I will now remember the works of the Lord, and declare the things that I have seen: In the words of the Lord are his works.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Stead, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ καθ’ εἰμαρμένην δέ τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι ... αἰτία τῶν ὄντων εἰρομένη ἢ λόγος καθ’ ὃν ὁ κόσμος διεξάγεται.

(Diogenes Laertius, 7.149

English translation from *ibid.*)

¹⁷⁶ τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ κυρίου οἱ οὐρανοὶ ἐστερεώθησαν καὶ τῷ πνεύματι τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ πᾶσα ἡ δύναμις αὐτῶν

(Psalms 32:6

English translation from *NRSV - Anglicised Edition*)

¹⁷⁷ Μνησθήσομαι δὴ τὰ ἔργα κυρίου, καὶ ἃ ἐώρακα, ἐκδηγήσομαι· ἐν λόγοις κυρίου τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ

O God of my fathers, and Lord of mercy, who hast made all things with thy word¹⁷⁸

- divine inspiration

The word of God which came to Jeremias the son of Chelcias, of the priests, who dwelt in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: accordingly as the word of God came to him in the days of Josias son of Amos king of Juda, in the thirteenth year of his reign.¹⁷⁹

And after the seven days the word of the Lord came to me¹⁸⁰

- the Commandments

And Moses was there before the Lord forty days, and forty nights; he did not eat bread, and he did not drink water; and he wrote upon the tables these words of the covenant, the ten sayings.¹⁸¹

And he wrote upon the tables according to the first writing the ten commandments, which the Lord spoke to you in the mountain out of the midst of the fire, and the Lord gave them to me.¹⁸²

(Sir 42:15

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, Brenton, Sir Lancelot C.L. ed., London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd., 1851)

¹⁷⁸ Θεὸς πατέρων καὶ κύριε τοῦ ἐλέους ὁ ποιήσας τὰ πάντα ἐν λόγῳ σου

(Wisdom 9:1

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁷⁹ Τὸ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὃ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ Ἰερεμیان τὸν τοῦ Χελκίου ἐκ τῶν ἱερέων, ὃς κατῴκει ἐν Ἀναθωθ ἐν γῇ Βενιαμίν· ὃς ἐγενήθη λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἰωσία υἱοῦ Ἀμώς βασιλέως Ἰουδα ἔτους τρισκαιδεκάτου ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ

(Jeremiah 1:1-2

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁸⁰ Καὶ ἐγένετο μετὰ τὰς ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας λόγος κυρίου πρὸς με

(Ezekiel 3:16

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁸¹ καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ Μωϋσῆς ἐναντίον κυρίου τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας καὶ τεσσαράκοντα νύκτας· ἄρτον οὐκ ἔφαγεν καὶ ὕδωρ οὐκ ἔπιεν· καὶ ἔγραψεν τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα ἐπὶ τῶν πλακῶν τῆς διαθήκης, τοὺς δέκα λόγους

(Exodus 34:28

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁸² καὶ ἔγραψεν ἐπὶ τὰς πλάκας κατὰ τὴν γραφὴν τὴν πρώτην τοὺς δέκα λόγους, οὓς ἐλάλησεν κύριος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐν τῷ ὄρει ἐκ μέσου τοῦ πυρός, καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτὰς κύριος ἐμοί.

(Deuteronomy 10:4

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

- the Mosaic laws

Wherewith shall a young man direct his way? by keeping thy words.¹⁸³

I will meditate on thine ordinances: I will not forget thy words. Render a recompense to thy servant: so shall I live, and keep thy words.¹⁸⁴

My soul has cleaved to the ground; quicken thou me according to thy word.¹⁸⁵

- the exodus story retold in the book of Wisdom

For while all things were in quiet silence, and that night was in the midst of her swift course, Thine Almighty word leaped down from heaven out of thy royal throne, as a fierce man of war into the midst of a land of destruction, And brought thine unfeigned commandment as a sharp sword, and standing up filled all things with death; and it touched the heaven, but it stood upon the earth.¹⁸⁶

Termini, among others, investigates Philo's views on λόγος and she describes it as the force that keeps the universe together giving it its due measure and harmony. It realizes a reconciliation of mercy and justice and neutralises chaos. "The subordination of the Logos to God serves to safeguard divine transcendence and to express the dialectical tension between the profound mystery of God-as-being and revelation."

Man is brought to the true knowledge of God by λόγος. Human intellect was created

¹⁸³ Ἐν τίνι κατορθώσει ὁ νεώτερος τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ; ἐν τῷ φυλάσσεσθαι τοὺς λόγους σου.

(Psalms 119:9)

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁸⁴ ἐν τοῖς δικαιώμασίν σου μελετήσω, οὐκ ἐπιλήσομαι τῶν λόγων σου. Ἀνταπόδος τῷ δούλῳ σου· ζήσομαι καὶ φυλάξω τοὺς λόγους σου.

(Psalms 119:16-17)

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁸⁵ Ἐκολλήθη τῷ ἐδάφει ἡ ψυχὴ μου ζήσόν με κατὰ τὸν λόγον σου.

(Psalms 119:25)

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

¹⁸⁶ ἡσύχου γὰρ σιγῆς περιεχούσης τὰ πάντα καὶ νυκτὸς ἐν ἰδίῳ τάχει μεσαζούσης ὁ παντοδύναμός σου λόγος ἀπ' οὐρανῶν ἐκ θρόνων βασιλείων ἀπότομος πολεμιστὴς εἰς μέσον τῆς ὀλεθρίας ἤλατο γῆς ξίφος ὃ ἐξ τὴν ἀνυπόκριτον ἐπιταγὴν σου φέρων καὶ στὰς ἐπλήρωσεν τὰ πάντα θανάτου καὶ οὐρανοῦ μὲν ἤπτετο, βεβήκει δ' ἐπὶ γῆς

(Wisdom 18:14-16)

English translation from *The Septuagint with Apocrypha*)

in the image of λόγος with the vocation of his contemplation. Λόγος is also a redemptive force, as in the symbol of the manna, which nourishes the spirit; and a light that provides guidance to the human soul.¹⁸⁷

In Radice's analysis,¹⁸⁸ Philo's λόγος is primarily the instrument of creation, since God has no contact with matter. Although the word itself is not used in Septuagint's book of Genesis, speech act and creation are firmly connected in Jewish thinking (see *Chapter 5*). In his treatise *On the Creation of the Cosmos* the combination of the Old Testament views on divine speech with the concept of λόγος is done in all sincerity:

If you would wish to use a formulation that has been stripped down to essentials, you might say that the intelligible cosmos is nothing else than the Logos of God as he is actually engaged in making the cosmos. For the intelligible city too is nothing else than the reasoning of the architect as he is actually engaged in the planning of the foundation of the city. This is the doctrine of Moses, not my own.¹⁸⁹

Radice also observes how the Stoic version of λόγος is applied and adjusted by Philo. Although the whole of his philosophy is rather Platonic, a Stoic concept fits in properly because of its similarity with the Biblical tradition. Stoics, too, regard λόγος as the rational principle responsible for the creation of the world. But while they distinguish a passive matter and an active God or λόγος, Philo could not accept such a

¹⁸⁷ Termini, C., 'Philo's Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism' In *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, Kamesar A. ed., Cambridge University Press, 2009, 99

¹⁸⁸ Radice, R., 'Philo's Theology and Theory of Creation' In *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, Kamesar A. ed., Cambridge University Press, 2009, 136-138

¹⁸⁹ εἰ δέ τις ἐβλήσειε γυμνοτέροις χρῆσασθαι τοῖς ὀνόμασιν, οὐδὲν ἂν ἕτερον εἴποι τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη κοσμοποιούντος· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ νοητὴ πόλις ἕτερόν τι ἐστὶν ἢ ὁ τοῦ ἀρχιτέκτονος λογισμὸς ἤδη τὴν [νοητὴν] πόλιν κτίζειν διανοομένου. τὸ δὲ δόγμα τοῦτο Μωυσέως ἐστίν, οὐκ ἐμὸν·

(Philo Alexandrinus, *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, Cohn L., P. Wendland eds., Berlin: Reimer, 1896, Vol. 1, Περί της κατά Μωυσέα κοσμοποιίας, 24-25

English translation from Philo of Alexandria, *On the Creation of the Cosmos according to Moses*, Runia, D. T. ed., Leiden: Brill, 2001)

dichotomy. According to him, God created both λόγος and matter, while the former is the instrument of creation. In fact this can be considered as a neo-Platonic reinterpretation of the stoic concept. In Philo, λόγος is the place where an ideal blueprint is formed, but it is also the object of his thought in the creative act.

In addition, Radice finds other meanings elsewhere in Philo's philosophy:

1. Λόγος in God can be seen as identical with God, having the function of His mind; and distinct from God, being the object of His thought.

2. Λόγος in itself is the instrument of God.

3. Λόγος in the world is the uniting force of the world.

Λόγος redeems the world from negative connotations associated to it by matter, but at the same time it dominates, controls, props up the world internally: "And the most ancient word of the living God is clothed with the word as with a garment."¹⁹⁰ This last metaphor makes Philo's λόγος quite similar to the Platonic world soul.

New Testament

Philo of Alexandria is thus an eminent representative of the link between Hellenic philosophy and Judaism. When Christianity, deeply rooted in Jewish culture, emerged from a κοινή environment, the semantic value of λόγος became even more complex than what classical Greek philosophy had developed.

The New Testament contains many passages where the influence of Philo's λόγος on the image of Christ cannot be mistaken. The former concept got a specific

¹⁹⁰ ἐνδύεται δ' ὁ μὲν πρεσβύτατος τοῦ ὄντος λόγος ὡς ἐσθῆτα τὸν κόσμον

(Philo, Vol. 3., Περὶ φυγῆς καὶ εὐρέσεως, 110

English translation from *The Works of Philo Judaeus, The contemporary of Josephus*, Yonge Ch. D. ed., London: H. G. Bohn, 1854-1890

expression in the Mosaic law. Christianity, however, reinterpreted λόγος as God's voice through Jesus.¹⁹¹

The Epistle to the Colossians enunciates:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.¹⁹²

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of a sharp λόγος that judges people's hearts instead of creating: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."¹⁹³ The cutting function can be found in Philo's works, too.

The culmination of the enrichment of the meaning of λόγος is most eye-catching in the Gospel of John.

¹⁹¹ Siegert, F., 'Philo and the New Testament' In *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, Kamesar A., ed., Cambridge University Press, 2009, 175-209

¹⁹² ὅς ἐστιν εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου· πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως, ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· τὰ ὀρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα— εἴτε θρόνοι, εἴτε κυριότητες, εἴτε ἀρχαί, εἴτε ἐξουσίαι· τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐκτίσται· καὶ αὐτὸς ἔστιν πρὸ πάντων, καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν· καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος, τῆς ἐκκλησίας· ὅς ἐστιν ἡ ἀρχή, πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν· ἵνα γένηται ἐν παῶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων· (Colossians 1:15-18)

English translation from *NRSV - Anglicised Edition*)

¹⁹³ ζῶν γὰρ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐνεργής· καὶ τομώτερος ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν μάχαιραν δίστομον, καὶ δικνούμενος ἄχρι μερισμοῦ ψυχῆς καὶ πνεύματος, ἁρμῶν τε καὶ μυελῶν· καὶ κριτικὸς ἐνθυμήσεων καὶ ἐννοιῶν καρδίας·

(Hebrews 4:12)

English translation from *NRSV - Anglicised Edition*)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.¹⁹⁴

In these verses λόγος is characterized by the following attributes: existence in the beginning, being by God, being God himself. Everything came into being through it, life was in it, and it could transform into a material being and thus dwell somewhere. Finally, it had something called δόξα, which is quite hard to define: expectation, notion, opinion, judgment, repute, external appearance, glory, etc.¹⁹⁵

Siebert observes¹⁹⁶ that in Genesis there is only God and nothing else that could be called divine. But here λόγος is divine and in fact it is God himself in order to retain monotheism. Furthermore, while in the Epistle to the Hebrews Jesus is referred to as “through whom he also created the worlds.”¹⁹⁷ Here the same idea is present, but λόγος is not a tool any more as it was earlier in Philo's theology. Philo also calls λόγος a *second God*, the *first-born Son* with the cosmos being the *second one*. In the New Testament the distinction of the *begetting* of the Son from the *creation* of the world is clear. The λόγος of the gospel, as in Philo, has an active role in creation, but as the embodied saviour it is active even in the history of revelation or salvation. The gospel's Platonic spirit can be witnessed in how the Son looks at the Father's deeds

¹⁹⁴ Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὁ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν ... Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας.

(John 1:1-4, 14)

English translation from *NRSV - Anglicised Edition*)

¹⁹⁵ The Online Liddell-Scott-Jones Greek-English Lexicon

¹⁹⁶ Siebert, 199-200

¹⁹⁷ δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας·

(Hebrews 1:2)

English translation from *NRSV - Anglicised Edition*)

like the Platonic demiurge or Philo's Logos look at the eternal ideas: "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise."¹⁹⁸

It is impossible to miss the similarity between these aspects of the meaning of λόγος. This complex ideology has been passed down through Christian philosophy. Furthermore, although it is impossible here to trace further all these elements in Christianity, one thing is obvious: The first five words of John's Gospel reaffirm the idea of the pre-existence of language, making *glottogenesis* an invalid question in the Christian world.

¹⁹⁸ Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐ δύναται ὁ υἱὸς ποιεῖν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ οὐδέν, ἐὰν μὴ τι βλέπῃ τὸν πατέρα ποιοῦντα· ἃ γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνος ποιῇ, ταῦτα καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ὁμοίως ποιεῖ.

(John 5:19)

English translation from NRSV - *Anglicised Edition*)

H – Epilogue and Conclusion

Epilogue

As seen in the previous chapters, because of the semantic peculiarities of the Hebrew language and its influence on religion and philosophy, language as a human capacity has to pre-exist creation in the narrative of the Old Testament. And once Christianity emerges as a hybrid of Greco-Roman and Jewish cultures, it becomes blind for centuries to the problem of the origin of language.

The purpose of the next chapter is not to give a full account of late antique Christian and mediaeval linguistic philosophy, although one would be surprised how short such a list would be despite the over one thousand years that need to be considered. It is sufficient here to illustrate through a few examples, the lack of interest towards *glottogenesis* and the dominating authority of the biblical story.

The language theory of Origen (2nd-3rd centuries AD) already reflects the metaphysical (lack of) explanation and contains a mixed set of Hebrew and classical Greek ideas. For him language has divine origin, as Hebrew is the language of creation.¹⁹⁹ Also, names do not represent or imitate at all, they point to the deepest meanings of objects, signifying their nature. Origen considers names to be summaries

¹⁹⁹ Janowitz, N., 'Theories of Divine Names in Origen and Pseudo-Dionysius' *History of Religions* 30, 1991, 363

describing the character of the thing named, and thus names manifest divine power.²⁰⁰ This summarising essence is of course rooted in Platonism. The τύπος in Cratylus (see *App. Crat.* 432b-433a) is what Socrates requires as the relation between things and names. Origen attributes the power of divine names to a non-arbitrary correspondence between the signifier and the signified, the name and the divinity. Moreover, Origen accepts that the power of a divine name is automatic and not based on the intention of the speaker, however it is not the signification of the name *per se*, which imbues it with power; but the very sounds of the word is effective.²⁰¹ The impact of Jewish philosophy on Origen has been sufficiently discussed in the scientific literature,²⁰² although the historian has an easy task here in identifying the influences of Origen, since he tells *expressis verbis* from whom he derived his thoughts:

And we learn the history of the names and their interpretation from those Hebrews, who in their national literature and national tongue dwell with pride upon these things, and explain their meaning.²⁰³

The lack of interest in the origin of language capacity among later mediaeval grammarians is indisputable. Although Isidore of Seville (6th-7th centuries AD) devotes

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 361

²⁰¹ Ibid. 362-363

²⁰² Bardy, G., 'Les traditions juive dans l'oeuvre d'Origene,' *Revue Biblique* 34, 1937, 221-223

Lange, N. R. M. de, *Origen and the Jews: Studies in Jewish-Christian Relations in Third-Century Palestine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976

Bietenhard, H., *Caesarea, Origenes und die Juden*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1974

Halperin, D., 'Origen, Ezekiel's Merkabah, and the Ascension of Moses,' *Church History* 50, 1981, 261-275

Blowers, P., 'Origen, the Rabbis and the Bible: Toward a Picture of Judaism and Christianity in Third-Century Caesarea,' in C. Kannengiesser and W. Petersen South Bend eds., *Origen of Alexandria: His World and His Legacy*, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1988, 96-116

²⁰³ μανθάνομεν δὲ τὴν περὶ τὰ ὀνομαζόμενα ἱστορίαν καὶ τὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐρμηνείαν ἀπὸ Ἑβραίων, τῶν τοῖς πατρίοις γράμμασι καὶ τῇ πατρίῳ διαλέκτῳ ταῦτα σεμνυνόντων καὶ διηγουμένων·

(Origenes, Κατὰ Κέλσου IV. 34

English translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers*)

20 books to the origin of words, he ignores the problem of the origin of language itself. He identifies Hebrew as the first language, obviously inspired by the Scriptural tradition, but no origin of the language capacity is mentioned in the *Origines*:

The diversity of languages arose with the building of the Tower after the Flood, for before the pride of that Tower divided human society, so that there arose a diversity of meaningful sounds, there was one language for all nations, which is called Hebrew.²⁰⁴

A less known example of the lack of inquiry concerning the origin of language is the *On Letters* (О писменехъ) of an author called the 'Brave Monk' (Чрънориз Храбър). The oldest attested manuscript of the treatise dates from 1348, but it is believed to be much older, probably from the 9th-10th century.²⁰⁵ The apology of the Slavic translation of the Scriptures has a unique opinion on the primacy of languages but shows no trace of deeper interest towards *glottogenesis* beyond the creationist perspective of the Bible:

But God did not create the Hebrew language first, nor Latin, nor Greek but Syrian, which also Adam spoke, and from Adam until The Deluge, and from the Deluge until God scattered the languages at the Tower of Babel, as it is written...²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Linguarum diversitas exorta est in aedificatione turris post diluvium. Nam priusquam superbia turris illius in diversos signorum sonos humanam divideret societatem, una omnium nationum lingua fuit, quae Hebraea vocatur.

(Isidorus Hispalensis, 1911, 9.1.1

English translation from Isidore 2006)

²⁰⁵ Toscano, S., 'Orthodox Slavdom' In Lepschy 1998, 125

²⁰⁶ нѣсть во бѣ створиъ жидовска жъзыка прѣжде, ни римска, ни єлииска, нъ сїрскы, ѿмже ѿ адама г҃ла, ѿ ѿ адама до потопа, ѿ ѿ потопа, дондеже бѣ раздѣли жъзыкы при стлѣпотворенїи, ѿкоже пишеть...

(Іоаннѣ Екзархъ Болгарскій, Калайдовичъ, К. ed., Москва, 1824, СС, 189-192

English translation with the kind assistance of Daniel Ziemann)

Finally, for the sake of contrast a last example is given here that should be seen as an exception that proves the rule and not as a regular phenomenon. In the mediaeval linguistic discourse philosophical or *horribile dictu* psycholinguistic issues were seldom mentioned before the scholastic rediscovery of Aristotle in the 13th century. Priscian's speculation on the universal logic of word order ought to be considered as a special case.

It should be noted, however, that correct ordering requires that the pronoun or noun be put before the verb, ... for indeed the substance and the person of the agent or patient the pronoun or noun signifies has to exist naturally prior to the act itself, which is accidental to the substance.²⁰⁷

Conclusion

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries a new theory of cognitive processes was worked out. Relevance theory²⁰⁸ implies that only a fraction of the intended meaning needs to be encoded in verbal communication. Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, the inventors of the theory argue that the human mind has an evolutionary adaptation: one or more cognitive module(s) provide our species with the obvious benefits of a Theory of Mind (ToM), the ability to represent others' states of mind. They contend that language is already rooted in a pragmatic inferential mechanism that is based on this ToM. But it is easy to presume that language is mainly a very sophisticated coding system, since it is so efficient that the need for other means outside language is almost

²⁰⁷ Sciendum tamen, quod recta ordinatio exigit, ut pronomen vel nomen praeponatur verbo, ... quippe cum substantia et persona ipsius agentis vel patientis, quae per pronomen vel nomen significatur, prior esse debet naturaliter quam ipse actus, qui accidens est substantiae.

(Priscianus, 17.16.105-6

English translation by the author)

²⁰⁸ Sperber 1987, 1995

Sperber, Dan and Deirdre Wilson, 'Relevance Theory' In Ward, G. - L. Horn eds., *Handbook of Pragmatics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004, 607-632

always missed. However, it was not always so efficient, and if it appeared first as a supportive system then that would predetermine its mechanism today. Relevance theoretic language is a private detective's method of dropping here and there pieces of evidences regarding what the speaker wants others to know so that these other private detectives can find them and scent the speaker's meaning. And while ciphers are built on standardised decoding, detectives use what they find in the environment and their suitcase.

One important aspect of this approach is that codes and formal rules in language might be lesser important than a "traditional" Chomskyan linguist would imagine. For if a continuous pragmatic inference is involved in language then it relies to a much lesser degree on coding. In fact, one can find that many things can go wrong and language is still comprehensible. At least computers are considerably dumber than humans are and thus they respond with 'syntax errors' much more often than people do. But if language is so flexible, why was that not realised earlier?

It has been recognised that the reason for the lack of *glottogenetic* interests in the Middle Ages is in Christian ideas, namely that language existed before creation. Perhaps the answer to the latter question is similar. If language is God's feature by default, its perfectness, wholeness, and formal symmetry cannot be questioned. Nobody would argue that God speaks or even creates in a language that is contingent and ambiguous. Language, as far as it is a divine gift, has to be well-designed and intentionally planned. Intentional design and functioning is an unyielding idea and humankind has had serious difficulties in letting it go. But if a ToM is the very essence of our species, then hypothesising intentional forces everywhere must not be surprising. These misconceptions are perhaps more obvious in biology because Darwinism is still in war with some religious groups, but the present image and

concept of language is just as much a product of the past with all its misunderstandings.

The Biblical story of the *confusio linguarum* attributes a great importance to language and implies, as usually happens despite opposite experiences, that linguistic unity is needed for great undertakings. It seems thus that the coding aspect of language was overemphasised by the Bible. As early modern philosophers wanted to correct the consequence of the *confusio linguarum* and create a perfect language they attributed to language the same importance and for a long time it was held by most people that the function of language is to encode and represent the world in the most sophisticated way possible. As the authority of the Biblical tradition weakened natural explanations for the existence of language sprang from new evidence gathered through empirical research. The idea of a perfect language was also abandoned in the 18th century. But the ideas of the nature and function of language did not change considerably. Language was not created in an instant any more, but it was still seen as a code and this assumption was reinforced by the increasing need and professionalism of translators in a more and more mobile world.

Moreover, the distinction between the φύσις-νόμος and the φύσις-θέσις dichotomies can not be made clear for a long time, perhaps due to our intentionality-seeking nature. In fact, the expression *ad placitum* implies a fatal misunderstanding: its literal meaning 'for delight' carries the overtone of arbitrariness instead of contingency. As a consequence if words do not reflect nature then they must have been imposed by an intentional agent. Also, if they have been imposed on us by God, Adam or anybody else, this act, at least in theory, can be repeated. This is the mistake of all the perfect linguists of history.

It happened that great discoveries in mathematics, information theory and cybernetics preceded those of linguistics. In fact, computer science, a child of the former, is about as old a discipline as systematic linguistics. And while allegedly

linguistic considerations have had influence on computer science that can be witnessed in such terminology as *computer languages*, the truth is that computer communication predetermined linguistic research for a long time. The common understanding of the word *language* is in fact closer to that of *informatics* than *human language capacity*. Computer languages are strict and intentionally predefined systems of codes and that is how many people would define human language, too. However, if Wilson and Sperber are right, then language is just a sophisticated supportive system for inferential communication.

Varro recognises intentionality in language and gives functional explanations for such phenomena as semantic sophistication. The Epicureans also discuss intentionality and their insistence on natural explanations foreshadows the strongly anti-religious discourse of the Enlightenment. Moreover their refutation of an original νομοθέτης bears some similarity to the thought experiments and methods modern evolutionary scientists use in the absence of concrete evidence. Experiments with children and animals, considered first in the Antiquity, are the most powerful sources of evidence in today's evolutionary linguistic research. In the 2nd century AD, Epicureans seem to recognise the basic elements of the Darwinian logics. Finally, the Epicurean imagery of pragmatics is what linguistics has just reintroduced to its toolkit. The distinction of signifier and signified by the Stoics and their description of linguistic ambiguity anticipates Saussure and could have eventually undermined the myth of a strict coding in language.

The question is, what would have happened if not the coding-decoding interpretation had inspired the interpretation of language? It might be just a historical accident that sophisticated information-processing machines were created before the understanding of similar natural systems. Of course such artificial systems help a lot by emulation to understand natural systems, if the fundamental difference between

them is kept in mind. However, if religious doctrines had not affected linguistics, then it is possible that the millennial gap in scientific research would not have occurred and that the present understanding of the function of language would be also excessively different.

Appendix

Plato's Cratylus 385 d-e:

H: Yes, Socrates, for I cannot conceive of any other kind of correctness in names than this; I may call a thing by one name, which I gave, and you by another, which you gave. And in the same way, I see that states have their own different names for the same things, and Greeks differ from other Greeks and from barbarians in their use of names.

Ἐ: οὐ γὰρ ἔχω ἔγωγε, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὀνόματος ἄλλην ὀρθότητα ἢ ταύτην, ἐμοὶ μὲν ἕτερον εἶναι καλεῖν ἐκάστῳ ὄνομα, ὃ ἐγὼ ἐθέμην, σοὶ δὲ ἕτερον, ὃ αὐτὸ σύ. οὕτω δὲ καὶ ταῖς πόλεσιν ὀρθῶ ἰδίᾳ [ἐκάσταις] ἐνίοις ἐπὶ τοῖς αὐτοῖς κείμενα ὀνόματα, καὶ Ἑλλησι παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους Ἑλληνας, καὶ Ἑλλησι παρὰ βαρβάρους.²⁰⁹

Plato's Cratylus 385b-d:

S: It is possible, then, to say in speech that which is and that which is not?

H: Certainly.

S: But is true speech true only as a whole, and are its parts untrue?

H: No, its parts also are true.

S: Are the large parts true, but not the small ones, or are all true?

H: All, in my opinion.

S: Is there, then, anything which you say is a smaller part of speech than a name?

H: No, that is the smallest.

S: And the name is spoken as a part of the true speech?

H: Yes.

S: Then it is, according to you, true.

H: Yes.

S: And a part of false speech is false, is it not?

H: It is.

S: Then it is possible to utter either a false or a true name, since one may utter speech that is either true or false?

H: Yes, of course.

²⁰⁹ Plato 1903

English translation from Plato 1921

Σ: ἔστιν ἄρα τοῦτο, λόγῳ λέγειν τὰ ὄντα τε καὶ μή;
 Ἐ: πάννυ γε.
 Σ: ὁ λόγος δ' ἔστιν ὁ ἀληθῆς πότερον μὲν ὅλος ἀληθῆς, τὰ μέρη δ' αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἀληθῆ;
 Ἐ: οὐκ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ μέρη.
 Σ: πότερον δὲ τὰ μὲν μέγала μέρη ἀληθῆ, τὰ δὲ σμικρὰ οὐ; ἢ πάντα;
 Ἐ: πάντα, οἶμαι ἔγωγε.
 Σ: ἔστιν οὖν ὅτι λέγεις λόγου σμικρότερον μέρος ἄλλο ἢ ὄνομα;
 Ἐ: οὐκ, ἀλλὰ τοῦτο σμικρότατον.
 Σ: καὶ τοῦτο [ὄνομα] ἄρα τὸ τοῦ ἀληθοῦς λόγου λέγεται;
 Ἐ: ναί.
 Σ: ἀληθές γε, ὡς φῆς.
 Ἐ: ναί.
 Σ: τὸ δὲ τοῦ ψεύδους μέρος οὐ ψεῦδος;
 Ἐ: φημί.
 Σ: ἔστιν ἄρα ὄνομα ψεῦδος καὶ ἀληθές λέγειν, εἴπερ καὶ λόγον;
 Ἐ: πῶς γὰρ οὐ;

Plato's Cratylus 392c-d:

S: Look at it in this way: suppose you were asked, "Do the wise or the unwise give names more correctly?"
 H: "The wise, obviously," I should say.
 S: And do you think the women or the men of a city, regarded as a class in general, are the wiser?
 H: The men.
 S: And do you not know that Homer says the child of Hector was called Astyanax by the men of Troy; so he must have been called Scamandrius by the women, since the men called him Astyanax?
 H: Yes, probably.
 S: And Homer too thought the Trojan men were wiser than the women?
 H: I suppose he did.
 S: Then he thought Astyanax was more rightly the boy's name than Scamandrius?
 H: So it appears.

Σ: ὧδε δὴ σκόπει. εἴ τις ἔροίτο σε πότερον οἶει ὀρθότερον καλεῖν τὰ ὀνόματα τοὺς φρονιμωτέρους ἢ τοὺς ἀφρονεστέρους;
 Ἐ: δῆλον δὴ ὅτι τοὺς φρονιμωτέρους, φαίην ἄν.
 Σ: πότερον οὖν αἱ γυναῖκες ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν φρονιμωτεραί σοι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι ἢ οἱ ἄνδρες, ὡς τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν γένος;
 Ἐ: οἱ ἄνδρες.
 Σ: οὐκοῦν οἶσθα ὅτι Ὅμηρος τὸ παιδίον τὸ τοῦ Ἑκτορος ὑπὸ τῶν Τρώων φησὶν καλεῖσθαι Ἀστυάνακτα, Σκαμάνδριον δὲ δῆλον ὅτι ὑπὸ τῶν γυναικῶν, ἐπειδὴ οἱ γε ἄνδρες αὐτὸν Ἀστυάνακτα ἐκάλουν;
 Ἐ: οἰκὲ γε.
 Σ: οὐκοῦν καὶ Ὅμηρος τοὺς Τρώας σοφωτέρους ἡγεῖτο ἢ τὰς γυναῖκας αὐτῶν;
 Ἐ: οἶμαι ἔγωγε.
 Σ: τὸν "Ἀστυάνακτα" ἄρα ὀρθότερον ᾤετο κεῖσθαι τῷ παιδί ἢ τὸν "Σκαμάνδριον";
 Ἐ: φαίνεται.

Plato's Cratylus 422d-e:

S: Now the correctness of all the names we have discussed was based upon the intention of showing the nature of the things named.

H: Yes, of course.

S: And this principle of correctness must be present in all names, the earliest as well as the later ones, if they are really to be names.

H: Certainly.

S: But the later ones, apparently, were able to accomplish this by means of the earlier ones.

H: Evidently.

S: Well, then, how can the earliest names, which are not as yet based upon any others, make clear to us the nature of things, so far as that is possible, which they must do if they are to be names at all? Answer me this question: If we had no voice or tongue, and wished to make things clear to one another, should we not try, as dumb people actually do, to make signs with our hands and head and person generally?

S: A name, then, it appears, is a vocal imitation of that which is imitated, and he who imitates with his voice names that which he imitates.

Σ: ἀλλὰ μὴν ὧν γε νυν<δὴ> διεληλύθαμεν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἡ ὀρθότης τοιαύτη τις ἐβούλετο εἶναι, οἷα δηλοῦν οἷον ἕκαστόν ἐστι τῶν ὄντων.

Ἐ: πῶς γὰρ οὐ;

Σ: τοῦτο μὲν ἄρα οὐδὲν ἤττον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα δεῖ ἔχειν καὶ τὰ ὕστερα, εἴπερ ὀνόματα ἔσται.

Ἐ: πάνυ γε.

Σ: ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ὕστερα, ὥς ἔοικε, διὰ τῶν προτέρων οἷά τε ἦν τοῦτο ἀπεργάζεσθαι.

Ἐ: φαίνεται.

Σ: εἶεν: τὰ δὲ δὴ πρῶτα, οἷς οὐπω ἕτερα ὑπόκειται, τίνι τρόπῳ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ὅτι μάλιστα φανερά ἡμῖν ποιήσει τὰ ὄντα, εἴπερ μέλλει ὀνόματα εἶναι; ἀπόκριναι δέ μοι τόδε: εἰ φωνὴν μὴ εἶχομεν μηδὲ γλῶτταν, ἐβουλόμεθα δὲ δηλοῦν ἀλλήλοις τὰ πράγματα, ἄρ' οὐκ ἂν, ὥσπερ νῦν οἱ ἐνεοί, ἐπεχειροῦμεν ἂν σημαίνειν ταῖς χερσὶ καὶ κεφαλῇ καὶ τῷ ἄλλῳ σώματι;

Plato's Cratylus 423b:

S: And when we wish to express anything by voice or tongue or mouth, will not our expression by these means be accomplished in any given instance when an imitation of something is accomplished by them?

H: I think that is inevitable.

S: A name, then, it appears, is a vocal imitation of that which is imitated, and he who imitates with his voice names that which he imitates.

Σ: ἐπειδὴ δὲ φωνῇ τε καὶ γλώττῃ καὶ στόματι βουλόμεθα δηλοῦν, ἄρ' οὐ τότε ἐκάστου δῆλωμα ἡμῖν ἔσται τὸ ἀπὸ τούτων γιγνόμενον, ὅταν μίμημα γένηται διὰ τούτων περὶ ὅτιον;

Ἐ: ἀνάγκη μοι δοκεῖ.

Σ: ὄνομα' ἄρ' ἐστίν, ὥς ἔοικε, μίμημα φωνῇ ἐκείνου ὃ μιμεῖται, καὶ ὀνομάζει ὃ μιμούμενος τῇ φωνῇ ὃ ἂν μιμῆται

Plato's Cratylus 432b-433a:

S: on the contrary, the image must not by any means reproduce all the qualities of that which it imitates, if it is to be an image. See if I am not right. Would there be two things, Cratylus and the image of Cratylus, if some god should not merely imitate your color and form, as painters do, but should also make all the inner parts like yours, should reproduce the same flexibility and warmth, should put into them motion, life, and intellect, such as exist in you, and in short, should place beside you a duplicate of all your qualities? Would there be in such an event Cratylus and an image of Cratylus, or two Cratyluses?

C: I should say, Socrates, two Cratyluses.

S: Then don't you see, my friend, that we must look for some other principle of correctness in images and in names, of which we were speaking, and must not insist that they are no longer images if anything be wanting or be added? Do you not perceive how far images are from possessing the same qualities as the originals which they imitate?

C: Yes, I do. ...

S: Then do not be faint-hearted, but have the courage to admit that one name may be correctly and another incorrectly given; do not insist that it must have all the letters and be exactly the same as the thing named, but grant that an inappropriate letter may be employed. But if a letter, then grant that also a noun in a clause, and if a noun, then also a clause in a sentence may be employed which is not appropriate to the things in question, and the thing may none the less be named and described, so long as the intrinsic quality of the thing named is retained, as is the case in the names of the letters of the alphabet, if you remember what Hermogenes and I were saying a while ago.

Σ: ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐναντίον οὐδὲ τὸ παράπαν δέη πάντα ἀποδοῦναι οἷόν ἐστιν ὃ εἰκάζει, εἰ μέλλει εἰκῶν εἶναι. σκόπει δὲ εἰ τί λέγω. ἄρ' ἂν δύο πράγματα εἴη τοιάδε, οἷον Κρατύλος καὶ Κρατύλου εἰκῶν, εἴ τις θεῶν μὴ μόνον τὸ σὸν χρῶμα καὶ σχῆμα ἀπεικάσειεν ὥσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἐντὸς πάντα τοιαῦτα ποιήσειεν οἷάπερ τὰ σά, καὶ μαλακότητος καὶ θερμότητος τὰς αὐτὰς ἀποδοίη, καὶ κίνησιν καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ φρόνησιν οἷαπερ ἡ παρὰ σοὶ ἐνθείη αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἐνὶ λόγῳ πάντα ἅπερ σὺ ἔχεις, τοιαῦτα ἕτερα καταστήσειεν πλησίον σου; πότερον Κρατύλος ἂν καὶ εἰκῶν Κρατύλου τότε εἴη τὸ τοιοῦτον, ἢ δύο Κρατύλοι;

Κ: δύο ἔμοιγε δοκοῦσιν, ὦ Σώκρατες, Κρατύλοι.

Σ: ὁρᾷς οὖν, ὦ φίλε, ὅτι ἄλλην χρὴ εἰκόνος ὀρθότητα ζητεῖν καὶ ὧν νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν, καὶ οὐκ ἀναγκάζειν, ἐάν τι ἀπὴ ἢ προσῇ, μηκέτι αὐτὴν εἰκόνα εἶναι; ἢ οὐκ αἰσθάνη ὅσου ἐνδέουσιν αἱ εἰκόνες τὰ αὐτὰ ἔχειν ἐκείνοις ὧν εἰκόνες εἰσίν;

Κ: ἔγωγε. ...

Σ: θαρρῶν τοίνυν, ὦ γενναῖε, ἔα καὶ ὄνομα τὸ μὲν εὖ κεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ μή, καὶ μὴ ἀνάγκαζε πάντ' ἔχειν τὰ γράμματα, ἵνα κομιδῇ ἢ τοιοῦτον οἷόνπερ οὗ ὄνομά ἐστιν, ἀλλ' ἔα καὶ τὸ μὴ προσήκον γράμμα ἐπιφέρειν. εἰ δὲ γράμμα, καὶ ὄνομα ἐν λόγῳ: εἰ δὲ ὄνομα, καὶ λόγον ἐν λόγῳ μὴ προσήκοντα τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπιφέρεισθαι, καὶ μηδὲν ἡττον ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ λέγεσθαι, ἕως ἂν ὁ τύπος ἐνῇ τοῦ πράγματος περὶ οὗ ἂν ὁ λόγος ᾗ, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖς τῶν στοιχείων ὀνόμασιν, εἰ μέμνησαι ἃ νυνδὴ ἐγὼ καὶ Ἑρμογένης ἐλέγομεν.

Plato's Cratylus 435d-437d:

S: What is the function of names, and what good do they accomplish?

C: I think, Socrates, their function is to instruct, and this is the simple truth, that he who knows the names knows also the things named. ... I think there is no other at all; this is both the best and the only method. ...

S: Clearly he who first gave names, gave such names as agreed with his conception of the nature of things. That is our view, is it not?

C: Yes.

S: Then if his conception was incorrect, and he gave the names according to his conception, what do you suppose will happen to us who follow him? Can we help being deceived?

C: But, Socrates, surely that is not the case. He who gave the names must necessarily have known; otherwise, as I have been saying all along, they would not be names at all. And there is a decisive proof that the name-giver did not miss the truth, one which you must accept; for otherwise his names would not be so universally consistent. Have you not yourself noticed in speaking that all names were formed by the same method and with the same end in view?

S: But that, Cratylus, is no counter argument. For if the giver of names erred in the beginning and thenceforth forced all other names into agreement with his own initial error, there is nothing strange about that. ... And I think we could, if we took pains, find many other words which would lead us to reverse our judgement and believe that the giver of names meant that things were not in progress or in motion, but were at rest.

Σ: τίνα ἡμῖν δύναμιν ἔχει τὰ ὀνόματα καὶ τί φῶμεν αὐτὰ καλὸν ἀπεργάζεσθαι;

Κ: διδάσκειν ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ τοῦτο πάννυ ἀπλοῦν εἶναι, ὃς ἂν τὰ ὀνόματα ἐπίσταιται, ἐπίστασθαι καὶ τὰ πράγματα. ... οὕτως ἔγωγε, οὐ πάννυ τι εἶναι ἄλλον, τοῦτον δὲ καὶ μόνον καὶ βέλτιστον. ...

Σ: δηλὸν ὅτι ὁ θέμενος πρῶτος τὰ ὀνόματα, οἷα ἡγεῖτο εἶναι τὰ πράγματα, τοιαῦτα ἐτίθετο καὶ τὰ ὀνόματα, ὥς φαμεν. ἦ γάρ;

Κ: ναί.

Σ: εἰ οὖν ἐκεῖνος μὴ ὀρθῶς ἡγεῖτο, ἔθετο δὲ οἷα ἡγεῖτο, τί οἶε ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀκολουθοῦντας αὐτῷ πείσεσθαι; ἄλλο τι ἢ ἐξαπατηθήσεσθαι;

Κ: ἀλλὰ μὴ οὐχ οὕτως ἔχει, ὦ Σώκρατες, ἀλλ' ἀναγκαῖον ἢ εἰδὸτα τίθεσθαι τὸν τιθέμενον τὰ ὀνόματα: εἰ δὲ μὴ, ὅπερ πάλαι ἐγὼ ἔλεγον, οὐδ' ἂν ὀνόματα εἴη. μέγιστον δέ σοι ἔστω τεκμήριον ὅτι οὐκ ἔσφαλται τῆς ἀληθείας ὁ τιθέμενος: οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε οὕτω σύμφωνα ἦν αὐτῷ ἅπαντα. ἢ οὐκ ἐνενόεις αὐτὸς λέγων ὡς πάντα κατὰ ταῦτόν καὶ ἐπὶ ταῦτόν ἐγίγνετο τὰ ὀνόματα;

Σ: ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μέν, ὠγαθὲ Κρατύλε, οὐδέν ἐστιν ἀπολόγημα. εἰ γὰρ τὸ πρῶτον σφαλῆς ὁ τιθέμενος τᾶλλα ἤδη πρὸς τοῦτ' ἐβιάζετο καὶ αὐτῷ συμφωνεῖν ἠνάγκαζεν, οὐδέν ἄτοπον ... οἶμαι δὲ καὶ ἄλλα πόλλ' ἂν τις εὖροι εἰ πραγματεύοιτο, ἐξ ὧν οἰηθείη ἂν αὐτὸ πάλιν τὸν τὰ ὀνόματα τιθέμενον οὐχὶ ἰόντα οὐδὲ φερόμενα ἀλλὰ μένοντα τὰ πράγματα σημαίνειν.

Diogenes of Oenoanda's Fr. X. and XI.:*Fr. X. Col II.*

4 εἰς οὖν οὐδεμίαν τέχνην
 5 ὡς οἱ οὐδὲ ταύτας, οὐτ' ἄλ-
 6 λο[ν] τινὰ θεῶν οὐτε
 7 τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν παραλημ-
 8 πτέον· πάσας γὰρ ἐγέν-
 9 νησαν αἱ χρεῖαι καὶ πε-
 10 ριπτώσεις μετὰ τοῦ
 11 χρόνου. καὶ τῶν
 12 φθόνγων δὲ ἔνεκεν (λέ-)
 13 γω δὲ τῶν τε ὀνομάτων
 14 καὶ τῶν ῥημάτων, ὧν

Fr. X. Col III.

1 ἐποιήσαντο τὰς πρώτας
 2 ἀναφθένξεις οἱ ἀπὸ
 3 γῆς φύντες [ἄνθρω]ποι)
 4 μήτε τὸν Ἑρμῆν παρα-
 5 λαμβάνωμεν εἰς δι-
 6 δασκαλίαν, ὥς φασίν
 7 τινες—περιφανῆς γὰρ
 8 αὕτη γε ἀδολεσχία—
 9 μήτε τῶν φιλοσόφων
 10 πιστεύωμεν τοῖς λέ-
 11 γουσι κατὰ θέσιν καὶ
 12 διδαχὴν ἐπιτεθῆναι
 13 τὰ ὀνόματα τοῖς πράγ[μα]-
 14 σιν, ἵνα αὐτῶν ἔχωσι σημει-

Fr. X. Col IV.

1 α τῆς πρὸς [ἀλ]λήλους ἔνε-
 2 κα ῥαδίας ἀποδηλώσεως οἱ
 3 ἄνθρωποι. γελοῖον γὰρ
 4 ἐστι, μᾶλλον δὲ παν-
 5 τὸς γελοίου γελοιότη-
 6 ρον πρὸς τῷ καὶ τὸ ἀ-
 7 δύνα[τ]ο[ν] αὐτῷ προσεῖ-
 8 ναι, σ[υνα]γεγεῖν μέν
 9 τινα τὰ [το]σάδε πλήθη,
 10 ἕνα τυγχάνοντα—οὐδὲ
 11 γὰρ πω τ[ότ]ε β[ασι]λ[έ]ες ἦ-
 12 σαν οὐδὲ μὴν γ[ρ]άμμα-
 13 τα, ὅπου γε μὴδὲ οἱ φθόν-
 14 γοι—περὶ γὰρ τούτων καὶ

Fr. XI. Col I.

1 [συνα]γω[γῆς] μόνον βασιλικῆς ἔ-
 2 δει] προσταγῆς τὴν
 3 συ[ν]αγωγὴν αὐτῶν γε-
 4 νέσθαι—συναγαγόντα
 5 δὲ καθηγεῖσθαι γρ[α]μ-
 6 ματιστοῦ τρόπον, ῥα-
 7 κειδὸς τινος ἀν[τι]λαβό-
 8 μενον, καὶ ἐκάστου τῶ[ν]
 9 πραγμάτων θινγάνον-
 10 τα ἐπιλέγειν, ὅτι του-
 11 τε[ῖ] μὲν καλείσθω λί-
 12 θ[ος], τουτεῖ δὲ ξύλον,
 13 τ[ο]υτε[ῖ] δὲ ἄνθρωπος,²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Chilton's reconstruction in Chilton, 159-167 based on Heberdey, R. - E. Kalinka, *Die philosophische Inschrift von Oinoanda*, Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique 21, 1897, 346-443

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