
ANCIENT ETYMOLOGY: A TOOL FOR THINKING

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1. Introduction

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1 Parts of this chapter are based on Sluiter [1997b], and on the ‘etymology dossier’ in Copeland-Sluiter [2009] 339-366 (esp. 339-344). I am grateful to Christopher Pelling, Philomen Probert, and Stephen Halliwell, and to the other colleagues and students in Oxford (where I was allowed to give the Nellie Wallace Lectures in the Spring of 2010 on ‘Thinking with Language’); parts of this material were also presented in Leiden, Utrecht (OIKOS), and the Department of Christiane Reitz at Rostock; it also informed some of my contributions to the team studying ‘textual practices’, including etymology, at the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin, brought together by Lorraine Daston, Anthony Grafton and Glenn Most in the Summer of 2012. I would like to thank them, and also Gregory Nagy and his wonderful staff and librarians at the Center for Hellenic Studies for providing me with the peace of mind to write this chapter.
This chapter will deal with the ancient scholarly and poetic practices of etymology.\(^2\) Rather than providing a historical overview, its main focus will be on the cultural and historical embedding of these practices, an analysis of the type of discourse they represent, and their cognitive and rhetorical functions. These aspects of etymology remain important throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages and they connect technical, poetic, and general (rhetorical) uses, even though at the same time there is a development in the technical disciplines to use etymology for the more specialized purpose of thinking about morphology and lexicon by organizing words into clusters with a family resemblance.\(^3\)

Even there, though, it has virtually nothing to do with our modern academic practice of etymology. The first thing to clear out of the way, then, is the possible confusion of ancient etymology and the modern form that has given us our etymological dictionaries, the most recent one for Greek by Robert Beekes [2010]. Such dictionaries ultimately go back to the linguistic discoveries by the *Junggrammatiker* of the 19\(^{th}\) century, based on the comparison of different languages, and in particular the realization that a number of them, including ancient Greek and Latin, are related as Indo-European languages. These languages all derive from a reconstructed common ancestor, Proto-Indo-European, and they diverge from that common stock in accordance with strictly defined and strictly conditioned phonological changes (sound laws). These laws describe the situation before and after the sound changes, including the phonological contexts in which at a given moment all phonemes under the scope of the law underwent its influence. Exceptions need to be explained either as the result of later sound changes or on the basis of processes of analogy.

The ancient discursive practice of etymology, on the other hand, is simply a different kind of language game. In antiquity, to the extent that rules are formulated, they are mostly *ad hoc*\(^4\) and as it were ‘after the fact’, the ‘fact’ being a preliminary *semantic* observation, leading to an interpretive relationship between the *explanandum* and the

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\(^2\) For historical overviews, see *e.g.* Amsler [1989], Lallot [1991a], and the introductions to Buridant [1998] and Nifadopoulos [2003b].

\(^3\) Philoxenus (1\(^{st}\) c. BC) may be our first source to move in this direction, see Lallot [2012b]. We see a similar development in Herodian, the Greek lexicographical tradition (*the Etymologica*), and in the Middle Ages, where it is the branch of grammar called *ethimologia* that subsumes the study of morphology, see Law [1985].

\(^4\) There were also some general principles guiding these practices; see below § 3.2.
explanans. This is to say that etymologies are mostly put forward to corroborate a specific view of what a word ‘really’ means, probably even where they are presented as a tool to find the meaning of a word. There are some attempts to systematize, but as we will see, they are designed to allow maximum amplitude in relating words to other words. This observation is not in any way meant as a disparagement of the ancient practice. Quite to the contrary, its aim is to allow us to value and appreciate that ancient practice for what it really is and purports to do, rather than trying to make it conform to what we consider the correct, even the only scientific, way of talking about language.

The differences that we can observe are connected with the different purposes of ancient and modern etymology. Modern etymology is interested in the systematic nature of language change and is a historical discipline relating words to their past forms (the Proto-Indoeuropean roots). Although this may also be useful as a general background to the study of semantic developments, this form of etymology cannot be used reliably to explain the actual usage of a word at any given point in time. It is usually made very clear to students that we should not fall into the trap of confusing diachrony with synchrony: synchronic semantics (and syntax, and phonology) can be described as a system without reference to the developments that led to any given state of that system. Diachronic linguistics, on the other hand, needs knowledge of the successive synchronic states to construe the development that led from one to the other. De Saussure used his famous comparison with a game of chess for this purpose: we can completely and adequately describe the positions of the pieces on the chessboard without knowing or caring what moves created those particular positions on the board.

Ancient etymology, on the other hand, is all about synchrony, even though it invokes a discourse that references the past. It is about the relationship between words and their semantic explanation or definition – it wants to know why anything is called what it is called, the reason for the name, and what motivates the namegiver – and the explanations it comes up with are not intended to give us insight into the past, into the

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5 For this heuristic function, see Maltby [2003] and below § 4.
6 De Saussure [1916 (1974)] 124-127. Scholars have pointed out various infelicities in this comparison (e.g. Willems [1971]), some of which were already anticipated by De Saussure himself (notably the fact that playing chess is an intentional activity, whereas language change, apart from analogical change, is an evolutionary process (cf. [1916 (1974)] 127). However, the main point referenced above is still an important one.
historical processes and developments leading to the present situation; rather, and importantly, (ancient) etymology is about understanding the present.\textsuperscript{7} So whereas modern etymology does not provide an immediate insight into the contemporary semantics of a word, that is actually precisely what ancient etymology is meant to do. Ancient etymology is primarily about the present, modern etymology is about the past.\textsuperscript{8} Modern etymology is about phonology, ancient etymology is almost entirely about semantics.

2. Ancient Etymology: ‘Denkform’ and ‘discursive practice’

In antiquity, etymology is what we may call a Denkform and a ‘discursive practice’, a particular mode of thinking and speaking. Since language is always simply there, it belongs to the shared background, or, more technically, the common ground of speakers and addressees in any communicative situation. A shared awareness of the language they are using makes language itself readily available as a topic of joint reflection and a source of arguments: it becomes a ‘tool for thinking’, not in the sense that language offers various possibilities to express our thoughts (for instance, certain grammatical constructions, such as embedding, that facilitate particular types of thought), but as a shared object of thought and a common focus of attention: the words we use become ‘intuition pumps’ for how the world they represent functions.\textsuperscript{9} When thinking about and trying to understand the present, whatever the specific issue at stake, one way

\textsuperscript{7} This is true both in technical and non-technical forms of etymology. For the ‘near-absence of considerations relating to the history of the Greek language’ in the Alexandrians, cf. Lallot [2011] passim, here at 248; for the same point specifically about etymology, and for etymology as ‘Benennungsgrund’, see Herbermann [1991].

\textsuperscript{8} For the importance of synchrony and interpretation, see Peraki-Kyriakidou [2002] 480-2. Socrates’ position in Plato’s Cratylus is exceptional, but the positions he is arguing against are the typical ones. What is new in Socrates’ position is that he considers etymology a way to reconstruct the namegivers’ thoughts and considerations in producing specific names for specific things. This would make etymology a historical type of investigation, leading to knowledge about a situation in the past; Socrates’ attempt to disqualify etymology from contributing relevant arguments to investigations of contemporary issues is virtually unique in antiquity, see below \S 3.

\textsuperscript{9} For the linguistic notion of ‘common ground’, see e.g. Clark-Brennan [1991]; ‘tools for thinking’: Dennett [2000]; [2013], where the equally appealing term “intuition pump” is also used. This label is applied primarily to thought experiments by Dennett, but it seems readily applicable to the exploratory character of numerous ancient etymologies.
of getting a grip is by thinking about and trying to understand the language itself that we use to speak about such issues. Hence the attraction of the etymological turn, in which language in general, but particularly names, become the object of research. Such etymological ‘language talk’ is couched in a very recognizable discourse, as we will see in more depth in Discourse characteristics below.\(^{10}\) It is a constant fixture of ancient poetry, but it also occurs in prose texts. Its use by the language disciplines (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) is in part similar to the general use, and in part more specifically tailored to talking about issues of morphology and lexicography.\(^{11}\) In the list of the tasks of grammar by Dionysius Thrax, the fourth item is specified as ἐτυμολογίας εὑρεσις, ‘the invention of etymology’.\(^{12}\) This means that etymology is now (2\(^{nd}\) c. BC) a canonical part of grammar, but at the same time, the formulation suggests a link with rhetorical inventio and the argumentative role of etymology which is part of its general and poetic use. The reason why it came to be subsumed under the field of grammar is probably precisely because it plays such an important role in poetry – poetry after all is the primary study and teaching material of the grammarian.

2.1 Anchoring practices: etymology, mythology, genealogy\(^ {13} \)

Ancient etymology is best understood as one of the ‘anchoring’ practices by which human beings seek to create points of reference and orientation in past and present. In that sense it belongs with cultural practices such as mythology and genealogy. An important role of mythology is that it provides a group with a set of stories, a narrative construction of formative moments in the past, and thus helps, among other things, to create a sense of group identity in the present. Mythology provides a common frame of reference. Genealogy, too, is a discursive practice that ultimately serves to explain the

\(^{10}\) The term ‘language talk’ to describe the various, often informal, discursive practices that take language itself as its starting point and object is inspired by the unpublished Leiden dissertation on ideas on language in Euripides by Christaan Caspers [2011], whose first chapter is about ὄνομα – πρᾶγμα talk.

\(^{11}\) For etymology as a criterion of correctness in ancient prosody and orthography see Pagani, Probert, and Valente (section III.2) in this volume.

\(^{12}\) Dion. T. Ars Gram. GG I 1.6.1-2.

\(^{13}\) I am making use in this section of Sluiter [1997b] for the connection between etymology, mythology, and genealogy. See Manetti [1987] for ancient semiotic practices.
status quo in the present by anchoring that present, in an unbroken line of generations, to a founding moment in the past, e.g. a hero or a god.\textsuperscript{14} Both mythology and genealogy are forms of cultural memory; both have recognizable generic features, \textit{i.e.} they constitute a genre with its own discursive characteristics, and both, it may be argued, are ultimately more ‘about’ the present than the past, in spite of their ostensive occupation with that past. The same goes for etymology, and in fact, that practice is regularly related to the other two.

For the link between etymology and genealogy, we may think, with Peradotto [1990], of the name of Penelope, who was most probably named after a kind of ‘duck’ (\pi\nu\epsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\varsigma) – there are more ancient examples of girls being named after animals. However, as Peradotto points out, it is possible that the name itself became the object of reflection, and was re-etymologized and connected to \pi\eta\nu\eta, “woof”, and \lambda\omicron\upsilon\pi\eta “robe, mantle”; this etymology would have been an impulse or mnemonic support to generate the story of a heroine who spun a robe by day and undid her work by night.\textsuperscript{15} Of course, the alternative is that the myth was there first, and that a suitable name for its heroine was subsequently devised: this is a chicken-and-egg question, but however that is, there is an undeniable link between the etymology of the name and the mythological story.

In the \textit{Odyssey}, the name of Odysseus, too, is etymologically connected to the role and character of the hero; “Odysseus” is etymologized many times (Rank [1951] 51-63).\textsuperscript{16} The most explicit instance links the choice for baby Odysseus’ name to the verb \dod\ous\as\sigma\tau\alpha (\textit{Od}. 19.406ff.), \dod\ous\as\sigma\tau\alpha, “to hate, to be mad at”, characterizes, it is said,
the relationship between Odysseus’ grandfather Autolycus and the world, and it is projected onto the new baby, who gets a name that fits his grandfather.\textsuperscript{17} Two implicit references come in the words of Athena to Zeus in \textit{Odyssey} 1.62, where Odysseus has “grown into his name” and carries it in his own right, for she asks Zeus: “why, Zeus, are you so mad at him?” (τί νό ποί τόσον ὀδύσσεο, Ζεῦ;) The same passage also hints at a link with ὀδύρομαι “to lament”, when Athena says that Circe is holding back poor Odysseus, who is lamenting his fate: δύστηνον ὀδυρόμενον κατερύκει (\textit{Od.} 1.55). Odysseus is not only, like here, frequently in the position of having cause for lamentation himself, in the \textit{Odyssey} he is obviously also the object of the lamentations of those who miss him, notably Penelope, Telemachus, and, in a striking passage, Eumaeus.\textsuperscript{18} In this case, we have both a link with the story and a link between etymology and genealogy: Odysseus gets the name that fits his grandfather and only subsequently does that name become appropriate to the man Odysseus as well. The three discursive practices of genealogy, mythology and etymology are all useful in helping to create a mental roadmap of reality, to give people a sense of where they are in the world.

\subsection*{2.2 Discourse characteristics}

\textsuperscript{17} There are many more literary examples of children who are given speaking names that characterize primarily their fathers or grandfathers, \textit{e.g.} Astyanax, whose name reflects Hector’s role of protector of the city: \textit{Il.} 6.402f. Hector called the boy Scamandrius, αὐτὰρ οἱ ἄλλοι / Ἀστυάνακτ’. οἷος γὰρ ἔρυετο Ἰλιὸν Ἅκτορ, “but the others called him Astyanax. For Hector was the sole protector of Troy”; Asty- correspond to Ἰλιον, and ἔρυετο to – anax; note that Hector’s name has a perspicuous etymology denoting the same thing, to which Priam alludes in \textit{Il.} 24.499 ἔρυτο δὲ ἅστι καὶ ἄντος “(my son) who protected the city and the people”. Similarly, Ajax’ son Eurysaces (“Broadshield”) is named after Ajax’ signature military gear (for the connection, see Soph. \textit{Aj.} 574-576).

\textsuperscript{18} Penelope, \textit{e.g.} \textit{Od.} 14.129f. – where notice the context of the absent husband: καὶ οἱ ὀδύρομένη βλεφάρων ἦμεν δόκρων πίπτει / ἥθεμις ἑστι γυναικός, ἐπὴν πόσις ἄλλη ἔλημη “and the tears fall from her eyelids, while she weeps, as is the way of a woman, when her husband dies afar” (trad. Murray); Eumaeus, a little further on in the same passage, claims that not even his absent parents arouse such weeping and longing in him as does his absent master Odysseus (\textit{Od.} 14.142f., where ὀδύρομαι evokes the name of Ὀδυσσεός, a name Eumaeus states he feels socially inhibited using): notice how the explicit reference to naming may be considered a clue to the presence of etymologizing (οὐδὲ νῦ τὸν ἐτὶ τόσον ὀδύρομαι, ... ἄλλα μ’ Ὀδύσσηος πόθος αἴνυατο ὀχρομένου. / τὸν μὲν ἐγὼν, ὦ ξεῖνε, καὶ οὐ παρέοντ’ ὄνομαζειν / αἰδέομαι ... ἄλλα μὴ ἥμειον καλέω “yet it is not for them that I henceforth mourn so much; instead, it is longing for Odysseus, who is gone, that seizes me. His name, stranger, absent though he is, I am ashamed to pronounce; ... instead I call him “honored friend”” (trad. Murray-Dimock).
Etymological discourse has a number of characteristics to which the modern reader should be alerted, since they help diagnose that we are actually confronted with this particular tool for thinking at a given point in the text. I will list them briefly here, and then discuss each of them in more detail.

The first and most prominent feature is the emphasis on *causality, motivation, and explanation*: the reasons and motivations for why a name or a word is what it is. The prominence of this feature deserves separate discussion in the subsection below.

Since ancient etymology is not about the reconstruction of the single, historically accurate, route from word form to word form, but about using language as a tool for thinking about contemporary reality, this intellectual framework does not require just one single and accurate etymology for each word: several explanations can co-exist, they can be true *simultaneously*, because different ones can elucidate and highlight different aspects of the same concept, and there is virtually always a certain *fluidity* to etymological discourse. Several etymologies can even add up to an *explanatory narrative* that illuminates the workings of a certain concept in society.

Since etymologies frequently have an argumentative function, the construction of the etymological argument is often such that they will be maximally *persuasive*; the rhetorical presentation of the material can sometimes be demonstrated from the use of a certain *bridging technique* to smooth the semantic connection between word and suggested etymology. Etymologies can also be used *polemically*, to underpin different positions in a debate. Since technical terminology is frequently avoided, there are other forms of signposting that should alert us to the presence of etymological discourse: the context often features words for “name” or “naming”.

To shore up the explanation that is being offered, there will always be a phonological or, in this case better, phonetic link between the *explanandum* and the

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19 See O’Hara [1996] 60 and 75ff. on “naming constructions as etymological signposts” (in Vergil); we just saw an example in the Eumaeus passage *Od*. 14.142ff. (see n. 18). Another example: *Ov. Fast*. 3.725ff., is about explaining the *causa*, the reasons why the vine-father summons (*vocet*) the people to his cakes. The combination of *causa* and *vocare* is enough to prime an ancient audience for the presence of etymologies: there follows a connection between *liba* and *Liber*, but the real connection comes at 733-736: *Liber* explains the name *libamina*, and then states *liba* “are so called, because” [again causal language calling attention to the etymology] *part* of them (*i.e.* of the *libamina*) is dedicated. This must be a playful etymology: *liba* forms part of the word *libamina*, and that fits the actual sacrificial procedure. For the phrases ἀπὸ τοῦ or παρὰ τό as signposts, see Peraki-Kyriakidou [2002] 482.
explanans: the phrase that is offered as an etymological explanation of the word will have some sounds or letters\textsuperscript{20} in common with the word that is being explained. The explanation will sometimes detail the path of transformation to the word-form under discussion (phonetic bridging).

We will go into the discourse of motivation separately, and then illustrate the features mentioned above through a close reading of one case study, taken from Plato’s Cratylus.

2.3 Emphasis on causality and motivation

The fact that ancient etymology serves as a tool for thinking and an orienting device explains a constant feature of etymological discourse both in literature in general and in the language arts (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic): it is strongly marked by the language of causation, motivation, and reasoning. Etymological discourse explains, rationalizes and motivates the meaning of words, it makes explicit the causal relationships obtaining between the thing and the name. Why should a word have a particular meaning, why has the thing been given that particular name?\textsuperscript{21} Such causal discourse works by linking what is well-known (the word-form that is the starting point) to what is less well-known (the semantic motivation for that word-form); borrowing a term from Fowler, we may call this process “retrospective shaping”.\textsuperscript{22} This is to say that the etymology will rarely be a heuristic to find out what a word means: that meaning, or someone’s opinion on the meaning, is the given, and the etymology is a form of reverse engineering that will make it possible to read off that meaning from the surface of the word.

The urge to motivate our words may be connected to the impulse to use metaphorical language or other poetic devices: both in etymological discourse and in metaphor (or poetry) we may recognize an attempt to undo the arbitrariness of the

\textsuperscript{20} These are never clearly distinguished in antiquity; the term \textgamma\textalpha\textmu\textalpha\ or \textsigma\textomicron\epsilon\textomicron\zeta\omicron\nu\omicron\ can cover both or either. \phi\omicron\nu\iota\ is usually reserved for (inarticulate) sound.

\textsuperscript{21} This is what Herbermann [1991] calls the ‘Benennungsgrund’. For the earliest reflections on words’ origin and meaning in the Greek world, see Novokhatko and Pagani in this volume.

\textsuperscript{22} For this concept (without the name) applied to genealogy, see West [1985] 11; Fowler [1999], 2 n. 7.
linguistic sign by making language essentially motivated. Very few ancient Greeks or Romans would have accepted the claim of arbitrariness, but it takes work to deny it. The same resistance can also be detected in the long tradition of folk etymology that lasts until our own day. This is how etymology is a tool for thinking: it supplies a particular kind of argument and explanation.

This characteristic of etymology is directly reflected in the discourse that expresses it, which is often strongly marked by the presence of causal language (true both in Greek and Latin). Some examples of typical phrases that point to etymologizing are:

- ἐπώνυμον οὕνεκα ... ["a significant name because ..."]
- [(name)] x is “as it were”, or “just like” (ὡσπερεί, οἱονεί, quasi, velut(i), sicut(i), tamquam) x [where x “unpacks” the information contained in the name]
- a thing has a particular name, because (quod, quia) x
- the reason (ratio) or cause (causa) for a particular name is x

Cicero is one of our sources stating this causal principle quite clearly, both when speaking about the Academics and the Stoics (the latter in a very critical passage):

Cic. Acad. 1.8.32 (on the old Academy)

verborum etiam explicatio probabatur, id est, qua de causa quaeque essent ita nominata, quam ἐτυμολογίαν appellabant; post argumentis quibusdam et quasi

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23 See Culler [1988] 11 and 13, pointing out this importance of the urge to motivate. “Precisely because the linguistic sign is arbitrary, discourse works incessantly, deviously to motivate”. For undoing the arbitrariness of the sign through metaphor and poetic language, see Conte [1986] 45, who uses Plato’s Cratylus as a parallel for this process. Etymology makes ‘poetry’ out of language, i.e. it makes language ‘substantially motivated’ (ibid.). O’Hara [1996] 3 also adopts this view of Conte in thinking about poetic etymologizing (cf. Conte [1986] 50).

24 Some examples: ἐπώνυμον οὕνεκα Hom. Il. 9.562; Hymn. Hom. Ap. 3.372ff.; Hes. Theog. 144; ὡσπερεί cf. Pl. Cra. 407b; οἱονεί: e.g. Heracl. Gram. Quaest. Hom. 55 Hermes stands for λόγος, Leto is opposed to him: λόγος δὲ παντὶ μάχεται Λητώ, οἱονεί ληθώ τις οὖσα καθ’ ἐνός στοιχείου μετάθεσιν “Leto fights all reason, being as it were a letho ['forgetfulness'] if one changes one element”; quasi etc.: see Isid. Etym. passim, e.g. I v 3 oratio dicta quasi oris ratio; (combined with quod): I ii 2 litterae autem dictae quasi legiterae, quod iter legentibus praestent “litterae [letters] are called as it were legiterae, because they show readers (leg-entibus) the way (iter)”; cf. further phrases such as Isid. Etym. I xvi 2 (on metrical feet) ipsi autem pedes habent speciales causas nominum quare ita vocentur. Pyrrhichus dictus est quia ... “the (metrical) feet themselves have special reasons for their names, why there are called what they are called. The Pyrrhichus is called that because ...”; an example of an allusive etymology, betraying knowledge of the Greek tradition is Vergil’s trunca pedum “devoid of feet”, as flagged by the grammarian Sacerdos (GL 6.477.16): apes quasi ἄτοξος quod sine pedibus nascatur, sicut Virgilius de his [Georg. 4.310] trunca pedum ‘apes’ “bee” is as it were a-pous “foot-less”, because it is born without feet, as Vergil says about them “devoid of feet”’.
rerum notis ducibus utebantur ad probandum et ad concludendum id quod explanari volebant.

They commanded the explanation of words, i.e., why each thing was called by its particular name (they called this etymology). Later they used some of them as arguments and deployed as it were the signs of things as guides to prove and show conclusively that which they wished to have explained.

... vocabulorum cur quidque ita appellatum sit causas explicare.

To explain the reasons for the names, why each has that particular name

The “indications or signs of reality” (rerum nota) are used as “guiding principle”, to argue and to underpin whatever explanation is offered.\(^\text{25}\) This explanation of etymology as the ‘Benennungsgrund’ and motivation for names is clearly expressed by qua de causa quaeque essent ita nominata, and cur quidque ita appellatum sit causas explicare.

Since the normal order of cause (here: the semantic explanation) and effect (here: the word under discussion) is precisely that, we also see the frequent use of A ἀπὸ (τοῦ) B; (ducere) a(b) etc.

2.4 The successful etymology

The successful mapping of names and world unto each other (the goal of the etymologist) may be flagged by commenting on the appropriateness of the name through terms such as ἔτυμον (ἐτύμως), ἔτητυμος, ἀληθῶς, πρεπόντως, δικαίως, ἔνδίκως, καλῶς, εὐλόγως, ὀρθῶς, each of which may again be followed (or preceded) by a motivation of such a declaration of appropriateness. All of these terms (minus the adverb ἔτυμως) can be found as early as the Greek tragedians, and all indicate that a name can be motivated in a satisfactory way, that there is a ‘click’ between the world and the way we speak

\(^{25}\) See n. 72 for Cicero’s terminology.
about the world. Although all of these terms are compliments, indicating a ‘good fit’, they do come from different semantic fields. The first three (ἐτύμως, ἐτητύμως, ἀληθῶς) indicate “truth”, i.e. they say something about the epistemological status of these names, their reliability, and the extent to which they indicate what really is the case. The term πρεπόντως indicates a certain impression on the senses, it means that the name is conspicuously fitting; there may also be an overtone of seemliness. A famous example with both ἐτητύμως and πρεπόντως is the passage where the chorus comments on the truthfulness of the name of Helen and the conspicuousness of that truth in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon 681ff. In this case the name-giver had some inkling of what lay in store (pronoiáis), and the nomen proved an omen.

26 This aspect of ‘truthfulness’ survives deep into the technical tradition, see, e.g., Sch. Dion. T., GG I 3.14.23-24: ‘Ετυμολογία ἐστίν ἡ ἀνάπτυξις τῶν λέξεων, δι’ ἧς τὸ ἀληθὲς σαφηνίζεται “etymology is the unfolding of the words by which the truth is clarified”.

27 ἐτύμως referring to etymologies is not found as adverb prior to the 4th c. BC, and esp. in prose from the 2nd c. BC onwards, mostly in technical literature. However, both the adverb and the adjective ἔτυμος are used with verbs or nouns referring to types of speech, e.g. λέγειν ἐτύμως in Xenophanes, Fragm. 8 (West); ἐτύμως ἄριστος, Stesich. 15 (Page); ἔτυμως λόγος, Aesch. Sept. 82; ἔτυμως φήμη, Eur. El. 818; ἔτυμως φάτις, Ar. Pax 114; ἔτυμως φθογγά, Soph. Stesich. 15 (Page); ἔτυμως φήμη, Eur. El. 818; ἔτυμως φάτις, Ar. Pax 114; ἔτυμως φθογγά, Soph. Stesich. 15 (Page); ἔτυμως φήμη, Eur. El. 818; ἔτυμως φάτις, Ar. Pax 114. In later prose referring to etymology, in a text dealing with “allegory” Heraclitus Quaest. Hom. 5.1-2 (Buffière) on the word ἄλληγορία: σχέδον γὰρ αὐτὸ τοῦ ἄλληγορον καὶ ἄλληγορον ἐτύμως εἰρημένον ἔλεγχε τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῆς, ὡς ἄλλα μὲν ἀρκετὰ τρόπους, ἢτερα δὲ τόν ἔλεγχε σημαίνοντες, ἐπωνύμως ἄλληγορία καλεῖται; (in a work not dealing with etymology) Artem. 1.4: a dream of a hostel called “the camel” was explained as announcing that the dreamer would break a leg: καὶ τὸ ἐξενδοχεῖον κάμηλος καλούμενον τὸν μηρὸν κατάζειν (sc. ἐδήλου), ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸ ξῦν τὸ καλούμενον κάμηλος μέσος λέγεται τοὺς μηροὺς ὑποτεμνόμενον τοῖς σκελοῖς τὸ ὅπως ἐτύμως καθελμένον κάμηλος ἀλληγορώ τοῖς κάμηλοις; and ἀληθῶς: Aesch. Supp. 315 on the name of Epaphus, derived from ἐφάπτων χειρί (see vs. 313): Ἐπαφος ἀληθῶς ῥυσίον ἐπώνυμος “Epaphus, and truly named from laying on of hands” (trad. Weir Smyth).
προκαλυμμάτων ἔπλευσεν.

who can have given a name so altogether true – was it some power invisible guiding his tongue aright by forecasting of destiny? – who named that bride of the spear and source of strife with the name of Helen? For, it was conspicuously as a Hell to ships, Hell to men, Hell to city that she sailed the sea, stepping forth from her delicate and costly-curtained bower (trad. Weir Smyth/Lloyd-Jones, adapted)

Ἔτήτυμος and ἔτυμος both mean “true”. Modern etymological lexica do not agree about the precise derivation of these words: they are certainly related to an adjective ἔτός (ἔτα is paraphrased in Hesychius as ἀληθῆ, ἀγαθά), which is itself related to ἔταζο. Ἔτήτυμος may either have an expressive reduplication or it is formed through a combination of ἔτός and ἔτυμος. Both words are only used in connection with the technical terminology of etymology (ἐτυμολογία) at quite a late stage: while they obviously indicate an etymology in Aeschylus, the term etymology is much later. But the principle is clear: Helen has a truth-speaking name. The term πρεπόντως in 687 conveys that she sailed out, she was both “conspicuously” and possibly “fittingly” men-, ship- and city-destroying, i.e. she behaved in a way appropriate to her name, as if she was somehow socially expected (πρέπει, τὸ πρέπον) to do the right thing by her name. She was certainly seen to be doing what her name might suggest. Notice how the ἐπεί clause motivates the appropriateness of the name.

Δικαίως and ἑνδίκως mean that things are as they ought to be, that regularity and order are preserved. Καλὸς comes from the semantic field of aesthetics, εὐλόγως of

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28 The word etymology is absent from Plato’s Cratylus and was apparently coined by the Stoic philosopher Chrysipps in the 3rd c. BC. τὸ ἔτυμον for ‘etymology’ is first used by Plutarch, e.g. Mor. 278c ἐστι δὲ τὸ ὀνόματος τὸ ἔτυμον ... “the etymology of the word is ...”.

29 An example combining ὀρθῶς, ἑνδίκως and ἐπώνυμον is Aesch. Sept. 400ff. (Eteoeles speaking, on Tydeus’ shield emblem of ‘night’): καὶ νύκτα ταῦτα ἴνα λέγεις ἐπ’ ἀσπίδος ... εἰ γὰρ θανόντι νῦς ἔπ’ ὀφθαλμοῖς πέσοι / τῷ τοι φέροντι σήμα ὑπέρκομπον τῶν / γένοιτ’ ἄν ὀρθῶς ἑνδίκως τ’ ἐπώνυμον “as for this ‘night’ which you say is on his shield (this will prove prophetic): for if the night of death should fall on his eyes, then his boastful device would prove to be rightly and properly true to its name for its bearer” (trad. Sommerstein). This passage is intriguing because it refers to a σήμα that is not a linguistic sign (the word ‘night’), but rather a graphic representation; it needs to be verbalized, and interpreted metaphorically
reasonableness, and ὀρθὸς of correctness, rightness according to a (straight) rule – this of course is the word that will become the 5th-century catchword for correctness of speech.

Any name carrying these commendations shares the fact that it is ἐπώνυμος, it is significant, and establishes a meaningful relationship between language and the world. It refers to the fact that something is named after something else. The term ἐπώνυμος is used from Homer onwards.

3. A case study: Plato’s Cratylus on the name of Apollo

as the night of death before the diagnosis of the ‘perfect fit’ between sign and reality will hold. For δικαίος, see also Soph. OT 1282ff.

31 For a passage combining ἐπώνυμος and καλός, see Aesch. Cho. 948ff. ὥθησε δ’ ἐν μία μεσημβρίᾳ ἐπώνυμος / Δίος κόρα, Δίκαιες δὲ νῦν / προσαγορεύομεν / βροτοὶ τυχόντες καλός “and in the battle his hand was guided by her who is in very truth daughter of Zeus, breathing murderous wrath on her foes. We mortals aim true to the mark when we call her DIKA (Justice)” (trad. Weir Smyth, adapted): here the truth of Dika’s parentage as daughter of Zeus (the first function of ἐπώνυμος here) is confirmed by her name (Di [os]-K[or]-A[], a name given by mortals that is beautifully to the point.

32 See e.g. Aesch. Fragm. 6.3 Radt Α τί δήτ’ ἐπ’ αὐτός ὄνομα θίσεσαι βροτοί./ Β σμικρὸς Παλικός Ζεὺς ἐφίεται καλέλαν. / Α ή καὶ Παλικόν ἐπώνυμον μένε φάτες; / Β πάλεν γάρ ἰκουσʼ ἐκ σκότους τόδ’ εἰς φάος “Ἀ So what name will mortals give them? / B Zeus ordains that they be called the holy Palici. / A And will the name of Palici be appropriate and permanent? / B Yes, for they have come back from the darkness to this realm of light” (trad. Sommerstein): the etymology is based on πάλεν and ἰκουσ’ – they are “Back-comers” (Sommerstein); cf. also Aesch. Supp. 251ff. (ὐλόγος ἐπώνυμον). For linguistic correctness (Hellenism) see Pagani in this volume.

33 For ὀρθὸς, see Aesch. Sept. 829 οἱ δήτ’ ὀρθὸς κατε ἐπωνυμίαν / <...> καὶ πολυνεικές ὀλοντ’ “who have verily perished in a manner appropriate to their names / ... with ‘much strife’” (trad. Sommerstein): the chorus claims that both names are “Polyneices”, and plays on the etymology of that name; Soph. Fragm. 965 Radt ὀρθὸς δ’ Ὀδυσσεῖς εἰμ’ ἐπώνυμος κακῶν; / πολλοὶ γάρ ὀδύσαντο δυσμενές ἐμοί “I am rightly called Odysseus, after something bad: for many enemies have been angry with me”. ὀρθὸς is used in particular for the correspondence between expressions and things meant – the crucial point in etymology. In Aeschylus, we also encounter the terms τορᾶς and σαφῶς “clearly”: these are terms that refer to the auditory domain, the shrewlness and clarity of sounds; they are less relevant here.

34 For ἐπώνυμος, used for a name in so far as it relates to something else, see Sulzerber [1926], Sluiter [1997b] 157. ἐπώνυμον ends up in the technical tradition as a subclass of nouns (Dion. T. GG I 1 38.3 ἐπώνυμον δὲ ἐστίν, ὃ καὶ διώνυμον καλεῖται, τὸ μὲν ἐπόδρον κυρίου καθ’ ἐνός λεγόμενον, ὡς Ἑνοσήθρον ὁ Ποσειδών καὶ Φαῖδος ὁ Ἀπόλλων 'an eponym, also called di-onym (double name), is the name that is used for a single referent together with another word that is the proper name, e.g. Poseidon is (also) “Earthly”, and Apollo is also “Phoebus”.

35 E.g. Hom. Od. 19.409 τὸ δ’ Ὀδυσσέα ὄνομα ἐστῖο ἐπώνυμον “therefore let Odysseus be his (significant) name”, “the name by which he is called”; Soph. Aj. 430ff. (Ajax speaking) αἰαί, τίς ἂν ποτ’ ἕθεν ὄδ’ ἐπώνυμον / τοῦμιν ἐξονότεν ὄνομα τοῖς ὑμῖν κακοῖς / νῦν γὰρ πάρεσσαι καὶ διὰ αἰαίνου ἐμοί “Alas! Who ever would have thought that my name would come to harmonise with my sorrows? For now I can say “Alas” a second time” (trad. Lloyd Jones); this is a case of Ajax having “grown into” his name, where the assonance with the interjection of lament αἰαί has suddenly become meaningful; cf. the relationship between Πανθέως and πενθός in Eur. Baech. 367 (without a term like ἐπώνυμος flagging the etymology).

This example was also discussed with a slightly different focus in Sluiter [1998].
In the 5th and 4th centuries it became increasingly fashionable to explore and exploit the notion that language itself can somehow be of direct and instrumental use in illuminating the relationship between reality, thought, and language itself, that there is a satisfying fit between language and reality, and that this relationship can be expressed as right, just, true, correct or beautiful, as fits the context. In Plato’s *Cratylus*, written in the 4th c. BC, but with a dramatic date in the 5th, Socrates is made to addresses this fashion in an attempt, in his case, to disqualify language as a direct route to philosophical truth. As in several other dialogues, Socrates dismantles the etymological method only after having proven his unrivalled excellence at this form of discourse.\(^{36}\) Plato always makes sure that the ‘sour grapes’ argument will never affect Socrates: whenever a particular type of discourse is rejected as a sound way to philosophical truth, (mostly) Socrates is first shown to have absolute mastery of it.\(^{37}\)

Probably without intending to do so, Plato gave an enormous impetus to the fashion of ‘thinking with language’ through his *Cratylus*. The dialogue was taken dead seriously throughout antiquity.\(^{38}\) It provided for the first time some sustained theoretical reflection on etymological practice, and this combined with etymology’s status as a fixture of poetry to secure a permanent place for it in the language disciplines: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic.\(^{39}\)

There is every reason to think that the discourse deployed in the *Cratylus* gives a reliable depiction of the type of discourse current among ‘etymologists’, in this case

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37 E.g. forensic rhetoric in *Ap.*; different types of epideictic rhetoric in *Menex.*, *Symp.*, *Phdr.*, *Prt.*; sophistic discourse in *Thit.*, and *Euthd.*; Other types of discourse, not always rejected for philosophical purposes: symbouleutic rhetoric in the preambles of *Leg.*; cosmological discourse in *Ti.* (with Timaeus as speaker), historiographical discourse (again not with Socrates as speaker) in *Ti.*, *Cri.*, *Leg. III*; legal discourse in *Leg.* See also Nightingale [1995].

38 The modern discussion about taking the *Cratylus* seriously or not is probably not quite on target: the use of etymology as a vehicle for philosophical discussion is explored quite seriously; the outcome that it should not be so used is equally serious. None of this precludes a certain playfulness on the way. In antiquity the *Cratylus* was sometimes seen as originating etymological theory, e.g. Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 16: πρώτῳ τὸν ὑπὲρ ἐτυμολογίας εἰσαγαγόντι λόγον Πλάτωνι τῷ Σωκρατικῷ, πολλαχῇ μὲν καὶ ἄλλῃ μάλιστα δ’ ἐν τῷ Κρατύλῳ “Plato the Socratic was the first to introduce the theory of etymology, in many other places, but in particular in his *Cratylus*”.

39 Cf. Pagani, Probert, and Valente (section III.2) in this volume.
probably the people applying it in the context of intellectual debate in sophistic circles; but clearly, they could also rely on an earlier tradition. And, indeed, the parallels between Cratylus and both the earlier and later traditions suggest that its presentation of etymological discourse must have been quite recognizable. What is new, is that Cratylus provides us with an early example of longer stretches of sustained etymological argument. In order to illustrate the characteristics of etymological discourse, let us take a look at the etymology of the name of Apollo in Cratylus 405a-406a:

Pl. Cra. 405a-406a: Apollo:

οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ὅτι ἂν μᾶλλον ὄνομα ἥρμοσεν ἕν ὧν τέταρτον δυνάμεις ταῖς τοῦ θεοῦ, ὥστε πασοῦν ἑφάπτεσθαι καὶ δηλοῦν τρόπον τινὰ μουσικὴν τε καὶ μαντικὴν καὶ ιατρικὴν καὶ τοξικὴν. ... (b) κατὰ μὲν τοῖνυν τὰς ἀπολύσεις τε καὶ ἀπολούσεις, ὡς ἰατρὸς ὄν τῶν τοιούτων, (c) “Ἀπολόους” ὁ όρθος καλοῖτο· κατὰ δὲ τὴν μαντικὴν καὶ τὸ ἄλληθές τε καὶ τὸ ἀπόλοιν – ταύτα γὰρ ἔστιν – ὁσπερ οὖν οἱ Θετταλοὶ καλοῦσιν αὐτόν, ὁρθότατ’ ἂν καλοῖτο· “Ἀπλοῦν” γάρ φασι πάντες Θετταλοὶ τοῦτον τὸν θεόν. διὰ δὲ τὸ ἀεὶ βολὸν ἐγκρατῆς εἶναι τοξικὴ “Ἀειβάλλων” ἔστιν. κατὰ δὲ τὴν μουσικὴν δεῖ ὑπολαβεῖν [ὁσπερ τὸν ἀκόλουθόν τε καὶ τὴν ἀκοίτην] ὅτι τὸ ἀλφα σημαίνει πολλαχοῦ τὸ ὁμοῦ, καὶ ἐνταῦθα τὴν ὁμοῦ πόλησιν καὶ περὶ τὸν οὐρανόν, οὕς δὴ “πόλους” καλοῦσιν, καὶ [τὴν] περὶ (d) τὴν ἐν τῇ φόδῃ ἀρμονίαν, ἢ δὴ συμφωνία καλεῖται, ὅτι ταῦτα πάντα, ὡς φασιν οἱ κομψοὶ περὶ μουσικῆν καὶ ἀστρονομίαν, ἀρμονία τινὶ πολεῖ ἄμα πάντα· ἐπιστατεῖ δὲ οὗτος ὁ θεὸς τῇ ἁρμονίᾳ ὁμοπολῶν ἀυτὰ πάντα καὶ κατὰ θεοὺς καὶ κατ’ ἀνθρώπους· ὁσπερ οὖν τὸν ὁμοκέλευθον καὶ ὁμόκοιτον “ἀκόλουθον” καὶ “ἀκοίτην” ἐκαλέσαμεν, μεταβαλόντες ἀντὶ τοῦ “ὁμοῦ” “αὐτὸν”, ὁσπερ καὶ “Ἀπόλλωνα” ἐκαλέσαμεν ὡς ἂν “Ομοπολῶν”, (e) ἐπερον λάβδα ἐμβαλόντες, ὅτι ὁμόνυμον ἐγίγνετο τῷ χαλεπῷ ὄνοματι. ὅσπερ καὶ νῦν ὑποπτεύοντες τινες διὰ τὸ μὴ ὀρθοῦς σκοπεῖσθαι τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ὁνόματος φοβοῦσιν αὐτὸ ὡς σημαίνον φθοράν τινα· τὸ δὲ [πολὺ], (406a) ὁσπερ ἄρτι ἐλέγετο, πασοῦν ἑφαπτόμενον κεῖται τῶν τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεων, ἀπλοῦ, ἢ ἂν βάλλοντος, ἀπολούοντος, ὁμοπολούοντος.
For no single name could more aptly indicate the four functions of the god, touching upon them all and in a manner declaring his power in music, prophecy, medicine, and archery ... (b) In accordance, then, with his acts of delivering and his washings, as being the physician of such diseases, (c) he might properly be called Apolouon [ἀπολούων, the washer], and in accordance with his soothsaying and truth and simplicity (haploun) – for the two are identical – he might most properly be called by the name the Thessalians use; for all Thessalians call the god Aplun. And because he is always by his archery controller of darts [βολῶν] he is ever darting [ἀεὶ βάλλων]. And in accordance with his music we have to understand that alpha often signifies ‘together’, and here it denotes moving together both in the heavens about the poles, as we call them, and with respect to (d) harmony in song, which is called concord. For, as the ingenious musicians and astronomers tell us, all these things move together by a kind of harmony. And this god directs the harmony, making them all move together, among both gods and men. And so, just as we call homokeleuthon (him who accompanies), and homokoitin (bedfellow), by changing the homo- to alpha, akolouthon and akoitin, so also we called him Apollo who was Homopolo, (e) and the second lambda was inserted because without it the name sounded of disaster. Even as it is, some have a suspicion of this, because they do not properly regard the force of the name, and therefore they fear it, thinking that it denotes some kind of ruin. But in fact, (406a) as was said, the name touches upon all the qualities of the god, as simple, ever-darting, purifying, and accompanying. [trad. Fowler, slightly adapted]

3.1 Illustration of discursive principles

This text provides a perfect demonstration of the principles of etymological discourse.

(1) First of all, here are four etymologies that are clearly meant to give us, collectively, a picture of the roles of Apollo in 5th–4th-century Athens: roles in music, divination, medicine, and archery. The different etymologies do not exclude, but rather supplement each other. None of them is supposed to offer the single true historical
derivation of the name, but each of them reveals an aspect of the god. They are simultaneously true.

(2) Second, each of the four gives a *Benennungsgrund*, they motivate the name of the god; each time the *Benennungsgrund* is different in accordance with the different roles of the god. The etymologies are marked by the use of causal language or the suggestion of causal connections.\(^{40}\) The etymologies are evaluated, in this case primarily by means of terms such as ὀρθῶς and ὀρθότατ’ (405c).\(^{41}\)

(3) Apart from the causal language, the vocabulary used draws explicit attention to the presence of names (*e.g.* in the very first line of this excerpt: ὄνομα) and the practice of naming (various forms of καλέω are used throughout this text). In the *Cratylus*, with its explicit focus on etymology, this may not cause wonder, but as noted above, such discourse elements may signpost etymologies also in texts that are not explicitly *about* etymology.

All the points mentioned so far can readily be paralleled in the poetic tradition, for instance in the multiple explanations for the name of Ion in Euripides’ *Ion*; in the prologue by Hermes we learn that Apollo will make sure that he will be called by the name Ion throughout Greece: as future founder of the Ionians (*Ion* 74-75), he will be their “eponymous hero”, *i.e.* they will be named after him; and in fact, Hermes proceeds immediately to call him by that name he is yet to get (80-81). The actual naming is based on Apollo’s oracle to Ion’s new father Xuthus: whoever encounters Xuthus on his leaving the temple (ἐξιόντι, 535) will be his son, says Apollo, and Xuthus converts the fact that Ion is the first person he saw into the motivation for his name.\(^{42}\) “Leaving” or “going (out)” is thus something done by the father. When the chorus reports the naming incident, they seem to transfer the “going” to the son – of course, “meeting” is something done

\(^{40}\) In 405b κατά may mean no more than “in accordance with”, “with reference to”, but the implication is clearly that etymology and domain are in accordance with each other; 405b ὄς + ptc. “because”; in 405c, again the use of κατά, especially διά, and again κατά; 405d ὡς; supplemented with a principle of analogy (405d ἀπαρε... ὡς...).

\(^{41}\) The qualification ὀρθῶς is obviously important in *Cra.* given its theme of ὀρθότης τῶν ὀνομάτων. But the other commendations also play a role, *e.g.* ἀλλήλα (vs. ἀναμίκτικα ~ καλός) Pl. *Cra.* 404d.

\(^{42}\) Eur. *Ion* 661-663 Ἰωνα δ’ ὄνομάζω σε τῇ τύχῃ πρέπον, / ὀδούνεκ’ ἀδύτων ἔξιόντι μοι θεοῦ / ἱχνὸς συνῆξας πρῶτος “I give you the name Ion, a name befitting the happy circumstances, because you were the first when I left (ex-ion-ti) the temple of the god, to cross my path”. Notice the causal language (ὀδούνεκ’), the success of the etymological relation (πρέπον), and the assonance between Ion and ex-ion-ti.
mutually. Each time, the etymology is signposted by the vocabulary of names and naming, and a causal relationship is suggested between name and motivation. The name also related to what happens in the story. This takes us back to the Cratylus example again.

(4) In the Apollo example, the etymologies together make up a narrative: they are a story about Apollo, in fact, the passage has a neat ring-composition that strengthens that effect (406a picks up 405a). It has frequently been observed that etymology is an important tool in allegory, without completely coinciding with it. Etymology can provide the building blocks, often based on establishing individual interpretations (or motivations) of names. Put together, these can constitute allegorical narratives. This is what we see happening, for instance, in the 1st c. AD work by Cornutus. However, as we see, etymology by itself also has narrative potential.

(5) Fifth, the last etymology, with its reference to people who believe that the name of Apollo is somehow related to the verb ἀπόλλωμι “to destroy”, is polemical in tone. It is claimed that the insertion of a second lambda was in fact done on purpose to prohibit such an association. In fact, however, our poetic tradition does indeed offer such an etymology, for instance in Aeschylus’ Agamemnon 1080-1082, where Cassandra calls on Apollo, and claims that he has destroyed her: Ἀπόλλων Ἀπόλλων / ἀγυιᾶτ’, ἀπόλλων ἐμός. / ἀπώλεσας γάρ οὐ μόλις τὸ δεύτερον (“Apollo, Apollo, god of the ways, my Apollôn: for you have destroyed me (apólesas) without any trouble for the second time”). Notice here too the explicit mention of the Benennungsgrund: γάρ, motivating the name Apollo. The polemical against Aeschylus and others demonstrates that you can argue with and with the help of etymologies, and that there is a certain fluidity to them.

43 Eur. Ion 802 (response to the question: what name did his father give him?) Ἴων’, ἐπείπερ πρῶτος ἐντησεν πατρί (“Ion, since he was the first to encounter his father”), cf. above n. 17 on Hector and Astyanax. The verb ἐντάω is used as a synonym for ἵπποι, which we need to get to “Ion”.
44 Boys-Stones [2003]; see also Long [1992] 54-58 on Cornutus and etymology.
45 Cf. O’Hara [1996] 58 (about etymology in poetry): “An etymology is a story ... and poets play with details of the story in a way that may be compared with the way they play with myths”.
46 The destructiveness of Apollo is a topos of the poetic tradition, cf. for instance Soph. OT 1329f. (Oedipus) Ἀπόλλων τάδ’ ἤν, Ἀπόλλων, φίλοι ο’ δικαία κακά τελόν ἔμα τάδ’ ἐμὰ πάθεα “this was Apollo, Apollo, my friends, who brought about these evil evil sufferings of mine”. Note that δικαία τελόν again represents a paraphrase of the term ἀπόλλωμι which is necessary for the actual etymology. Another destructive Apollo is encountered in the first book of the Iliad, where he brings about the pest.
47 Here related to ἀπόλλωμι/ἀπολλόω as if from ἀπόλλω.
different etymology will correspond to a different view of the underlying reality, in this case the role of Apollo.

(6) Finally, this text is also a valuable illustration of the technical aspect of etymology: the linguistic operations that will lead from one form to the next. These deserve separate discussion.

3.2 Etymological technique

(a) An important aspect of etymological persuasive technique, and a demonstration of its rhetorical use is semantic bridging, the semantic transition technique that Socrates uses. For instance, when he speaks about the mantic qualities, the aspects of divination in Apollo’s name (405c), he starts with the term μαντική – this represents his initial claim that the name of Apollo will somehow reveal this function of Apollo. He then substitutes τὸ ἀληθὲς “truth” – this is unlikely to be a controversial move, since divination is conventionally about establishing truth, and from there he moves to ἄπλοῦν: this move is surprising, but it is the word he needs to make the etymology work. Hence his explicit confirmation that truth and simplicity are really the same thing. It would not have worked to go straight from μαντική to ἄπλοῦν.

(b) Within etymological discourse any linguistic principle or observation can be put to good use: the etymologist can take recourse to different dialects, as here to that of the Thessalians, 405c, where Aeolic psilosis helps to bring ἄπλοῦν via ἄπλουν closer to Ἀπόλλων. Socrates also refers to the (correctly identified) similarity of ἀ- and ὁμο-, i.e. he realizes that the alpha may not just be an a privans but may also indicate a relationship of “togetherness”. And he uses a principle of analogy: the relation between ὁμόκοιτις and ἄκοιτις is the same as that between ὁμοπολῶν and Ἀπόλλων. To say that etymology is a very different language game from our discipline of historical grammar is definitely not...
to say that there is not a great amount of linguistic observation and knowledge feeding into it.\textsuperscript{50}

(c) This is also our first extant text in which the avoidance of homonymy is explicitly invoked as a reason for linguistic change – in later grammatical theory we will encounter the phrase ἵνα μὴ συνεմπίπτῃ “in order to avoid coincidence”; συνεμπίπτειν refers to the coincidence of forms (\textit{co-in-cide} is actually a ‘calque’ of συν-εμ-πίπτειν).\textsuperscript{51}

(d) Another issue of the technique of etymology is \textit{phonetic bridging}, the phonetic transition technique that takes us from one word-form to the next. This is connected with the set of rules, also going back to the \textit{Cratylus} that is associated with etymology in antiquity. These rules are asserted quite confidently by Socrates in the passage in the \textit{Cratylus} in which he claims to be under the influence of a strange inspiration. If we wish to understand why a word is called whatever it is called – a clear enunciation of the ancient mission statement of etymology –, he says, we should fully focus on the \textit{semantic} aspect. Ultimately, that is the only thing that counts. The \textit{word-form} can undergo all kinds of changes, which will not ultimately affect the meaning. Socrates distinguishes four kinds of change or operations:

\begin{quote}
Pl. \textit{Cra.} 394b οὕτω δὲ ἴσως καὶ ὃ ἐπιστάμενος περὶ ὀνομάτων τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῶν σκοπεῖ, καὶ οὐκ ἐκπλήττεται εἴ τι πρόσκειται γράμμα ἢ μετάκειται ἢ ἀφῄρηται, ἢ καί ἐν ἄλλοις παντάπασιν γράμμασίν ἐστιν ἢ τοῦ ὀνόματος δύναμις. (\textit{E.g.} Hector and Astyanax have only a \textit{tau} in common, yet they mean the same thing).\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

So perhaps the man who knows about names considers their value and is not confused if some letter is added, transposed or subtracted, or even if the force of the name is expressed in entirely different letters. (trad. Fowler)

\textsuperscript{50} In that sense the criticism of Nifadopoulos [2003b] of the observation that ancient etymology will use anything that will create the desired result is misguided. The recognition that ancient etymology is a particular “tool for thinking” in its own right rather than a precursor of historical grammar is perfectly compatible both with taking it seriously, and with acknowledging that observations of linguistic regularities may feed into it (cf. also Pagani, Probert, and Valente [section III.2] in this volume).

\textsuperscript{51} See Sluiter [1990] 125-139.

\textsuperscript{52} See above n. 17.
Socrates is talking here about an expert in names (a dialectician) who wants to understand what the namegiver has done. The namegiver has expressed in his names a certain principle (in the case of Hector and Astyanax the principle of “protecting a city”). The precise form in which he does so is irrelevant. Socrates himself notes that Hector and Astyanax have only the letter _tau_ in common, yet they mean the same thing – the idea is _not_, therefore, that one is somehow ‘derived’ from the other, they both express the same semantic idea in different sounds.\(^53\)

Aristotle will use the same four categories as an exhaustive explanation of the forms that any change can take: change will come about by addition or subtraction or transposition or substitution (πρόσθεσις, ἀφαίρεσις, μετάθεσις, ἐναλλαγή). And we will find these same four categories throughout the grammatical tradition,\(^54\) whether discussion is about dialects or accentuation or pathology or syntax; they also underlie the theory of rhetorical tropes and figures. Socrates has a long shadow here.

Two comments should be made here. The first one is positive and constructive: the fact that all these changes are enumerated and that they receive their own labels points at the fact that the causal link constructed between a name and its etymology cannot do without _some_ form of material support in the word form. The plausibility of the causal connections that are constructed in this explanatory exercise may depend primarily on the semantic link, but phonological (or rather: phonetic) adstruction is necessary. There needs to be a form of assonance between the _explanandum_ and the _explanans_, even if just a very slight one.\(^55\) Issues of euphony may be invoked to explain why the shift in the ‘soundscape’ of the word took place (e.g. 404d), and _phonetic bridging_ will often provide a series of subtly changed forms connecting the semantically perspicuous to the semantically opaque one.

On the other hand, it will also be clear that if all these changes are permitted, this means that ultimately we can get from any single word to any single other word or phrase – and that, of course, is precisely the criticism that Socrates himself at a later point in the _Cratylus_ anticipates and that will be taken up by that part of the ancient tradition that is

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\(^{53}\) Note again that like all ancient thinkers, Socrates does not distinguish between sounds and letters.

\(^{54}\) See Pagani in this volume.

\(^{55}\) See O’Hara [1996] 59 and 60ff. on _paronomasia_ (the poetic linking of words of similar sound).
highly critical of etymology (such critics of etymology notably include Aristotle, Cicero and Galen). In Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum*, for instance, it is put like this:56

enodatio nominum ... in enodandis autem nominibus quod miserandum sit laboratis ... quamquam, quoniam Neptunum a nando appellatum putas, nullo erit nomen quod non possis una littera explicare unde ductum sit; in quo quidem magis tu mihi natare visus es quam ipse Neptunus. (63) magnam molestiam suscepit et minime necessariam primus Zeno post Cleanthes deinde Chrysippus commenticiarum fabularum reddere rationem, vocabulorum cur quidque ita appellatum sit causas explicare.

The unraveling of names ... in unraveling names, what a pitiful effort are you making! ... though since you think the name Neptune comes from *nare* “to swim”, there will be no name of which you could not make the derivation clear on the basis of one letter. In this matter you seem to me to be more at sea than Neptune himself. (63) A great deal of quite unnecessary trouble was taken first by Zeno, then by Cleanthes, and lastly by Chrysippus, to rationalize these purely fanciful myths and explain the reasons for the names by which the various deities are called (trad. Rackham, adapted).

The criticism is put quite clearly here: if Neptune can be derived from *nare*, any word can be linked to any other by having just one letter in common: one letter will suffice to explain its provenance (*una littera explicare unde ductum sit*). This criticism, too, would be long-lived. It is the basis for Mark Twain’s famous dictum on the derivation of the name of the village of “Middletown” from “Moses”, “by dropping oses and adding iddletown” 57

The *Cratylus* passage has provided examples of semantic bridging, of the use of any kind of linguistic observation, of the argument from linguistic economy, and of

56 This is part of the same text quoted above, in § 2.3.
57 Taken from Culler [1988] 4.
phonetic bridging with its application of the four categories of change. These will remain important instruments of etymologists throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages.58

4. Functions of etymology

If ancient etymology is not a historical discipline with a primary interest in phonological change, what does it do? As I argued in this chapter, to understand the intellectual and socio-cultural niche occupied by etymology, it is imperative that we understand its functions. Focusing on function rather than on technique has the important advantage that it starts from the Principle of Charity: it gives a maximizing interpretation of the relevance and coherence of the ancient practice before criticizing it.59 I will pull together some threads from my earlier discussion in this overview of the functions of etymology.60

As we demonstrated above, etymology, just like genealogy and mythology, may support cultural memory: in this mnemonic capacity, the words themselves are turned into repositories of cultural information (Carruthers 1992). But not everyone has the key to these repositories. There is a considerable performative element to etymological discourse.61 The poets, or later the more technical language specialists, put themselves forward as masters of language, capable of making language ‘special’, ‘marked’, and ‘motivated’, in that any seemingly opaque element of language in their hands becomes transparent and meaningful in and of itself. The masterful unpacking of the information carried by the very words themselves is an instant demonstration of the poet’s superior and playful command of language; it allows him to compete with others in a particular form of power play, and thus to claim his place in a literary tradition.62 At the same time, the reader is actively involved in the same language game, particularly where the etymology is signposted, but not fully spelled out. Following the poets’ lead in squeezing

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58 For etymologies a contrario of the type lucus a non lucendo, not represented in this passage, see e.g. Quint. Inst. 1.6.34: etiamne a contrariis aliquam sinemus trahi, ut “lucus” quia umbra opacus parum lucent, et “ludus” quia sit longissime a lusu, et “Ditis” quia minime dives?: August. De dialect. 6; for their explanation as euphemistic expressions, see O’Hara [1996]; Sluiter [1997b] 159.

59 For the Principle of Charity applied to linguistic thought, cf. Sluiter [1998].

60 The excellent discussion by O’Hara [1996] 103ff. has provided the basis for this section.

61 This is definitely also true for Socrates’ performance in the Cratylus; see further Ford [1999].

knowledge of the world out of their words becomes an aesthetic experience, contributing to the pleasure of the reader. Etymological suggestions also frequently create thematic connections with (poetic) content, and thus support and reinforce the narrative. While these elements are all crucial to the primarily poetic and literary functions of etymology, they spill over into different areas of ancient intellectual life; in particular, there is an important feedback loop between the production of poetry and Alexandrian scholarship, from which grammar and philology take their cue. And there is a second important feedback loop connecting the language disciplines (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, philology).

It is in technical grammar (but also in rhetorical contexts) that etymology is also used – or at least presented – as a heuristic tool, an ‘intuition pump’ for assessing the meaning or orthography of a word. This presupposes that the etymology is easy to follow. Varro complains about an etymology in Ennius that presupposes knowledge of Greek to an extent that makes the etymology itself highly obscure. In the technical grammarians Apollonius Dyscolus and Herodian (2nd c. AD), etymology plays a rather minor role. However, two passages from Herodian may illustrate the range of its usage.

**Herodian, De Il. prosod., GG 3.2.30**

‘Ἡφαίστον· δασύνεται διὰ τὴν ἐτυμολογίαν· παρὰ γὰρ τὸ ἅπτω ἐγένετο

Hephaestus: Rough breathing on account of the etymology. For it comes from (the word) ἡπτῶ.

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63 See Montana in this volume.
64 See e.g. Maltby [2003], 103-118. See further Pagani, Probert, and Valente (section III.2) in this volume.
65 Varro Ling. 7.82 (note that Varro does not doubt the correctness of the etymology, but its effectiveness) apud Ennium “Andromachae nomen qui indidit, recte indidit” ... *imitari dum voluit Euripiden et ponere ἔτυμον, est lapsus*; nam Euripides quod Graece posuit ἔτυμα sunt aperta. ille ait adeo nomen additum Andromachae, quod ὁδηγεῖ μάχεται; hoc Ennii quis potest intellegere in versu[m] significare

“*Andromachae nomen qui indidit recte indidit*”? “in Ennii: ‘whoever gave Andromache her name, gave it rightly’...he made a mistake when he wanted to imitate Euripides by giving the etymology. For Euripides’ suggestion in Greek is a clear etymology. He said that Andromache had been given her name, because she *andr-i mach-etai*. But who can understand that this is the meaning of Ennii’ verse ‘whoever gave Andromache her name, gave it rightly’”? (Example from O’Hara [1996] 52).
66 Cf. Pagani, Probert, and Valente (section III.2) in this volume.
This is the usage traditionally labeled ‘heuristic’: the etymology of the name Hephaestus is used as an argument to settle the question of whether the opening vowel should have a rough or a smooth breathing. Since ἄπτω has a rough breathing, so should Ὑφαιστος. However, the etymology itself is offered quite apodictically. There is no argument or motivation for it, i.e. the name Hephaestus is not motivated through an explicit semantic link with the verb ἄπτω “to touch”. The second example takes a different approach still:

Herodian, De II. Prosod., GG 3.2.95 (on Il. 15.365 ἦς Φαίβη)

ἦς· Ἀρίσταρχος διασώζει, ἀπὸ τῆς ἔσεως τῶν βολῶν. οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Κράτητα ψυλῶς, ἀπὸ τῆς ἔσεως. καὶ οὖτως ἐπείσθησαν οἱ γραμματικοί πρὸς διάφορον ἐτυμολογίαν διαφόρως ἀναγινώσκειν. ἄννουσι δὲ ὅτι ὁ χαρακτήρ μάχεται· ἀεὶ γὰρ τὸ η πρὸ φωνημέντος ψυλύται, ἡμῖν, ἦμι.

Aristarchus writes ἦς (ê-e) with a rough breathing, from the shooting (hesis) of darts, but Crates and his followers with a smooth breathing, from healing (iasis). And thus the grammarians let themselves be persuaded to read this differently in accordance with their different etymologies. But they do not realize that the word-type is inconsistent with this: for ἐta before vowel always has a smooth breathing, (e.g.) ἐός, ἐῖα’.

We immediately recognize two of the etymologies attached to Apollo in the Cratylus (see above). We also again see that different groups of grammarians use etymology as an argument for (different) orthographical decisions to do with prosody. But Herodian overrules them all because the etymology turns out to be irrelevant: whatever it is, the word would have started with an ‘ἐτα + smooth breathing’, because all Greek words starting with ἐτα before a vowel have a smooth breathing. The technical

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67 Cf. Hdn. Pros. GG 3.1.543.24, where it becomes apparent that the rough breathing in Hephaestus is exceptional (other words starting with η followed by an aspirate (here φ) have a smooth breathing). The etymology motivates the exception.
68 For comparison: Chantraine (Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque) calls Hephaestus “nom divin particulièrement obscur”. In Plato’s Cratylus (407c) Socrates makes it clear that he’d rather not be forced to discuss his suggestion in detail.
grammarian works with sweeping rules based on phonological conditions (or at least sequences of letters) which may outweigh etymological considerations. There is no doubt that we are again encountering a performance of mastery in conditions of fierce intellectual competition: but etymology is not the winning weapon here.

As a tool of interpretation and persuasive argumentation, etymology may serve widely divergent causes. For instance, Ovid rejects an etymology of April that would not support the Augustan political agenda and Julian claims of descent from Venus. The background to his stance is one of politics and poetic patronage. In rhetoric, etymology is part of inventio, the first task of the rhetorician, in which he finds the argumentative structure and material for his speech, not in the sense of inventing, but of discovering what is already there. Etymology is a topos of invention, and has a place in works called Topica, both by Aristotle and by Cicero. The argumentative role of etymology is crucial. An example of such an etymological argument from a legal context, where it may have fulfilled the role of, precisely, an intuition pump, a prima facie argument, is the fragment by the Roman legal scholar M. Antistius Labeo (from the time of Augustus).

M. Antistius Labeo, GRF 557-63. Fragm. 7

soror appellata est quasi seorsum nascitur

a soror “sister” has that name as if she is born seorsum “apart”

The fragment relates the word for “sister” (soror) etymologically to seorsum “separate” or “apart”. A reasonable guess would be that Labeo used this etymology to

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70 Ov. Fast. 4.85-90 where an etymology of April from aperire (of nature in Spring) is rejected in favor of one connecting the name of the month to Venus; cf. Herbert-Brown [1994] 90f. I thank Stephen Heyworth for this suggestion. See Maltby [1991] s.v. aprilis.
71 The slightly curious phrasing of the fourth task of grammar in Dionysius Thrax as ἐτυμολογίας εὕρεσις is probably indicative of the place of etymology in precisely this neighboring language discipline, namely rhetoric. See at n. 12.
72 E.g. Arist. Rh. 1400b17-25; Top. 112a32-38; Cic. Top. 35-37 cum ex vi nominis argumentum elicetur “when an argument is drawn from the meaning of a name”. Cicero experiments with different translations, but rejects the literal veriloquium (a ‘calque’ of ἐτυμολογία) for notatio (quia sunt verba rerum notae “because words are symbols of reality”, relating this choice to Aristotle’s σύμβολον. Cic. De or. 2.256-257 provides more examples of paronomasia and rhetoric based on etymology (in spite of the philosophical objections raised in Nat. D., see above at n. 56.)
argue for the legal status of “sisters”: by nature, that is in natural law, they would be expected to leave the house and the jurisdiction of their fathers when they got married and to go over into the manus of their husband. This natural state of affairs appears from their name soror, and it means that natural law and positive law are in agreement. This argument would have appealed to the Stoa and may in fact have been inspired by them.73

Finally, there may be a more basic mnemonic function than the one we started out with: etymologies are a helpful support for memory, simply because they can be delightful, clever, and easy to remember. We will end this overview with two examples from the Middle Ages, where yet another type of etymology becomes popular: the syllabic one.74 This leads to etymologies such as cadaver = ca-ro da-ta ver-mibus (“flesh given to worms”) or fenestra = fe-rens n-os extra (“taking us outside”).75 These etymologies are funny and memorable, and excellently suited for teaching Latin to non-native speakers, which adds a pedagogic function to our list. And the unorthodox use of the window in particular, if we think not of just staring out of it, but actually using it as an exit, may have appealed to schoolboys in particular.

5. Final adhortation

Ancient linguistic thought takes all kinds of shapes: etymologizing is one of the most varied intellectual habits of classical antiquity in spite of all the ridicule and criticism it has also invited. But it needs to be engaged on its own terms, and we need to be alert to its often hidden and allusive nature. It is an intuition pump used to demonstrate authority and mastery over language, no longer a random instrument for speaking, but a motivated and meaningful one that helps us explore the common ground formed by language itself. It suggests prima facie arguments and interpretations, and it supports memory. And most importantly, it can be delightfully clever. But that, admittedly, is also a matter of taste.

73 See Allen [2005] on Stoic etymology.
74 The Di-ka ~ Dios Kora example discussed above at n. 30 is an early version of this.
75 To be found in Petrus Helias, Summa super Priscianum I 2 (see Copeland-Sluiter [2009], 351); the gloss on Priscian Promisimus (Copeland-Sluiter [2009], 356).
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