Etymology

Five Examples of Another Truth, From Democritus to Foucault

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei

Ph.D. (European Graduate School, 2011)
M.Mus. (Royal Conservatoire, 2007)
M.A. (Leiden University, 2005)

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In lieu of an introduction, this dissertation starts with a short exposé on the paradigm, or the example, which provides the general framework in which the argument will develop – namely to the side of more classical modes of deductive or inductive reasoning. Our argument here is that in order to inspect a concept – *etumos logos* – that has been repressed throughout most of the history of metaphysics, our biggest chance of uncovering some of it is to avoid modes of the *logos* that have been specifically prominent in that history of repression.

In the First Example we investigate the predominance of *alētheia* as philosophically dominant word for truth, while locating in the work of Martin Heidegger a sustained attempt to undermine and recast the precise meaning of that word. It is our claim that even though Heidegger, ever reaching farther back in the history of Western philosophy, up to the first, non-philosophical, poetical attestations of the Ancient Greek language, manages to uncover many subtleties in the meaning and origin of truth as *alētheia*, he fails to notice that in the epic literature predating the first philosophical works *alētheia* is in no way the privileged word for truth.

By investigating the precise semantics of the contrast between *etumos/etētumos/eteos* and *alēthēs* in the work of Homer and Hesiod, and the slow disappearance of this contrast in Aeschylus and Pindar, we suggest a parallel between on the one hand the disappearance of the former and Heidegger’s insistent neglect of this disappearance. This neglect is also the reason that Heidegger’s readings from Homer and Hesiod fail to convince; they project onto these authors a “basic meaning” of *alētheia* that in fact post-dates their texts. At the same time, we inspect Heidegger’s attempts to “go beyond” etymology, and the insistent professions of his aversion to mere “word philosophy,” in spite of the fact that his methodology often follows precisely the figura etymologica. Thus it appears that both his dislike for etymology and his blindness for this “other” Ancient Greek word for truth can be interpreted together in a way that suggests that Heidegger’s attempts to recover a lost meaning of truth and go beyond “metaphysics,” are in fact strongly anchored within one of its most important precepts: a rejection of the *etumos*.

In the Second Example we depart from the adverbial usage of *eteon ge* “in truth, reality” in the *Iliad* and the *Homeric Hymns*, and subsequently its nominal form *eteē* in the work of the pre-Platonic materialist philosopher Democritus, where *eteē* as “real-
ity” or “truth” is the condition upon which truth as alētheia can be known, even if with difficulty. It is thus conceptualized as a truth, which, unlike alētheia, is independent of human perception or subjectivity. This specifically Democritean concept has been subsequently lost in the Platonic–Aristotelian tradition, as confirmed by the doxographica

Democritus only returns to prominence in philosophy with his rediscovery by Friedrich Albert Lange and, more thoroughly, Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche spent a considerable part of his early career studying the work of Democritus, which exerted an enormous influence on his later thought, not so much in terms of his atomism, which Nietzsche discards later, but in terms of his ethics, which is untethered to a world beyond or eternal principles. It allows the contemplation of a philosophical life for us. In an inversion of Plato’s hatred for Democritus, Democritus becomes essential in Nietzsche’s rejection of Platonism and thus, down the philosophical road, for Heidegger’s deconstruction of metaphysics and ontotheology.

In the twentieth century, both classicist Gregory Vlastos and philosopher Jan Patočka discuss the work of Democritus as essential for coming to an understanding of a philosophical practice that does not depend on alētheia, but on reaching etéē. The Third Example traces the development of etumos as a specialized word meaning the “true meaning” of a word. The first usage of this word in that form is from the choral passages in Aeschylus’s Agamemnon, which are traditionally spoken in the Doric dialect of Greek. In fact, it appears that etumos only survives in later works as a dialect word, with all its appearances in the Platonic corpus being inside citations from Spartans. From its beginning, etymology is therefore cast as something that is foreign and decidedly non-Attic. Plato is here the Athenian, and Democritus the stranger who arrived to Athens as a newcomer whom nobody knew.1

The Cratylus is the only Platonic text that explicitly deals with etymology, even though it does not name it. The history of its reception thematizes the difficulties between philosophy and etymology; although originally written with clearly comical and satirical intent, it was taken seriously as linguistic work, first inspiring Stoic grammar of language, which then in turn allowed a reinterpretation of the Cratylus during Middle Platonism along linguistic lines, glossing over its comical intent – a comical intent

1.  **DK 165 B116 = T D1**: ἦλθον γὰρ εἰς Ἀθήνας καὶ οὐ τίς ἐγνώκεν. – “For I came to Athens and no one knew me.”
that attempts to ridicule the *etumon*, and, by extension, the work of the “laughing philosopher.”

In spite of this attempt at ridicule, the *Cratylus* manages to formulate a set of phonological and morphological transformations that will turn out to be the foundations for formal research into grammar and, eventually, linguistics. At the same time, it appears that Socrates – refusing to take up either the conventionalist or the naturalist position toward language – formulates instead a fundamental distrust of language as the properly philosophical position.

In the Fourth Example we inspect the trajectory of two related derivatives of *etumos*, the verb *(ex)etazein* and the noun *exetasis*. *Exetasis* is tightly connected to the Socratic method as displayed in the early dialogues, the incessant questioning of oneself and of others. It is a technique of the care of the self, which basically checks the consistency between someone’s words and someone’s actions, that is, the truth of someone’s words as reflection of the reality of someone’s actions. Again there is not a question of *alētheia*, in which the subject observes his own behavior and describes it truthfully, but rather of *eteē* as a correct correspondence between word and deed.

In a development by now familiar to us, *exetasis* as philosophical term falls into disuse already in later Platonic texts and disappears nearly completely after him. The only residue can be found in the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, first thought to be a work of Aristotle but later ascribed to Anaximenes, where the *eidos exetastikon* is presented as a separate mode of rhetorical investigation, a mode that is absent from the more widely known *Rhetorics* of Aristotle. Socratic *exetasis* is here weaponized in order to ferret out contradictions within the character of one’s opponent in court, disjunctions between speech and act. As a type of investigation that is always mixes with other rhetorical modes, it plays a constant role in any piece of oratory while at the same time becoming unrecognizable as an individual type.

Our final and Fifth Example reconnects several threads relating to *eteos*, *etumos*, and *etētumos*. By inspecting Foucault’s late work on the care of the self, we can trace the slow work of undoing the philosophical emphasis on *alētheia*, and the rediscovery of *etumos logos*, “true discourse,” as a key concept in relation to the care of the self. Nietzsche’s early influence on Foucault, which appears in his genealogical method (which is essentially paradigmatic in nature), the concern for the Socratic technique of self-investigation, and his incessant attempts to shift away from grand metaphysical frameworks all attest to a different conceptualization of truth, as often as it may have been rejected ever
since Democritus. With Foucault we therefore see, for the first time, a rigorous attempt to refound a philosophical practice based on etéê.

We conclude by surveying two strategies through which the rejection of etymology has taken shape in contemporary philosophical discourse, and the failures of those strategies. The first is a strategy of introducing “etymological irreducibility” in philosophical discourse, the usage of writing techniques that obstruct the normal functioning of etymology in a text, such as neologisms and typographical interventions. We will inspect several instances, namely Heidegger’s *kzomil*, *Seyn*, and *Sein*, and the generalized irreducibility of Derrida’s *différance*, which itself irremediably complicates Heidegger’s own attempts at reaching a “halting point.”

The second strategy is a complete evacuation of the concept of truth from philosophy; that philosophy itself cannot be true. This strategy inevitably leads to an internal contradiction, as philosophy cannot but proceed on the basis of “true examples,” whose truth can only be verified through the philosophy that depends on it. Both Derrida’s complication of Heidegger and the internal tension of the work of Badiou thus seem to signal the inseparability of etymology from philosophy, the necessity of their parasitic relation. We then end with a brief outline of what the affirmation of this relation could look like, not as an etymology of words but as an etymology of sentences – an etics.
Declaration

Hereby I, Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, declare that I am the sole composer of this dissertation, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, and that all quotations herein have been distinguished by quotation marks or indent, and that all sources of information have been specifically acknowledged in the footnote apparatus and bibliography.

Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei, Ph.D.

Le mot même d’étymologie renvoie par son étymologie à une affirmation qui règle ce sur quoi on s’interroge : savoir du sens « vrai » des mots (qu’en est-il d’étymon?). Mais nous ne pouvons nous laisser prendre à une telle proposition.

– Blanchot, L’Écriture du désastre, 147.
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Abbreviations

Aesch. Ag.  Aeschylus, Agamemnon
Aesch. Eum.  Aeschylus, Eumenides
Aesch. Lib.  Aeschylus, Libation Bearers
Aesch. Pers.  Aeschylus, Persians
Aesch. Seven  Aeschylus, Seven of Thebes
Aeschin.  Aeschines, Speeches
Antiph.  Antiphon, Speeches
Ar. Apr.  Aristotle, Prior Analytics
Ar. Cat.  Aristotle, Categories
Ar. DI  Aristotle, On Interpretation
Ar. EE  Aristotle, Eudemian Ethics
Ar. HA  Aristotle, History of the Animals
Ar. Met.  Aristotle, Metaphysics
Ar. Rhet.  Aristotle, Rhetoric
Ar. Top.  Aristotle, Topics
Dem.  Demosthenes, Speeches
Dion. Hal. De Comp. Verb.  Dionysius of Halicarnassus, De Compositione Verborum
DK  Diels & Kranz, Fragmenta Vorosokratiker
D.L. Vit. Phil.  Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers
Heracl. All.  Heraclitus, Homeric Problems concerning What Homer Has Expressed Allegorically in Respect to the Gods
Hes. Th.  Hesiod, Theogony
Hes. WD  Hesiod, Works and Days
HH  Homeric Hymns
Hom. Il.  Homer, Iliad
Hom. Od.  Homer, Odyssee
Pind. P.  Pindar, Pythian Odes
Pl. Apol.  Plato, Apology
Pl. Crat.  Plato, Cratylus
Pl. Crito  Plato, Crito
Pl. Euth.  Plato, Euthyphro
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In the last chapter of *The Use of Pleasure*, the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, entitled “True Love,” Foucault offers a discussion of Platonic erotics in the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. Right at the beginning he points out that Xenophon’s account for love in the *Symposium* and the first two speeches in the *Phaedrus* differ respectively from Diotima’s account and Socrates’ fable, that neither of them is a true discourse [*etumos logos*]. Foucault explicitly cites the Greek phrasing – *ouk esti etumos logos* – and repeats the word *etumos* in the following lines: “discourses *etumoi*: true discourses, [...] related by their origin to the truth that they tell.” Why did Foucault stress this particular Greek adjective for truth, *etumos*, by repeatedly citing it verbatim? He doesn’t explicitly return to it or thematize “truth” in the following paragraphs, but in one of the few extant reflections on this passage, Christopher Fynsk suggests that “the exigencies to which Foucault answered in seeking his ‘truth,’ [...] are linked to an exigency met in any consequent meditation no the essence of language.” It will be our claim that this sudden appearance of another concept of truth – that is, a truth that is not *alētheia* – in Foucault’s work has a long, if obscure, philosophical provenance indeed linked to such a “meditation,” or as Agamben would say, “experiment of language.”

Perhaps we should interpret Foucault’s insistence on *etumos logos* as “true discourse” as an implicit reference to, and critique of, the still immensely prevalent philosophical understanding of truth, including its inflections both in analytical and continental philosophical literature, as somehow corresponding to the Greek concept of *alētheia*. Both logico-mathematical definitions of truth and post-Heideggerian considerations of truth as partaking in some form of “event,” interpret truth in the broad tradition following Plato’s allegory of the cave and Aristotle’s *Organon*. As Foucault constantly attempted to avoid paradigmatic philosophical concepts such as Being, the subject (he spoke of processes of subjectivation), power (he spoke of relations of power and governmental-ity), it is not unlikely that he felt similar discomfort toward the heavily burdened, transcendentally inflected concept of *alētheia*, and attempted a shift toward *etumos* instead, which has only survived as adjective, and thus cannot aspire to a stably defined concep-

1. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 235. In English translations, the Greek word ἔτυμος is often transliterated as etymos. In this thesis I will transliterate throughout *etumos*.
tual status. It is unfortunate that Foucault’s preliminary investigations were cut short by his premature death, leaving us with few materials to trace or develop.

If it was indeed Foucault’s aim somehow to recall *etumos logos* from its Greek beginnings, what would such a recollection look like? How was *etumos* as truth forgotten by philosophy in the first place? As Blanchot wonders in *The Writing of the Disaster*, “what is the true sense of *etymon*?”

This thesis aims to somehow recover a lost history of repression that starts with the disappearance of the adjectives *etumos, etētumos,* and *eteos* and the Platonic suppression of the Democritean term *etē* in favor of *alēthēs,* and its accompanying noun, *alētheia,* so prominent in the remaining history of metaphysics.

This process of obliteration was already well underway in the pre-Socratic period, even though traces, such as the *Phaedrus* citation referred to by Foucault, remain here and there, albeit always spoken by a stranger. *Eteē,* a concept central to Democritean philosophy, became extinct in part through the active suppression of Plato, who, although referring at multiple instances to Democritean ideas, expressed the desire to condemn all his work to the fire. History, it seems, has proved a more effective form of erasure, until Nietzsche rediscovers Democritus early in his career – an important and mostly overlooked key to the philosophical and philological shockwaves sent out by his work.

The process of *exetasis* or investigation, literally bringing out (*ex*) the truth (*etasis*), is the only immediate relative of *etumos* that is still operative in the (early) Socratic dialogues, and can surprisingly be determined as an accurate description of the Socratic method. Phrased in a Foucauldian way, we could perhaps say that whereas processes of subjectivation constitute subjects, Socratic processes of *exetasis* produce *alētheia.* However, like *etumos,* *exetasis* has been all too rapidly discarded as philosophical, or even rhetorical method. Though it is still discussed as an investigatory rhetorical method in Anaximenes’ *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum,* no traces of it remain in Aristotle’s contemporary treatise *Ars Rhetorica.*

The final, and also most proliferate remainder of *etumos* is etymology itself, whose different methodological strategies we may discern for the first time in Plato’s *Cratylus,* even though the term itself and the formalization of its method are of a later age, invented by the Stoics. What will be called etymology stands at one of the beginnings of a long philological tradition, eventually giving birth to comparative linguistics and the genealogical method, at points of intersection – Nietzsche, Foucault – where also related terms reemerge in philosophical discourse.

We may thus notice a certain resistance of philosophy to etymology. This resistance expresses itself in the sometimes stubborn insistence on seemingly antonymous pairs such as truth/falsehood, serious/childish, and derivation/pun, but also historically in the sense of a striking absence of a strong tradition of philosophical commentary on the *Cratylus*, which until recently seemed to have been relegated to outside the philosophically sanctioned and valued parts of the Platonic corpus. Yet etymology itself is engrained within philosophical endeavors ever since its Greek beginnings, developed in close ties with the Socratic dialogical method as it stands at the origins of philosophical considerations of language. In its pursuit of the right form of argument, etymology has long been relegated to the realm of philology, forming the basis of modern linguistic investigations and, ironically, a fortiori a large part of what is currently called analytic philosophy. Let us not forget that the originators of perfectly coherent philosophical systems were at the same adamantly in search of the perfect, original, most logical language, while Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the founders of modern linguistics, was at the same time obsessed with the subliminal truth of anagrammatic word plays.

This thesis will thus be an attempt to sketch out, through five examples, a preliminary genealogy of *etumos logos*, a form that seems appropriate in the sense that Nietzsche’s genealogical method itself derives from the philological *stemmata* and genealogical trees of historical linguistics that etymological research gave rise to in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We will thus trace subsequently the displacement of *etumos* by *alēthes* in philosophical discourse (Example 1), the suppression of Democritus’s *eteē* (Example 2), the development of etymology as the foundation for linguistics (Example 3), and the expulsion of *exetasis* from rhetorical writings (Example 4). This is an “obliterary” history in the Ronellian sense, a history of philosophy’s forgetting of what only philology and rhetoric were able to retain.

We will treat all these different terms as examples, as exercises in paradigmatic thought, in the sense that neither deductive nor inductive modes of reasoning are appropriate when it comes to *etumos logos*; it resists classification, generalization, and definitive statements, being always allied with the pun and word play, with the imagination of an original language or with the character of those who speak. Etymology, being close to derivation, inclination, and paronomy – all those procedures that make words

change their form and shape – can only proceed paradigmatically, and the etymology of etymology, leaving its haphazard and mostly obscure traces in the history of philosophy, cannot but follow the same “illogic.”

Finally, we will first reconstruct Foucault’s slow approach, or perhaps rediscovery, of the *etumos logos* in the context of his late investigations of *parrhesia* and care of the self (Example 5), before concluding by an attempt to sketch out the different ways in which philosophy has attempted to resist and marginalize etymology, or overcome its effects. We will distinguish here two different lines of argument that both coincide with the idea that philosophy cannot lead to truth: on the one hand the complete exclusion of etymology, present in philosophy since Plato and most recently forcefully defended by Alain Badiou, and on the other the attempt to overcome etymology by producing philosophical language that is resistant against the pull of simple etymological derivation. Here we find the deconstructive work initiated by Heidegger and continued by Derrida.

Both the former and the latter affirm etymology’s circularity. In his text *La preuve par l’étymologie*, Jean Paulhan insists that etymology is a fully self-referential exercise, which only can yield us more of the same: “Au surplus, le nom même nous l’apprend: *étymologie*, c’est *etumos logos*, le sens authentique. Ainsi l’étymologie fait sa propre réclame, et renvoie à l’étymologie.”7 Instead of accepting this seemingly endless hermeneutical circle, this dissertation attempts to break through it with a rigorous analysis of the philosophical usage of precisely that term, *etumos*, and all its paradigmatic affiliations. If it means “true,” “real,” or “authentic,” how does this truth or authenticity relate to that other, grand philosophical word for truth, *alētheia*? Why is it that this truth or authenticity is something that can only pertain to *logos*, to reason, meaning, discourse, or language – and how does this work, philosophically?

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For Example

The Etymology of the Paradigm
In his text “What Is a Paradigm?,” Giorgio Agamben investigates the methodological status of the paradigm in Foucault’s work and, by extension, his own. Through a series of brief sections, which each in themselves form examples illustrating a paradigmatic approach, Agamben recursively defines the paradigm by pointing out its appearance in radically different and disjunctive moments of philosophical history, which, nevertheless, are all examples of each other. So by discussing such examples – Foucault’s epistemological figures, Goethe’s Urphänomen, Kant’s esthetic judgment, Indo-European nominal declensions – we arrive at a definition of a paradigm that does not partake the opposition between inductive and deductive reasoning, an immanent relation between examples that is without origin, and which intersects diachronic and synchronic temporalities.¹

There is however another moment in the production of meaning within Agamben’s exposition that remains unexplained. Framed within a linguistic discussion of nominal declension and an oblique reference to the Alexandrian distinction between analogy and anomaly, the “etymological meaning” of the paradigm shows up:

The example, then, is the symmetrical opposite of the exception: whereas the exception is included through its exclusion, the example is excluded through the exhibition of its inclusion. However, in this way, according to the etymological meaning of the Greek term, it shows “besides itself” (parallel efficacy) both its own intelligibility and that of the class it constitutes.²

Thus in absence of either inductive or deductive modes of reasoning that would allow us to capture the paradigm, it shows its own “intelligibility,” according to its “etymological meaning” that would be “besides itself,” followed by a typical - exemplary - citation of the Greek etymology of “paradigm,” para-deiknumi. We are plunged here, to follow Christopher Fynsk, into a “movement into language” principally via prefixes and ety-

mons, that is unremitting and immeasurable.” The absence of definitional procedures inherent to the paradigm, except giving what risks to be an incoherent list of examples of paradigms, is a recourse to the “etymological meaning” of the prefix para-, which would mean “beside,” and the etymon, that is, meaningful kernel, the root that carries the “true meaning” of the verb deiknumi “to show.”

The question here is not of having recourse to the “dictionary meaning” of paradigm in order to supplement the different examples with a certain grounded sense. It is an attempt to locate a meaning that is as immanent as the relations between it, a form of meaning that would reflect the way in which examples create paradigms, the meaning of a word that does not appear or is revealed, or that can be constituted through meticulous forms of correspondence. It is a meaning that itself is paradigmatic or analogical, in the sense that its correspondences in form and meaning can never be reduced to an origin – the mythical “originary language” – or expanded into a generalized model for language – the utopian “perfect language.” It remains continuously suspended between the two.

The reference to “etymological meaning” in the context of Agamben’s discussion of the status of the paradigm in Foucault is triggered by a summary discussion of Plato’s definition of the paradigm, which itself is driven by etymology. This definition, which is found in the dialogue called the Statesman, is one of the few etymologies found in the Platonic corpus outside the Cratylus and therefore poses the question why Plato had to resort to this type of definition in this precise place. Giorgio Agamben, in his brief discussion of Plato’s definition, suggests correctly that this etymological definition occurs in the environment where a “paradigm for the paradigm” is formulated, through the example of the syllables that children may recognize in different words.

The introduction of the paradigm in the Statesman, as an example of the use of example (the example of using/recognizing letters) is itself justified by a pun, or etymological derivation. An etymology, moreover, that is placed within a context in which

4. Fujisawa, “᾿Εχειν, Μετέχειν, and Idioms of ‘Paradeigmatism’ in Plato’s Theory of Forms,” 46, suggests that Plato only develops the notion of the paradigm in his later dialogues, the ones under consideration in this chapter, at the expense of the notion of participation (metekhein). Quite remarkably, Fujisawa admits to be “not so much interested in whether some idioms belong to ‘immanence’ or ‘transcendence’-language” (47), implying, like Agamben, that this distinction breaks down in the face of the paradigm. For an extensive treatment of the paradigm in the Statesman, see Goldschmidt, Le paradigme dans la dialectique platonicienne.
letters and syllables are distinguished and recognized, by example, by paradigm. In or-
der to be able to gauge the philosophical abyss that is opened by this recursive defini-
tion that is a paradigm for the working of a paradigm, we will first have to analyze the
context in which this definition is placed, both the context of the conversation and the
relations between the interlocutors and the wager of the conversation itself, the nature
of the statesman. This will give us a provisional grounding for a further investigation
of the paradigm in the work of Aristotle and its constant lingering on the edges of what
may be circumscribed by etumos and etymology. It is a question of why precisely this
particular definition needs etymological grounding. Why is it unable to operate by itself
and produce its own, uncontaminated truth?

The example of the paradigm, and the paradigm of the paradigm, occurs in the
*Statesman* at the moment when the Stranger and Young Socrates stall in an attempt
to provide a definition for the true statesman by means of division (*diairēsis*), and the
Stranger suggests that they try again through the use of examples:

> It is difficult [...] to set forth some of the greater ideas, except by the use of
> examples [paradeigmasin]; for it would seem that each of us knows every-
> thing that he knows as if a dream and then again, when he is as it were awake,
> knows nothing of it all.6

The examples that the Stranger calls upon are necessary to makes sense of the dream
of knowledge, a dream that we will later encounter in the definition of *khōra* (Exam-
ple 3). However, the Stranger contends, “the very example I employ requires another
example.”7 In a note to his translation, Fowler suggests that the following example of the
example is also employed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, where, however, the Stranger is
absent. Fowler thus suggests “a dramatic slip on Plato’s part.”8

Again this slip occurs within the context of a dream, when Socrates responds to
Theaetetus with “a dream for a dream,”9 and again the example of letters (*stoikheia*) and
syllables – the example of the example, as we will see – are the way in which he deals

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χρώμενον ἵκανῶς ἐνδείκνυσθαι τι τῶν μειξώνων. κινδυνεύει γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐκαστος οἶον
δναρ εἰδικ ἀπαντά πάντ’ αὐτί πάλιν ὑσπέρ ἐπαρ ἀγνοεῖν.
dεδεηκεν.
with the dreamlike inexplicability of the primary elements (prōta stoikheia), which have no logos in themselves but only in combination with each other:

But in fact none of the primal elements can be expressed by reason [logoi]; they can only be named [onomazesthai], for they have only a name [onoma], but the things composed of these are themselves complex, and so their names are complex and form a rational explanation; for the combination of names is the essence of reasoning [logou ousian].

Socrates then introduces the example of letters, just like the Stranger in the Statesman, to pull us out of this unintelligible “dream,” by focusing precisely on a different etymological meaning of stoikheia, taking them as “hostages,” that he will submit to “examination” (basanizōmen). Thus the examples that are supposed to dispel the dream are extracted from the dream itself, and interpreted by metonymic displacement, through analogy: primary elements are like letters, because they share the same “etymon,” namely stoikheion. It is this same procedure through which Fowler suggests that Plato slips in the Statesman, even though in this case the content of the dream and the mode of its interpretation are no longer etymologically connected; Plato’s example from Theaetetus is thus transposed to the Statesman, in order “to set forth some of the greater ideas.”

This example of the example, then, concerns the letters (stoikheia) and the way in which children learn them. Having first recognized them in short and easy syllables, they should then move on to more difficult examples placed alongside the earlier, easier examples in order to recognize these letters also in a more difficult context. Because of the play of words that is set up in this section, and the way in which this etymological play makes the definition of the example of the example fully self-referential, it is worth quoting at length:

To lead them first to those, in which they had correct opinions about these same [sc. letters], and then leading them and positing [tithenai] them beside [para] the not yet recognized ones, and by throwing them beside [paraballon-tes] to show what their sameness and nature are in both intertwinings, until

The Stranger sets up the definition carefully, with a syntactical structure that is difficult to reproduce in the English translation. Already in the second line, we find the two separate words “positing beside” (tithenai para), followed by another compound with the prepositional prefix para-, “throwing beside” (paraballontes), until the sequence “positing [...] are shown beside [...] showing [...] examples” (paratithemena deikhthēi, deikthenta de, paradeigmata). This etymological play of words around the prefix para- and the etymological root deik-, which at the same time offers the definition of a paradigm, thus follows up on tithenai para to paratithemena, reiterating the prefix para- from paraballontes and paratithemena in paradeigmata, and the derivation of the root deik-: deikhthēi, deikthenta, and paradeigmata.

Why does the Stranger here have to resort to a wordplay, an etymological reasoning? It seems the only way to obtain some sense of argumentative closure. As the Stranger has opened a potential mis-en-abyme of examples of examples of examples, and so on, it would have been easy for Young Socrates, if he were so inclined, to ask according to which example the recognition of letters would proceed. By closing off the definition of the paradigm precisely by defining it according the recognition of letters shifting through different syllables while remaining recognizable, the definition of the paradigm ends up in a sort of hermeneutical circle: through the etymological way of definition, the paradigm has become literally its own example. Or in other words: the etymology of the paradigm is the paradigm of etymology. It is this same hermeneutical circle that features as example in Agamben’s essay, which, just like Plato’s, is closed through an appeal to the etymology of the paradigm.

The Appearance of Paronymy

The Statesman features a moment when Socrates withdraws from the discussion, never to return, even though he states that his “turn will come by and by.” Moreover, the pre-


cise moment of his withdrawal and the crux of the ensuing argument are indicative of the development of a specific philosophical notion that is exemplary for the functioning of the paradigm in a more linguistic or grammatical environment, namely, paronomy. Plato’s Statesman offers us the first signals of its philosophical deployment, even before a clear articulation of its nature, which will only appear with Aristotle.

The three Platonic dialogues Theaetetus, Sophist, and the Statesman all inquire different aspects of Plato’s philosophy of language and seem to form a narrative unity. The Statesman forms a continuation of the Sophist dialogue, which in its turn is a continuation of the Theaetetus. The group of interlocutors in the Statesman is also similar to the one in the Sophist. The Sophist stages an encounter between Socrates and the mathematician Theodorus, the youngsters Theaetetus and Young Socrates, and a Stranger from Elea, a student of Parmenides whom Theodorus praises as a “very philosophical man.”

As we mentioned above, one of the core problems of the Statesman is the problem of diairesis, of separation. How may the function of the statesman be separated from the other functions in the polis? The language that Plato employs in the opening of the conversation constantly recalls this work of separation: incision (tmēma), separation (aphelontas), and division (diairei). The Stranger poses the question of diairesis as follows: “Shall we then assume that the statesman, king, master, and householder too, for that matter, are all one, to be grouped under one title, or shall we say that there are as many arts as names?” The issue lies in the way these words refer to the craft of the statesman: are they all synonyms, referring to one and the same craft, or are they homonymous, each referring to a different craft? The question of diairesis thus engages the issue of differentiating between synonymy and homonymy. And it this question that is addressed by Socrates in the conversation leading up to the dialogue between the Stranger and Young Socrates, which Socrates then leaves. His separation from the dialogue thus coincides with the appearance of the theme of the paradigm.

The question of distinguishing homonymy and synonymy features also on a level of the participants. Theaetetus, who is the sole interlocutor of the Stranger for most of the Sophist, is described as something of a Socrates lookalike: “he is not beautiful, but he is
like [proseoike] you with his snub nose and protruding eyes.”\textsuperscript{21} Additionally, Theaetetus suggests his close friend Young Socrates, who is similar to Socrates by name, as a possible replacement,\textsuperscript{22} but in the end Theaetetus is able to sit through the entire philosophical dialogue. It is only in the subsequent dialogue, the Statesman, that he is replaced as interlocutor of the Stranger by Young Socrates, as if we discursively shift from synonymy (Sophist) to homonymy (Statesman). Socrates says:

And besides, Stranger, it seems to me that they are both related [xugeneian] to me after a fashion; one of them anyhow, as you say, looks like me [homoion emoi] in his cast of countenance, and the other has the same name and appellation [klēsis homonumos], which implies some sort of kinship [tina oikeiotēta]. Of course we ought always to be eager to get acquainted with our relatives [xuggeneis] by debating with them.\textsuperscript{23}

According to Socrates, both Theaetetus and Young Socrates may be considered most “at home” (oikeiotēta) with him, his kin and relatives (xuggeneis). The question of diairesis engages these issues of kinship and relation, of homonymy and synonymy by, eventually bypassing them both through weaving as the example (paradeigma) for the art of statesmanship.

The opening section of Aristotle’s \textit{Categoriae} presents us with a precise treatment of the three semantic relations that Plato hinted at: homonymy, synonymy, and paronymy. We will stay as close to Aristotle’s Greek as possible and inspect the function of these relations in Aristotle’s theory of language and rhetoric. According to his \textit{Rhetorica}, homonyms are useful for the sophist to develop his wicked arguments.\textsuperscript{24} For example: “if every man is a living being, how come the drawing that you refer to as ‘man’ is not living?” Both a man standing in front of me and a drawing of a man can refer to the name “living being,” and as such, they are homonymous. Any sophist would immediately seize such an opportunity to confuse us, and it will be up to Aristotle to deal with him somewhere in another part of his oeuvre.

\textsuperscript{21} Pl. \textit{Theaet}. 143e, trans. Fowler: οὐκ ἔστι καλὸς, προσέοικε δὲ σοὶ τὴν τε σιμότητα καὶ τὸ ἔξω τῶν ὀμμάτων.
\textsuperscript{22} Pl. \textit{Soph}. 218d.
\textsuperscript{23} Pl. \textit{Pol}. 257d–258a, trans. Fowler: καὶ μὴν κινδυνεύειτον, ὃ ξένε, ᾧμω ποθὲν ἐμοὶ συγγένειαι ἔχειν τινά. τὸν μὲν γε σὺν ὑμεῖς κατὰ τὴν τοῦ προσώπου φύσιν ὄμοιον ἐμοὶ φαίνεσθαὶ φατε, τοῦ δ’ ἡμῖν ἡ κλῆσις ὁμώνυμος οὐσα καὶ ἡ πρόσρησις παρέχεται τινα οἰκειότητα. δεὶ δὴ τοὺς γε συγγενεῖς ἡμᾶς ἀεὶ προθύμως διὰ λόγων ἀναγωρίζειν.
\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Aubenque, \textit{Le problème de l’être chez Aristote}, 123.
The second semantic relation defined in the opening section is synonymy. According to Aristotle, synonyms are useful for the poet to enrich his language. It allows him to use verbs like “strolling” and “walking” to signify the same type of action without confusing the reader; we understand that such terms are synonymous.\(^{25}\) In his essay “Homonyms,” Agamben determines the relationship between homonyms and synonyms as follows:

**Synonyms for Aristotle are entities that have the same name and the same definition:** in other words, phenomena insofar as they are members of a coherent class, that is, insofar as they belong to a set through participation in a common concept. These same phenomena, however, that relate to each other as synonyms become homonyms if considered with respect to the idea […].\(^{26}\)

So homonyms and synonyms are intimately linked within the Aristotelian system of categories.\(^{27}\) Depending on one’s perspective, two terms can appear either homonymous or synonymous. But the third relation, the relation of paronymy, seems to occupy a position somewhat separated from the first two, while at the same time stressed as the analogy machine allowing for ontological differentiation. The definition paronymy can be translated as follows:

Paronymous are called those things, differing from something through case \(\text{[\text{ptōsei}]\)\), that have an appellation according to [that] name [of this something], like grammarian \(\text{[\text{grammatikos}]\) from grammar \(\text{[\text{grammatikēs}]\) and courageous-man \(\text{[\text{andreios}]\) from courageous \(\text{[\text{andreias}]}.\(^{28}\)


\(^{26}\) Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 75.

\(^{27}\) Cf. Aubenque, *Le problème de l’être chez Aristote*, 173ff. Aubenque however, like many other commentators, fully disregards the role of paronymy in Aristotle’s philosophy of language. An exception to this general disregard of the role paronymy is the chapter “Metaphor and Philosophical Discourse” in Paul Ricoeur’s *The Rule of Metaphor*. In his analysis of paronymy, he in fact links this third class to a “new domain for philosophical discourse based on the existence of non-accidental homonyms. […] The new possibility of thought opened up in this way was that of a non-metaphorical and properly transcendental resemblance among the primary significations of being. To say that this resemblance is unscientific settles nothing. It is more important to affirm that […] this purely transcendental resemblance even today attests, by its failure, to the search that animated it” (Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, 321). Thus Ricoeur regards paronymy as the relation allowing for the first articulation of the non-accidental multiple meanings of being.

\(^{28}\) Ar. Cat. 1a12–15: παρώνυμα δὲ λέγεται ὁσα ἀπὸ τινος διαφέροντα τῇ πτώσει τήν
But for whom or what is this useful? Aristotle suddenly stops talking about relations between ideas and words. Instead, we are suddenly talking about a purely formal relation. And it seems as if, whereas homonymy is useful for sophists and synonymy useful for poets, paronymy doesn’t serve anyone at all; neither the sophist, nor the poet. Perhaps it serves the philosopher.

Both homonymy and synonymy are also addressed in the *Rhetorica* in the context of the use of metaphors in speech. These metaphors can be introduced through semantic devices like homonymy and synonymy, depending on the aim of the orator. And even more than the sophist or poet, the orator is supposed to be attentive to them, because “the metaphor has clarity, suaveness, and strangeness, which cannot be apprehended through something else.” Paronymy is again explicitly absent from this context. It has no metaphorical power, it works linearly from word to word, on the level of the signifier.

Perhaps we could say that paronymy lacks a certain strangeness; it doesn’t introduce multiple meanings. On first sight, it doesn’t even concern itself with meaning. The Greeks call something strange to *xenikon*. And in this precise sense paronymy lacks the strangeness of the grammatical devices introduced by the Stranger (*xenos*) in the *Sophist*, it is a formal procedure which seems to relate the form of one word to the other. It is neither clear nor suave, and brings with it no strange, foreign, or exotic fragrance from a different or within the same language or logic.

An adjacent term evoked within the context of paronomy is *ptōsis*, or denomination as it has been classically translated. This semantic relation between two words founds and supports the study of the relation between words based on their form, hence of both etymology and grammar. As Aubenque states: “Πτῶσις désigne d’une façon générale toute modification de l’expression verbale portant non sur le sens, mais sur la façon de signifier.” Thus, according to Aristotle, it is possible and legitimate to establish a relation between two words, between “grammar” and “grammarian,” between “courageous-man” and “courageous,” based on their shape and form. But this shape or form of the word is still far from being formalized in the morphological analyses that are common in contemporary linguistics. Aristotle has not developed the grammatical vocabulary to talk about morphemes, he doesn’t cut up words into different morphological elements. Although he is, for example, capable of isolating the nominal component “dorus” in the

κατὰ τούνομα προσηγορίαν ἔχει, οἷον ἀπὸ τῆς γραμματικῆς ὁ γραμματικὸς καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνδρείας ὁ ἀνδρείος; my emphasis.

name “Theodorus,” he is unable to discuss it in terms of morphology: no proper meaning (i.e., as morpheme) can be attached to either of its parts. In other words, when discussing paronymy in Aristotle, we will always have to deal with the word as a whole and never with something like a root or an inflectional ending.

The furthest Aristotle seems to be willing to push this similarity between words can be found in his *Ethica Eudemia*. In this work, he paronomously relates courageous-man (*thrasus*) and courage (*thrasos*) to being-courageous (*tharrein*). By furthest I mean here largest deviation in form. The confirmation of a relation between these words namely based on something like a perceived common root *thra-/thar-* is not a small feat, because to indicate such a relation means at least to have an understanding of the morphological features of roots and endings that does not push the derivation over its limit. Because there is a limit to paronymy, and we may determine this limit as the “truth” of the derivation – i.e., the *etumon*, from which our word etymology derives.

We will now have to inspect in what way paronymous derivation operates in the field of language. A paronymous relationship is not merely restricted to the type of derivation that shifts from the abstract noun “grammar” to the denominative actor “grammariian.” There are also other types. Aristotle claims in his *Topica* that when someone has a certain type of knowledge, for example grammatical knowledge, this is always predicated paronomously, derivatively, from the knowledge in question. For example, knowledge of grammar (*grammatikē*) can be expressed by the sentence “he has grammar” (*grammatikēn hexei*) or by the word “grammariian” (*grammatikos*), both deriving from “grammar.” Thus, paronymous relations do not only exist between couples like “grammar” and “grammariian,” but also between “grammar” (*grammatikē*) and “(he has) grammar” (*grammatikēn*), the latter distinction, between what we now call nominative and accusative, is no longer productive in English, unless we think of the relation between “he” and “him.” Thus the relation between different cases is a paronymous relation.

Paronymous relations thus envelop everything from etymological relations to morphological derivations, nominal inflections, and verbal conjugations. And it should immediately be added that all these terms are absent from Aristotle’s vocabulary in the specialized, technical, and grammatical sense that they are used today. In at least a part of his texts, there is no definite separation between what we can nowadays technically

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distinguish. It may be clear, nonetheless, that the relations between the words used by Plato in his definition of the paradigm are paronymous, and that each of them is, so to say, and example for the other. Thus etymology, as it is fully based on a paradigmatic logic, cannot but consider each instance of an etymon, with different prefixes or inflections, as a paradigm for any of the other. Thus, contrary to its claims, it seems that etymology, left to its own devices (that is, without assuming sound laws, paleographic dating, and other methods to device a chronology) is utterly unable to determine any “origin.”

The Example of the Witness
Besides formulating the first and last elaboration of the notion of paronymy, only hinted at by Plato, Aristotle also seems to have formalized the former’s notion of paradigm, defining it briefly and nearly incidentally in the *Analytica Priora*:

> It is evident that the paradigm [paradeigma] is neither like a part with respect to the whole, nor like a whole with respect to the part, nor like a whole with respect to the whole, but like a part with respect to the part, like with respect to like – whenever both are under the same genus, but one is better known than the other.34

Paradigm is here posited as beyond or “besides” modes of deduction and induction discussed previously by Aristotle,35 albeit stripped from the etymological definition given by Plato. In Aristotle’s definition, the paradigm is embedded in a logical framework of parts and wholes, and articulated in contrast with part–whole relations (inductions) and whole–part relations (deductions, or syllogisms) as a movement of thought that moves from part to part.36

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34. Ar. *Apr* 69a14–17, ed. Tredennick: Φανερὸν οὖν ὃτι το παράδειγμα ἐστιν οὔτε ὡς μέρος πρὸς ὅλον οὔθ᾽ ὡς ὅλον πρὸς μέρος οὔθ᾽ ὡς ὅλον πρὸς ὅλον, ἀλλ᾽ ὡς μέρος πρὸς μέρος, ὁμοιόν πρὸς ὁμοίον — ὃταν ἄμφω μὲν ἐν ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ γένος, γνωριμώτερον δὲ ἔκτερον ἔκ τετέρου.
36. Following the Platonic example, Agamben assumes that this movement from part to part happens directly, without recourse through a whole. This view is supported by Hauser, “Aristotle’s Example Revisited,” 179, who makes the interesting claim that the example’s movement of part-to-part “captures perfectly the dynamics of the rhetor as phronimos in the act of arguing and of the perceptual realities of the audience as a judge of rhetorical pistis.” A contesting view is given in Benoit, “On Aristotle’s Example,” who presents convincing evidence to the contrary. How-
The textual tradition of this fragment, however, is not as univocal as it seems. Whereas the edition prepared by Hugh Tredennick opens the section by “It is evident that the paradigm is neither...,” W.D. Ross’s edition provides a different opening line, which seems to suggest that Aristotle, contra Agamben’s interpretation, had already subsumed the paradigm under induction: “That a paradigm is an induction [epagoge] and what it is an induction for has been said: It is neither...”37

In this version, it seems that because it starts by considering a part, and not a whole, the paradigm is a specific type of induction and not a deduction, which always commences from considering a whole. Thus we can say that at least in the textual tradition of the Analytica Priora there was already a confusion or debate about the precise status and sustainability of the paradigm within Aristotle’s logical framework; it proved unstable and incidental enough a concept to require a more logical connection to the surrounding text, rather than remaining a disconnected “example of the example,” with little implication for the rest of exposition.

It should be noted, however, that both editions retain the idea that the paradigm “differs” from induction, even though it remains unclear whether this difference should be thought of as special type of induction or wholly different from it. If we then inspect another text of Aristotle’s, his Rhetorica, we indeed find that the paradigm is discussed as a type of induction,40 without the special status suggested in the Analytica Priora.

The “example” has already been described as one kind of induction; and the special nature of the subject-matter that distinguishes it from the other kinds has also been stated above. Its relation to the proposition it supports is not that of part to whole, nor whole to part, or like to like. When two statements are of the same order, but one is more familiar than the other, the former is an example.41
The example, in fact, is mapped out as a rhetorical variant of the induction used in logic or dialectic:

With regard to the persuasion achieved by proof or apparent proof: just as dialectic there is induction on the one hand and syllogism or apparent syllogism on the other, so it in rhetoric. The example is an induction, the enthymeme a syllogism, and the apparent enthymeme an apparent syllogism. I call the enthymeme a rhetorical syllogism, and the example a rhetorical induction. Every one who effects persuasion through proof does in fact use either enthymemes or examples: there is not other way. And since every one who proves anything at all is bound to use either syllogisms or inductions (and this is clear to us from the Analytics), it must follow that enthymemes are syllogisms and examples are inductions.42

Aristotle thus suggests a certain mapping of dialectic forms of argument onto rhetorical forms of argument, where deductive reasoning in dialectic, the syllogism, would map onto the rhetorical enthymeme, and dialectic inductive reasoning would map onto the paradigm. And he continues:

When we base that proof of a proposition on a number of similar cases, this is induction in dialectic, example in rhetoric; when it is shown that, certain propositions being true, a further and quite distinct proposition must also be true in consequence, whether invariably or usually, this is called syllogism in dialectic, enthymeme in rhetoric.43

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42. Ar. Rhet. 1356a36–b10, trans. Ross: περὶ μὲν οὖν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτῶν, καὶ πῶς ἔχουσι πρὸς ἀλλήλας, εἰρήται σχεδὸν ἱκανῶς· τῶν δὲ διὰ τοῦ δεικνύναι ἢ φαίνεσθαι δεικνύναι, καθάπερ καὶ ἐν τοῖς διαλεκτικοῖς τὸ μὲν ἐπαγωγή ἐστιν, τὸ δὲ συλλογισμός, τὸ δὲ φαινόμενος συλλογισμός, καὶ ἐνταῦθα ὁμοίως: ἔστιν γὰρ τὸ μὲν παράδειγμα ἐπαγωγή, τὸ δ’ ἐνθύμημα συλλογισμός, τὸ δὲ φαινόμενον ἐνθύμημα φαινόμενος συλλογισμός. καλώ δ’ ἐνθύμημα μὲν ῥητορικόν συλλογισμὸν, παράδειγμα δὲ ἐπαγωγὴν ῥητορικὴν, πάντες δὲ τὰς πίστεις ποιοῦνται διὰ τοῦ δεικνύναι ἢ παραθείματα λέγοντες ἢ ἐνθύμηματα, καὶ παρὰ ταύτα ὤδεν· ὡστ’ εἴπερ καὶ ὅλως ἀνάγκη ἢ συλλογικὸμον ἢ ἐπάγοντα δεικνύναι ὁτιοῦν ἢ ὀντινόν (δῆλον δ’ ἡμῖν τοῦτο ἐκ τῶν Ἀναλυτικῶν), ἀναγκαίον ἐκάτερον αὐτῶν ἐκατέρω τούτων τοῦ αὐτοῦ εἶναι. Emphasis added.

Whereas the previous statements from Book I of the Rhetorica seem to position the example on the same level as the enthymeme in terms of rhetorical technique, Book II offers a radically different view.\(^4\) First, enthymeme and example do not carry the same persuasive value. Audiences seem to favor arguments based on deductive reasoning and not on inductive examples: “[s]peeches that rely on examples [paradeigmatōn] are as persuasive as the other kind, but those which rely on enthymemes [enthumatikoi] excite the louder applause.”\(^45\) Moreover, within rhetorical structure itself Aristotle seems to favor the enthymeme over the paradigm: “When we are unable to argue by Enthymeme, we must try to demonstrate our point by this method of Example, and to convince our hearers thereby. If we can argue by Enthymeme, we should use our Examples as subsequent and supplementary evidence.”\(^46\)

At this point, Aristotle compares examples to witnesses, which are more effective after the deductive argument than before:

They should not precede the Enthymemes: that will give the argument an inductive air, which only rarely suits the conditions of speech-making. If they follow the enthymemes, they have the effect of witnesses [marturiois] giving evidence, and this always tells. For the same reason, if you put your examples first you must give a large number of them; if you put them last a single one is sufficient; even a single witness will serve if he is a good one.\(^47\)

But it is precisely this “argument” that we lack. The following examples all preface an argument that has not yet been made, but hopefully appear as sufficiently convincing witnesses speaking their truth. Aristotle’s discomfort and perhaps disregard for the paradigmatic movement, initially expressed by a certain ambiguity toward its status in the Analytica Priora, its subsequently demotion to the occasional anecdote at the end of an argument in Rhetorica, and its final and complete reduction to one of the “alleged

\(^46\) Ar. Rhet. 1394a9–11, trans. Ross: δεῖ δὲ χρῆσθαι τοῖς παραδείγμασι οὐκ ἔχοντα μὲν ἐνθυμήματα ὡς ἀποδείξειν (ἡ γὰρ πίστις διὰ τούτων), ἔχοντα δὲ ὡς μαρτυρίοις.
\(^47\) Ar. Rhet. 1394a11–16: ἐπιλόγων χρώμενον τοῖς ἐνθυμημασί, προτείθεμεν μὲν γὰρ ἐσικεύν ἐπιαγγῇ, τοῖς δὲ ῥητορικοῖς οὐκ οἰκεῖον ἐπαγγὴν πλὴν ἐν ὀλίγοις, ἐπιλεγόμενα δὲ μαρτυρίοις, ὁ δὲ μάρτυς πανταχοῦ πιθανὸς, διὸ καὶ προτείθηνε μὲν ἀνάγκη πολλακά λέγειν, ἐπιλέγοντι δὲ καὶ ἐν ἰκανόν: μάρτυς γὰρ χρήστος καὶ εἰς χρήσιμος.
facts” that may support an enthymeme,48 are themselves examples of the different types of conceptual decay that we will survey.

At the same time, the fate of the paradigm, and its relegation to grammatical studies, is closely linked to our main topic of investigation, namely the different and widely divergent examples, individual instances of etymologically – and therefore paradigmatically– related instances of etumos, eteē, exetasis, and etymology. The paradigm moves us into language by exhibition it without using it. And it is this type of exhibition, perhaps indeed without reason or argument, that I will now try to limn.

**First Example**

*Etimos and Alēthes*

**Alētheia Contested**

The contemporary question surrounding truth has been thoroughly complicated by the philosophical, artistic, and scientific developments commencing at the end of the nineteenth century. Ever since the inception of a properly metaphysical tradition with Plato, the philosophical term truth, in most of its contemporary inflections, recalls in one way or the other the Greek word *alētheia.*¹ Up to Nietzsche all refer implicitly or explicitly to one or the other interpretation of what is *alēthes,* true. Already in Plato and Aristotle *alēthes* is contrasted with *pseudos,* false. In Plato’s dialogue the *Sophist,* when Theaetetus is confronted with two sentences, “Theaetetus sits” and “Theaetetus flies,” the Stranger asks him, “Now what quality shall we ascribe to each of these sentences?” Theaetetus answers, “One is somehow false [pseudē], and the other true [alēthē].” The Stranger affirms, “The true one [ho alēthēs] states the beings as they are [to onta hōs estin] about you.”³ A sentence can thus said to be true if in some way or another it correctly corresponds to things as they are. Similar ideas can be found in Aristotle, when he for example claims that affections of the soul are likenesses of things,⁴ and opposes true and false statements: “To say that what is is not, or that what is not is, is false [pseudos]; but to say that what is is, and what is not is not, is true [alēthes].”⁵ This idea of truth as correct correspondence subsequently found its way, through scholasticism in Thomas Aquinas’s famous definition “Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus” (Truth is the equation of

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2. Throughout this thesis we will find different inflections and different transliterations used by different authors of this Greek word for truth. As a substantive, I will generally use standard Attic *alētheia,* although we will also encounter the Ionic *alētheiē* in Homeric texts and the Doric *alatheia* in Pindar. As an adjective the masculine/feminine singular form is *alēthēs,* whereas the neuter singular form is *alēthes.* Masculine/feminine plural is *alētheis,* neuter plural is *alēthē.*
4. *Ar. DI* 16a6–8.
thing and intellect), up to the picture theory of language expounded by Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: “A logical picture of facts is a thought,” and “The totality of true thoughts is a picture of the world.” For Wittgenstein, therefore, the entirety of logical pictures of facts – that is, all sentences of language – correspond in detail to a picture of the world; there is a bijective relation between language and the world.

Wittgenstein is at the same time closely linked to another lineage in this conception of truth found in the work of Gottlob Frege and further developed by the Vienna Circle and contemporary semantic theories that can be captured under the name of “analytic” philosophy, in which truth is computationally determined, though fundamentally based on an evaluation of a correspondence to reality. This is captured explicitly in Alfred Tarski’s classical article “The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics” when he states that he would like his definition of truth “to do justice to the intuitions which adhere to the classical Aristotelian conception of truth – […] The truth of a sentence consists in its agreement with (or correspondence to) reality.” The Aristotelian idea of correspondence continues to be the touchstone of these types of semantic theories, for example in Carnap’s “Rule of Truth”: “An atomic sentence in S, consisting of a predicate followed by an individual constant is true if and only if the individual to which the individual constant refers possesses the property to which the predicate refers.”

Apart from these analytically inclined philosophers that still build their theories of truth on some derivative of Aristotelian metaphysics, that is, truth as a relation or adequation, there have been a variety of proposals by twentieth-century philosophers that suggest that the classical paradigm of *alētheia*–truth appears to be either no longer sufficient to think truth in philosophy, or should be discarded in favor of other philosophically grounded notions of truth. In order to sketch a general outline of these attempts to reformulate the question of truth I will briefly address two passages.

The first one is from Alain Badiou, as follows: “Philosophy does not itself produce any effective truth. It seizes truths, shows them, exposes them, announces that they exist.” This is one of the most succinct articulations of Badiou’s idea that philosophy is founded on a series of truth procedures and as such can not itself produce statements that are true. We can trace this conception from two different angles, one which decouples scientific truths from philosophy, and the other one leads to Heidegger whose

edifice, according to Badiou, “as regards the question of truth [...] leaves no solution other than the poem.”

Even though Badiou evacuates truth from philosophy as a concept that can no longer be produced by philosophy, but merely harbored, he still takes this truth, vérité, or Wahrheit to be directly or indirectly linked to the Greek word alētheia. This is obvious from Heidegger’s incessant etymological ruminations on this word but holds all the same for Badiou when he states in the introduction to Being and Event that his “new doctrine of truth [...] crosses the paths of Heidegger” precisely at the point where the latter subtracted truth – that is an alētheia as unconcealedness which gives prior to any “Es gibt” or “There is” – from knowledge. It would be my claim that in spite of many differences and even abyssal disjunctions, most of contemporary philosophy on both sides of the Atlantic aisle adhere to a concept of truth that in one way or the other partaking in this history of alētheia.

At the same time, the late nineteenth century, beginning with Nietzsche, has seen the emergence of another genealogy of truth, one that is not traceable to alētheia but in fact leads back to a variety of disjunct sources such as the adjectives eteos, etumos, and etētumos from ancient Greek epic and Aeschylean texts, all meaning “true,” the Demo-critean neologism for material reality, etē, the Socratic discipline of self-examination, or exetasis, and the history of a philological practice that hardly seems commensurable with philosophy, namely etymology. Already this terminological variety and discontinuity should prompt us about the essentially different concept of truth that is at stake here. If we indeed concede the point hovering over continental philosophy that there are no (longer) philosophical truths, this seems to have been only sufficiently proven for truth as alētheia. It seems to me that philosophical arguments, including the ones raised by Heidegger, Badiou, and all their epigones, can in no sensible way be evaluated – in terms of rigor, incisiveness, invention – without at least something that looks an awful lot like truth, and this truth of philosophy is immediately related to the idea the philosophy conveys meaning – that philosophy is meaningful. In other words, if philosophy is meaningful, then it must have a concept of truth, and if this concept of truth is not alētheia, as some developments in recent philosophical history seem to indicate, then it must be something else.

12. A more common transliteration in philosophical texts is etymos. However, in keeping with the scientific conventions of Greek transliteration I will consistently transcribe etumos, etc. except in the case of the English word etymology.
My first indication, and the onset of my investigation into this other truth, is a passage from the second volume of Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, entitled *The Use of Pleasure*. In this passage, Foucault discusses Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the different discourses of love that are held in it. He juxtaposes on one side the naive speech of Lysias and the facetious speech of Socrates as discourses that are false, explicitly citing the Greek *ouk esti etumos logos*, and on the other side the speeches of Diotima and Socrates that are “*etumoi,*” namely true discourses which are “related by their origin to the truth that they tell.” It should be noted that it is Foucault who pluralizes the Greek word, indicating that somehow there is no proper French (or English) translation for it other than “true,” which, however, already renders the previously mentioned Greek adjective *alēthēs*. According to Foucault, true discourse as *etumos logos* is true because of a certain “relation by its origin to the truth it tells,” that is, true because of a relation to the subject of enunciation. True discourse as *etumos logos* therefore has nothing to do with either traditional structures of mimesis, the disclosure of Being, or radically anonymous and universal truth procedures.

The reason I pick up on this passage in Foucault is because I think that it should be read as an onset to his broader research into Greek *parrhēsia*, that is, “saying everything” or “speaking the truth,” a practice that is intimately linked with the figure of Socrates and his incessant *exetasis*, examination, and because throughout his work, Foucault has shunned classical metaphysical categories such as subject and power, instead talking about processes of subjectivization and governmentality. It therefore seems logical that instead of under the heading of *alētheia*, he would prefer to approach the question of truth in philosophy from the perspective of the *etumos logos*, true discourse, even though these investigations were cut short by his untimely death. It is this approach that I intend to develop by providing a genealogy – if not to say etymology – of *etumos logos*.

Foucault’s attempts to discern a different kind of truth do not stand on their own. We can point both to philosophers that have taken up Foucault’s project and those which have touched upon it from a different direction. In the first case I should mention here the work of Christopher Fynsk, who in *The Claim of Language* sets out to think precisely the relation between language and humankind that Foucault points out as the core of *etumos logos*:

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I believe that there is a kind of necessity to this movement – that the exigencies to which Foucault answered in seeking his ‘truth’ [sc. etumos], as he named it in The History of Sexuality (vol. 2), are linked to an exigency met in any consequent meditation on the essence of language. [...] The fact of language’s finitude – it is not an infinite logos – requires a thought of the relation between language and humankind. The opening of speech – every time – presupposes the material site provided by that structure of exposure that defines the essence of human being[15].

From another direction, Jacques Derrida has made significant inroads into the question of etumos, by pointing out at several instances its intimate relation to the meaningfulness of philosophy as a such. For example, in The Truth in Painting, he states that posing the Heideggerian question “What is the origin of the work of art?” implies that art has an “etumon,” that is an “originary meaning,” “a truth that is one and naked [une vérité une et nue],”[16] and “a presupposition without which one would perhaps never open one’s mouth.”[17] Note that Derrida’s definition of the etumon as truth is already contaminated by a pun (une-nue), a false etymological derivation at the heart of the etymon itself. Yet in spite of these and other occasions at which the question of the etumon and etymology could have been broached, Derrida nowhere – and here he follows Heidegger – historicizes his own etymological strategies of “derivation or affinity.”[18] Perhaps such historicization is mistaken in the sense that it would introduce a genealogical lineage into a philosophical concept which in fact propounds the very undoing of lineage, a notion of truth that is grounded in the material site of enunciation yet at the same time has lent itself to relentless punning and word games as well as the foundation of the entirety of modern linguistics. Nevertheless this is precisely my aim, for what is at stake is the meaning of doing philosophy, no matter how frivolous or serious.

So for the moment, I would like to shift back a few thousand years to before the onset of philosophical thought, that is, to ancient Greek epic and tragic literature in which we can witness the difference between truth as alēthēs and truth as etumos, and start following the development that eventually led to the hegemony of alētheia as truth in philosophical discourse, while at the same time leaving enough traces – the ones I have pointed out above – to complicate this same discourse 2400 years later. In making this movement back to epic literature we follow the path set out by Heidegger, who reached

18. Derrida, The Truth in Painting, 86.
ever farther back into antiquity to arrive at what he called the “basic meaning” of philosophical terms such as alētheia.

**Heidegger’s Recasting of Alētheia**

An important part of Heidegger’s return to Greece, a return whose different inflections we will pass through in this thesis, is an insistent investigation of a Greek word for “truth,” alētheia, with the intention to return to a supposedly originary pre-Socratic experience of alētheia as “unhiddenness.” For the moment we will bracket the question which “Greece” Heidegger exactly returns to, as it will become clear later on that precisely the etymological investigation of alētheia transports us to a realm that is no longer “properly,” or even “historically” “Greek.”

Heidegger’s subsequent investigation into a more primordial meaning of truth can be characterized as constantly moving backward in time, from the Aristotelian philosophy in his early work, through Plato and the pre-Socratics until pre-philosophical epic texts of Homer and Hesiod. One of Heidegger’s early formulations of this investigation can be found in his work *Being and Time*:

> If a λόγος as ἀπόφανσις is to be true, its Being-true is ἀληθεύειν in the manner of ἀποφαίνεσθαι – of taking entities out of their hiddenness and letting them be seen in their unhiddenness (their uncoveredness).

Truth is not so much a matter of a correct correspondance between language and the world, cast in the Aristotelian terminology from *De Interpretatione*, but is rather an aspect of the revelation, unhiddenness of the world in language itself. The moment this articulation takes place, however, it dissimulates that what it is supposed to reveal. The

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20. See also Most, “Heidegger’s Greeks.” Only late in his life, in his seventies, Heidegger moved from discourse to life and actually visited Greece (see Heidegger, *Sojourns*). According to John Sallis’s Foreword to *Sojourns*, “What was at stake in Heidegger’s travel to Greece was, in a word – in a word in which for him all Greek thinking and poetizing is concentrated – ἀλήθεια” (xv). This is later confirmed by Heidegger himself when he states “Ἀλῆθεια is the proper word of the Greek Da-sein” (33). Throughout the trip, and to his clear disappointment, he finds nothing of it.

ultimate consequence of this line of thinking – which is therefore also the complete oppo-
positie to any idea of correct correspondance as truth – is that truth itself is subtracted
from language, or, more precisely, every truth gives birth to an entirely new language.
This is the view that, for example, still resonates in the work of Badiou: “The one-truth,
which assembles to infinity the terms positively investigated by the faithful procedure,
is indiscernible in the language of the situation.”

The work of Martin Heidegger thus offers us an important starting point for our
investigation into the beginnings of the philosophical concept of truth. Heidegger at-
tempts to reach back to a more original conception of alētheia as uncoveredness, unhid-
denness, unconcealedness, or disclosure starting from his first turn toward Aristotle in
“Phenomenological Interpretations in Connection with Aristotle” from 1922. Heidegger
attempts to escape the philosophical tradition that has developed from Aristotle’s cor-
respondence theory of truth, which showed its first signs already in the Platonic corpus,
and becomes to full fruition in the Roman translation of alētheia with veritas.

Throughout his work and reworkings of the concept of truth he will reach back to ever more an-
cient strata of Greek texts. We will attend to several moments in the development of his
thinking of alētheia and the scholarly literature that has accumulated around it, because
Heidegger’s tireless efforts to arrive at the “basic meaning” of alētheia bring us to the edge
of philosophical history, forming a nigh perfect negative image of precisely the concept
of truth we seek to investigate in this text.

Already in Being and Time, Heidegger reaches back from Aristotle to Heraclitus frag-
ment B1 to assert his claim for a reinterpretation of alētheia as a-lētheia:

“Being-true” (“truth”) means Being-uncovering. [...] And is it accidental that on
of the fragments of Heracleitus – the oldest fragments of philosophical doc-
trine in which the λόγος is explicitly handled – the phenomenon of truth in the
sense of uncoveredness (unhiddenness), as we have set forth, shows through?
Those who are lacking in understanding are contrasted with the λόγος, and
also with him who speaks that λόγος, and understands it. The λόγος is φράζων
ὅπως ἔχει: it tells how entities comport themselves. But to those who are lack-
ing in understanding, what they do remains hidden – λανθάνει. They forget it
(ἐπιλανθάνονται); that is, for them is sinks back into hiddenness, Thus to the
λόγος belongs unhiddenness – ἀ-λήθεια.

22. Badiou, Being and Event, 396.
25. Heidegger, Being and Time, 262 [219].
After this definition of truth as unhiddenness in Being and Time, Heidegger developed the same idea across a number of lectures, including The Origin of the Work of Art from 1935 in which he inverts the Platonic doctrine of the relation between art and truth laid out in the Republic through a discussion of Van Gogh’s painting of a pair of shoes: “The artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth. [...] Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth. This being emerges into the unconcealment of its Being. The Greeks called the unconcealment of beings alētheia.”26 And again, in his lecture series from 1931–32, The Essence of Truth, Heidegger recapitalutes this etymology in an interpretation of the Platonic cave myth from The Republic.27

The core of Heidegger’s argument in these earlier texts is that although neither the word alētheia nor its opposite, lēthē, are mentioned in pre-Socratic fragments, single verbal forms like epilanthanontai allow us to establish the relation between logos and alētheia. This implies various assumptions that have been problematized by Heidegger himself and in the secondary literature. The first assumption is that there would exist an etymological relation between epilanthanontai and alētheia. As stated before, this claim is an old one28 – although not as old as pre-Socratic or even Platonic philosophy – and Heidegger was definitely not the first one to make it within the context of German classical studies.29 The second assumption is that Greek authors were aware of this relation, even though a clearly defined field of etymological inquiry had yet to be developed. Third, that this etymological relation had a structural quality, namely that the semantic field comprising the words deriving from the root lath- were organized around the opposition lēthē–alētheia, thus implying that the Greeks somehow had the knowledge –

27. E.g., Heidegger, The Essence of Truth, 97. See also Heidegger, “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” 168ff and its discussion in Ch. 2 “Aletheia and the Concealment of Concealing” of Bernasconi, The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being.
grammatical, etymological, or otherwise – to distinguish the α- of alētheia as a negative element, thus opposing it diametrically to lēthē.

The first assumption seems to be confirmed by the tradition of historical linguistics, on which Heidegger nevertheless refuses to rely. In order to provide evidence for the second assumption, philologist Ernst Heitsch suggests that we should trace the origins of the Greek concept of truth not, as Heidegger ventures to do, to philosophical sources, but rather to non-philosophical, literary texts in order to get a better grip on its associations. Referring to the following two citations from Homer’s Iliad, he suggests that truth as alētheia may be intimately bound up with the question of memory:

and thereby he [Achilles] set as an umpire godlike Phoenix, his father’s follower, that he might mark [memneōito] the running and tell the truth [alētheiēn] thereof.31

In this citation, truth as alētheia is brought forth explicitly in relation with the act of remembering, and at the same time, it would be lost in case of any memory failure, of forgetfulness. He calls this the “subjective” usage of the word alētheia as a truth that a subject established between his memory, imagination, and the world.

[A]nd my heart rejoiceth that thou rememberest [memnēsai] me, thy friend, neither am I forgotten [lēthō] of thee, and the honour wherewith it beseemeth that I be honoured among the Achaean.32

Adducing many other examples from poets such as Hesiod, Sophocles, and Euripides, but also from historians such as Thucydides and rhetoricians like Lycurgus and Demosthenes, Heitsch explicitly argues with Heidegger that it seems to have been “obvious” to Greek authors that lanthanō, lēthē, and alētheia were related, even though he remains sceptical about Heidegger’s claim that this semantic field would have had anything to do with “hiddenness.” Rather, he adduces a number of examples from the Platonic corpus

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30. Beekes, Etymological Dictionary of Greek, 1, 66: “ἀληθής is a compound with privative α-; the second member is either from *λῆθος (Dor. λάθος) or λήθη (Hom.), or from the verb λήθω, λαθ- ‘to be hidden, be unknown.’”
that seem to indicate that although the Greeks were associating these different words deriving from the common root \( lath^- \), the meanings of the different derivatives had already too much diverged to be interpreted in the sense of a pure opposition.

Nevertheless, it seems that in at least some of the examples cited by Heitsch, there may be a tighter link between \( lēthē \) and \( alētheia \) than just “association.” Surprised by the fact that Plato didn’t come up with the expected etymology of \( a-lētheia \) in the Cratylus, but instead opted for \( alē-theia \) (see Example 3),\(^{34}\) Jean Grondin sets out to investigate precisely the assumption of an active Greek knowledge of the interpretation of \( alētheia \) as \( a-lētheia \). After picking up some lapidary evidence from the Phaedrus and the final book of the Republic, where Plato speaks of respectively the “plain of truth [\( alētheias \)]”\(^{35}\) and the “plain of Oblivion [\( Lēthēs \)],”\(^{36}\) he recalls the well-known passage from the myth of Theuth in the Phaedrus that was already cited by Heitsch.

For this invention will produce forgetfulness [\( lēthēn \)] in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory [\( mnēmēs \)]. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory [\( anamimnēiskomenous \)] within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory [\( mnēmēs \)], but of reminding [\( hupomnēseōs \)]; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom [\( alētheian \)], for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise.\(^{37}\)

This decisively mythical passage in Plato’s oeuvre appears to corroborate Heitsch’s claim on the original relation between \( alētheia \) and memory, and provides some evidence for Heidegger’s third assumption, namely that the opposition \( lēthē–alētheia \) had a structural quality. Therefore, Grondin dismisses the etymology from the Cratylus as “beaucoup

\(^{34}\) Cf. Pl. Crat. 421b.
\(^{37}\) Pl. Phdr. 275a–b, trans. Fowler: τοῦτο γὰρ τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησία, ἅτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἐξώθην ὑπ᾽ ἄλλου τύπου, οὐκ ἐνδόθην αὐτοῖς ὑπ᾽ ἄλλου ἀναμμηνησικομένους: οὐκοῦν μνήμης ἀλλὰ υπομηνήσως φάρμακον ηὕρες. σοφίας δὲ τοὺς μαθητὰς δόξαν, οὐκ ἀληθειαν ποιήσεις: πολυηθίου γὰρ σοι γενόμενοι ἄνευ διδαχῆς πολυγνώμονες εἶναι δόξον, ἀγνώμονες ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλήθος δόξας, καὶ χαλεποὶ συνείναι, δοξόσοφοι γεγονότες ἀντὶ σοφῶν. See also Pl. Apol. 17a; Crito 51a; Prot. 339d; Phil. 52b, 63d; Phdr. 248b; Phaedo 64a–b.
moins sérieuse,”38 in spite of the fact that the experience of truth as divine wandering, madness, or as G.W.F. Hegel phrased it, “Bacchanalian revel [bacchantische Taumel],”39
is not without progeny. In fact Blanchot points out that there is no explanation as to
why Heidegger would favor the former over the latter, especially since the Greeks ex-
plicitly opt for the latter, “which is of no less importance than Heidegger’s etymological
interpretation.”40

Tilman Krischer, moreover, points out that Heidegger and Heitsch – who both base
their arguments on Homeric texts – are too hasty in positing the meaning of alēthēs as
“unconcealed,” based on the supposed meaning of lanthainein, “to be concealed.” Krisch-
er argues that lanthanō does not simply mean “to be concealed,” as a simple predicate
of an object, but that the verb carries the subjective implication of “to be overseen”:41
“Ἀληθής ist in formaler hinsicht dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß es eine Darstellung
voraussetzt, die nichts unbemerkt läßt, also möglichst vollständig und lückenlos ist.”42
Krischer argues that in Homeric, but also tragic sources, alēthes is closely linked to the
verb katalegein, the enumeration, or in fact “cataloguing” of elements of a situation.
Apart from the fact that this particular interpretation of the root lath- seems to hold in
both examples adduced by Heidegger above, it supports Krischer’s interpretation that
alētheia always needs subjective verification in the world, an eyewitness. At the same
time this definition of alēthes as that which is not overseen already prepares the ground
for what will be later philosophically formalized as a correspondence between language
and facts.

So it seems that in spite of the semantic nuances pointed out by different authors,
all three assumptions on which Heidegger bases his interpretation of alētheia as uncon-
cealedness have a ground in terms of philological or etymological research. But pre-

seems to hint at such an etymology further on in Parmenides, 123: “Therefore, what
belongs to the appearance of Being is still of the type uncanny, so that there is no
need to ascribe to Being a divine character subsequently and to demonstrate it
afterward. If now, however, ἀλήθεια belongs to the essence of primordial Being
and so does its counteressence λήθη, then each of these is primordially a Θείον.
Therefore even for Plato λήθη is still essentially ‘demonic.’ Should we then be of-
fended if in Parmenides’ primordial thinking ἀλήθεια appears as Ἡθα, as goddess?
We would now be more surprised if that were not the case.”
39. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 27: “The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in
which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he
drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose.”
40. Blanchot, The Writing of the Disaster, 94.
cisely because he felt that these disciplines developed in the wake of classical Greek philosophy and had therefore already fully fallen prey to what he called Seinsverges-senheit, Heidegger actively seeks to find other access points to the same truth. It is in these attempts to uncover the “basic meaning” of alētheia that we will locate a concept of truth that had already been mostly lost in the Platonic corpus, namely truth as etumos.

**Disclosing Alētheia**

The most extensive investigation of alētheia as uncoveredness, unhiddenness, unconcealedness, or disclosure (depending on the English translation of the German; Heidegger later prefers the German neologism Entbergung) occurs in Heidegger’s lecture course from the winter semester 1942–43 on Parmenides. His choice for this particular pre-Socratic philosopher as a point of departure for a meditation on the concept of truth is significant here, in the sense that we owe to Parmenides, through his influence on Plato, the prevalence of alētheia as the philosophically proper concept for truth itself.

Heidegger starts out from the Ancient Greek present active infinitive lanthanein, “to be concealed” (sic) deriving the meaning of alēthes as “unconcealed,” through various derivations and interpretations of a sequence of Homeric, that is, pre-Socratic, citations. Whereas Heitsch used the non-philosophical as a semantically “neutral” domain in relation to philosophy, Heidegger’s aim is rather to use them as an entrance point into more ancient strata of the Greek language that had already been lost by the time of Plato. The first citation that Heidegger adduces is from the *Odyssey*:

> Now from all the rest he [sc. Odysseus] concealed [elanthane] the tears that he shed, but Alcinous alone marked him and took heed.

By taking elanthane not to mean the active “he concealed,” but rather the passive “he was concealed,” Heidegger suggests an alternative, more literal translation: “but then in relation to all others he was concealed as the one shedding tears.” Instead of a simple transitive interpretation of the active verb, Heidegger insists on a more reflexive reading, which defines lanthanein as being concealed, concealing even that concealedness.

Heidegger cites another instance from the *Iliad* in which a similar reflexive concealedness is displayed:

> but Pallas Athene caught it [sc. the spear] up, and gave it back to Achilles, unseen [lathe] of Hector, shepherd of the host.47

Again Heidegger insists on concealedness as a “basic feature” of Pallas Athena:

> The “concealed” and the “unconcealed” are characters of the very being itself and not the characteristics of the noticing or apprehending. [...] Thought in the Greek fashion, λανθάνομαι says: I am concealed from myself in relation to something which would otherwise be unconcealed to me.48

*Alētheia* is the negation of this concealedness. Note that in these two fragments the relation between truth and memory claimed by Heitsch are completely absent, whereas Krischer’s interpretation of concealedness in terms of subjective oversight seems to hold. Moreover, the different derivatives of the root *lath*—appear to operate on their own, without being accompanied by words that are either semantically related (like *mnēmē*), or etymologically related (like *alētheia*). Thus Heidegger’s analysis proceeds through a sole meditation on *elanthane* and *lathe* in their poetic context.

Although it is common to dismiss Heidegger’s analyses of this type as thoroughly “etymologizing,” he refuses to engage into systematic derivation as is common in historical linguistics, tracing different instances of the “same” root back to a common ancestor imbued with a “basic” or “primordial” meaning. His argument in the *Parmenides* lectures instead meanders through verbs and nouns, infinitives and finite forms, actives and medio-passives, adverbials and adjectives, circumscribing the entire semantic field of the root *lath*—, without ever clarifying the epistemological status of such a root. Instead, he argues actively against any systematic “derivation”:

> In the attempt to trace the basic meanings of words and word-forms we are often guided, of course, by inadequate ideas of language in general, which then contribute to the current misjudgments about the very inquiry into basic meanings. We are wrong to think that the word-forms of a language originally possessed the pure basic meaning, which then got lost with the passage of time and became distorted. The basic and root meaning, on this view, remains quite hidden and only appears in the so-called “derivations.” But this theory already

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leads us astray, for it presupposes that there would exist somewhere the “pure basic meaning” in itself, from which then other meanings would be “derived.” [...] Even though our thoughtful inquiry is aiming here at a basic meaning, we are nevertheless guided by an entirely different conception of the word and of language. To claim we are involved in a so-called “word-philosophy,” which sorts out everything from mere verbal meanings, is admittedly very convenient, but it is also such a superficial view it does not even deserve to be labeled false. What we are calling the basic meaning of words is their beginning, which does not appear at first, but at last, and even then never as a detached formation, a specimen we could represent as something for itself. 49

Heidegger seems to aim for a more originary “basic meaning,” which is “their beginning” but which however appears only “at last”: “The so-called basic meaning holds sway in a veiled manner in all the modes of saying the respective word.”50 This long caveat is couched in a larger argument against the “literal” translation of a-lētheia into un-concealedness; we should aim instead “beyond the form and reach the words themselves.”51 This going beyond the literal form of the word takes on the character of a “listening” to what the word is “saying,” and this phonic line of argument resonates through the entire meditation on the basic meaning of alētheia.52 It regulates his reasoning through the semantic opposition between alēthes and pseudos in favor of the opposition between alēthes and lēthes. This argument no longer proceeds by means of a reading of for example the passage from the Phaedrus, but passes solely through the ear.

The counter-word to “unconcealing” (true), ἀληθές, has quite an unrelated sound, ψεύδος. [...] In any case it would now finally appear to be the time to consider once and for all that the counter-word to ἀληθές is not what seems to be closest, ληθές or λαθές or some similar-sounding word, but ψεύδος.53

51. Heidegger, Parmenides, 15.
52. Cf. Derrida’s observations on Heidegger in Of Grammatology, 22: “The voice of the sources is not heard. A rupture between the originary meaning of being and the word, between meaning and the voice, between ‘the voice of being’ and the ‘phonè,’ between ‘the call of being,’ and articulated sound; such a rupture, which at once confirms a fundamental metaphor, and renders it suspect by accentuating its metaphoric discrepancy, translates the ambiguity of the Heideggerian situation with respect to the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism.”
Even though Heidegger himself has in earlier work employed the adjective “etymological” to describe precisely this type of interpretation, his later investigations do not follow settled procedures such as adherence to “sound laws” in order to buttress his argument – they rather follow sound as such. Heidegger’s attempts to avoid “word-philosophy,” that is, a certain mode of etymological reasoning, do not stop with his shift from “literal” translation to sound, however. Aware that meaning itself is firmly rooted in literal form and cannot be dispensed with through an appeal to sound, he argues in his lecture “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B16)” from 1954 that

An appeal to the meaning of ἀληθεσία [sic!55] accomplishes nothing, and will never produce anything useful. Further, we must ask whether what is entertained under the rubrics of “truth,” “certainty,” “objectivity,” and “reality” has the slightest bearing upon the direction in which revealing and lighting point.56

Without foraging too much into Heidegger’s intention to move in the direction of “revealing” and “lighting,” we can thus trace through his consecutive interpretations of alētheia through Being and Time, his interpretation of the Platonic cave myth, the Parmenides fragments and those of Heraclitus, a progressive attempt to undo the terminology that has accumulated around truth and truth-seeking along the course of philosophical history: definition, form, sound, meaning. Because Heidegger attempts to reach the “basic” understanding of the word alētheia by reaching out to ever earlier Greek thinking, up to Heraclitean fragments that even no longer contain any trace of the word itself, alētheia itself contains something that is decidedly non-Greek – namely something never explicitly captured by the Greeks themselves. John Caputo describes this dichotomy, which is never resolved, when he points out the difference between on the one hand alētheia and the etymologically analytical a-lētheia:

We might say that in the first sense alētheia is a Greek word which describes the Greek epoch of presence as unconcealment (phenomenality). But in the second sense, the hyphenated sense, it is no longer a Greek word and cannot be enclosed within Greek experience, for it is no longer a quality of their experience, no longer a feature of the Greek experience of presence, but rather that which grants [...] the Greek experience of presence as unconcealment (phenomenality). In short, a-lētheia is no longer a Greek word. The hyphen breaks up its

54. See, for example, the second chapter of Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, “On the Grammar and Etymology of the Word “Being.”
55. This typo appears in both the German Gesamtausgabe edition, and in the English translation. The word ἀληθεσία is absent from Liddell & Scott.
56. Heidegger, “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B16),” 103 [266].
nominal unity, prevents it from belonging to a particular, epochal, historical language (just as does crossing out of Sein, or the attempt to respell Sein as Seyn.)

Caputo thus relates the etymological gesture of hyphenating a-lētheia, that which makes it readable as the opposition to lēthē, to precisely that which Heidegger is unable to capture in his philosophical history of Seinsvergessenheit. This offers us an explanation for Heidegger’s constant discomfort with more openly displayed etymological derivations and lines of argument; their constant disavowal masks the essentially etymological operation that allows him to understand the “basic” meaning of alētheia as un concealment in the first place.

Thus we may claim that the opposite of Heidegger’s trajectory toward a “basic” understanding of Greek thinking – an understanding that itself is non-Greek – is throughout captured in the word etymology. Etymology is always the first road of investigation that is a dead end, that which is everything but aletheiological. This is the insistent argument from the Introduction to Metaphysics onward, even though all modes of reasoning that Heidegger unpacks throughout his oeuvre stay uncomfortably close to what an unassuming outsider would assume to be etymology – albeit unhampered by formalities such as sound laws, isoglosses, and documentary evidence. This proximity is explicit in the constant disavowal of etymology in Heidegger’s work, up to one last time in a text from 1964, entitled “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking.” Here Heidegger returns once more to Parmenides and the question of alētheia. He will insist that

It is not for the sake of etymology that I stubbornly translate the name alētheia as un concealment, but for the sake of the matter which must be considered when we think adequately that which is called Being and thinking. Un concealment is, so to speak, the element in which Being and thinking and their belonging together exist.

57. Caputo, “Demythologizing Heidegger,” 529. See for an expanded discussion of the final parenthesis, Conclusion). Cf. Bernasconi, The Question of Language in Heidegger’s History of Being, 21: “The philological argument must of necessity be concerned with, for example, the question of whether aletheia was originally understood as bearing an alpha privative, but such an argument was not sufficiently far-reaching. When Heidegger hyphenated a-letheia in his later writings, he was not concerned to establish such a reading. Heidegger does not disregard such evidence as bears on his claims; but particularly in his later writings, what he was saying was not open to confirmation or rejection according to such evidence.”

It is this crucial link between truth and Being that will guide us through the rest of this example, in the sense that it will direct us to that which Heidegger is after in his search for the basic meaning, beyond all philosophical debris, of truth. That is, precisely this pre-philosophical word that time and again returns in Heidegger, without ever being activated. So close and yet so far away, the core assumption of any etymological endeavor, no matter how disavowed – the etumon.

**Another Word for Truth**

What is remarkable is that Heidegger, in one of the most protracted meditations on the concept of truth in twentieth-century philosophy, has never stumbled upon the other semantically related cluster of Greek words dealing with a concept of truth. This group of words was especially productive in the epic tradition of Homer and Hesiod, the latter of whom is an important influence on the later pre-Socratic philosophers Parmenides, Heraclitus, and Empedocles. In fact, if there were any candidate for a truth that was subsequently “forgotten” in the history of Western philosophy it would be this one. I speak here of the words eteos, etumos, and etētumos, which Levet calls with a beautiful phrase, “l’expression positive du vrai.” It is thus ironic that Heidegger was struggling to get rid of cheap “word-philosophy” and disdained etymology as a linguistic discipline while at the same time holding on to a manner of argument – not only in his interpretations of Greek, but especially also in his German language – that can be only described as etymological, as figura etymologica.

Heidegger came very close, nonetheless. His late insistence on the crucial relation between truth and Being and attempts to circumvent common etymological practice of literal word investigation by turning to the ear are all indicative of the other resonances, however faint, that etumos will have throughout the history of philosophy: Democritus’s usage of the noun etē for reality, Socrates’ philosophical method of exetasis and his refusal to leave any written work, Foucault’s insistence on parrhēsia, speaking the truth in the period that also the term etumos appears in his work. Heidegger’s struggle against “word-philosophy,” etymology for the sake of “literal” translations somehow kept him blind to the word that was all the while right in front of him: etymo-logy.

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60. Levet, *Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque*, 161. Pratt indicates in a footnote that “aletheia specifically is actually named in connection with poetry in only two places in all of archaic poetry […]. All other evidence for truth in archaic poetry uses a different vocabulary, the words etumos or etetumos, for example” (*Ly- ing and Poetry from Homer to Pindar*, 31, n. 33).
Heidegger’s questioning of the basic meaning of the word **alētheia**, its *true* meaning, back to pre-Socratic sources and epic texts of Homer and Hesiod are attempts to escape the philosophical deadlock in which a search for the basic meaning of truth is conditioned by precisely these philosophical fundaments of truth that the investigation is supposed to circumvent. But precisely a reference to these sources opens up another avenue of research of “different” truth that is never reached by Heidegger. As Krischer suggests, “In der epischen Sprache jedoch gibt es zur Bezeichnung des ‘Wahren’ neben ἀληθῆς noch die in klassischer Zeit so gut wie ausgestorbenen Wörter ἐτεός, ἔτυμος, ἐτήτυμος.” And he asks rhetorically, “Sollte etwa diese Gruppe genau auf die Fälle pas- sen, wo ἀληθῆς nicht paßt?”

Let us revisit Krischer’s full argument, which sets up a contrast between **alēthēs** on the one hand as always relying on visual, subjective verification. Louise Pratt defines **alētheia** as “an accurate account of what really happened provided to a reliable reporter by honest eyewitnesses,” whereas Thomas Cole suggests that **alēthēs** is “[w]hat is involved is strict (or strict and scrupulous) rendering or reporting – something as exclusive of bluster, invention or irrelevance as it is of omission or understatement,” and “presupposes a certain determination, concentration or effort at recall on the part of the speaker.”

**Etumos**, on the other hand, offsets the true from the false – a meaning later incorporated into **alēthēs**. Krischer starts out by revisiting the example from Homer’s *Iliad* previously cited by Heitsch in his attempt to reach the “non-philosophical” meaning of **alēthēs** in support of Heidegger’s analyses: “and thereby he [Achilles] set as an umpire godlike Phoenix, his father’s follower, that he might mark the running and tell **[apoειποί]** the truth **[alētheiēn]** thereof.” Krischer observes that what is relevant for the correct interpretation is not only that Phoenix impresses his memory with the running, but that the truth is told, namely in such a way that no detail is lost in the correspondence between the running observed by Phoenix and his subsequent narration of it.

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61. Krischer, “Ετυμος und ἀληθῆς,” 164. Additionally, there are two other privative adjectives for “true” that appear in epic language, νεμερτῆς and ατρέκης, which he suggests to have a more specialized meaning than **alēthēs** but do not overlap with **etumos**. As by the time of Aeschylus these adjectives were already absorbed into the general term **alēthēs** before **etumos** and are semantically less divergent, I have not included them in the discussion below. Cf. Cole, “Archaic Truth,” 13ff.
Book 6 there is another instance of an eyewitness account in which a maid tells Hector where Andromache went: “Then a busy house-dame spake to him, saying: ‘Hector, seeing thou straitly biddest us tell [muthēsasthai] thee true [alēthea].’”

Krischer moreover signals that in the Odyssey the adjective alēthēs and the noun alētheiē (the Ionic form of alētheia used by Homer) appear altogether thirteen times with the verb katalegein, “to list, enumerate.” In most of these cases, the situation is that of an eye-witness account. In Book 7 Odysseus tells Queen Arete about his adventures: “In this, for all my sorrows, have I told [katelexa] thee the truth [alētheiēn]” in Book 16 he tells Telemachus how the Phaeacians brought him Ithaca: “Then verily, my child, I will tell [katalexō] thee all the truth [alētheiēn].” In case alēthēs is used in a negative context, we are always dealing with a lie in the sense of a false eye-witness account. In Book 13 Odysseus, speaking to Pallas Athena disguised as herdsman, tells her that he indeed once has heard of Ithaca (while in fact it’s his home land): “yet he spoke [eipe] not the truth [alēthea];” and later in Book 14 a swineherd accuses Odysseus of just doing that: “[vagabonds like Odysseus] are not minded to speak [muthēsasthai] the truth [alēthea].”

Evidence from the Homeric Hymns, written in the same period, appears to confirm Krischer’s thesis. In all occurrences of a form of alētheiē, an eyewitness account is implied. In the second Hymn, “To Demeter,” the goddess, disguised as an old woman grieving among the mortals over Hades’ abduction of her daughter Persephone, tells her story – that is, the story of the old woman she is disguised as – to the daughters of King Celeus: “I will tell you my story [muthēsomai]; for it is not unseemly that I should tell [muthēsasthai] you truly [alēthea] what you ask.” And later, when Persephone is reunited with Demeter and has narrated her mother about her abduction to the Underworld: “All this is true [alēthea], sore though it grieves me to tell the tale [agoreuō].” Also in the fourth Hymn “To Hermes” we find two instances of the same usage. The first again refers to a deception of a god, in this case Hermes, taken by Apollo to appear in front of the council of gods because of his theft of several oxen belonging to Apollo. In
front of Zeus he tells his own deceiving account of the events, stating without blinking an eye: “Zeus, my father, indeed I will speak [katalexō] truth [alētheiēn] to you; for I am truthful and I cannot tell a lie [pseudesthai].” The second instance is when Zeus in his final speech tells Hermes about the Thriae, who practice divination at Mount Parnassus: “And when they are inspired through eating yellow honey, they are willing to speak [agoreuein] truth [alētheiēn]; but if they be deprived of the gods’ sweet food, then they speak falsely [pseudontai], as they swarm in and out together.” This usage of alētheia, namely as a truthful account of what is going to happen in the future such that it can be witnessed and verified is probably related to two other instances in the Odyssey marked out by Krischer.

The related adjectives etos, eteos, etumos, and etētumos – in epic poetry we find no nominal form – indicate a wholly different concept of truth, one that is independent from eyewitness verification, but rather pits what is “real” against the “unreal,” for example when Telemachus tells Athena, disguised as Nestor, that for Agamemnon “no real [etētumos] return” is any longer possible, i.e., that he is dead. The same holds for the truth (etētumon) spoken by the anonymous poet in his Hymn to Delian Apollo. The real and true as etumos is also that which holds up under exetasis, examination and thorough inspection, hence the later usage of this noun as a characterization of Socratic dialectics. If Socrates were out just to find alētheia, none of his usual prying and recourse to ideas would have been necessary (see Example 4). The following examples are from Krischer, and Cole, assisted by the extensive bibliographical research of Jean-Pierre Levet.

76. The adjective etos, from which eteos, etumos, and etētumos derive, has only been attested in a late gloss of Hesychius and fragments of Callimachus. There are also several more rare forms deriving from the same root, as well as several proper names. The etymology of the family of words around etos is unclear, and Levet warns against the very attractive but untenable proposition to relate it to the Indo-European root *h₁es-/h₁s- “to be.” See Levet, Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque, 2, 7.
78. HH 3.176.
79. See also Iribarren, “Du muthos au logos.”
First there are a few instances in which etumos is contrasted with pseudos. For example when in Book 10 of the Iliad, Nestor hears the sound of a lashing whip and horses, but is unsure what it means – whether Odysseus and Diomedes are coming back safely from their mission in the Trojan camp, or whether some bad tidings are arriving. “My friends, leaders and rulers of the Argives, shall I be wrong [pseusomai], or speak [ereō] the truth [etumon]?” There is no question here of alētheia. Nestor has not witnessed the intrusion of Odysseus and Diomedes into the Trojan camp, nor has a trusted messenger told him about their possible success. The truth in this case can only be known by investigating what has happened, or simply by waiting for their or, worse, a messenger’s arrival in the Greek camp. A similar phrasing turns up in the Odyssey, when Helen confides in Menelaos her thoughts about the identity of the two guests that have arrived at their court in Sparta: “Do we know, Menelaus, fostered of Zeus, who these men declare themselves to be who have come to our house? Shall I disguise my thought [pseusomai], or speak [ereō] the truth [etumon]? Nay, my heart bids me speak.” Again Helen does not know through verification that the two guests are Pisistratus and Telemachus, she can only utter her truly felt suspicions.

When Odysseus, in Book 19 of the Odyssey, deceives his wife Penelope in a ploy to kill all of her suitors, and recounts to Penelope his own adventures as if a stranger, moving her to tears: “He spoke, and made the many falsehoods [pseuda] of his tale seem like the truth [etumoisin].” To speak here of alēthēs would make no sense. Odysseus is not attempting to convince Penelope of the correct account of a certain turn of events, but rather of the truthfulness of his story. And finally in Book 23, when the nurse Eurycleia wakes up Penelope to tell her that Odysseus has come home, she tells her: “I mock thee not, dear child, but in very truth [etumon toi] Odysseus is here, and has come home, even as I tell thee. He is that stranger to whom all men did dishonor in the halls.” The stranger which initially had told Penelope “many falsehoods” that “seemed like the truth,” now

80. According to Park, Truth, Falsehood, and Reciprocity in Pindar and Aeschylus, 33–34, even as late as in Prometheus Bound.
turns out “in very truth” to be Odysseus himself. Again we do not speak of eyewitness accounts here, in the sense that Odysseus has been hiding in plain sight, for everyone to behold.

When relating to situations in which no possible verification of true events can be produced, for example in the case of dreams or prophecies, the epic material also gives us different variants of *etumos*. In book 19 of the *Odyssey*, Penelope speaks of two types of dreams, the ones that don’t come, and the ones that “bring true issues [*etuma*] to pass,” and related to this usage of *etumos* as regarding dreams is its usage in the context of prophecies, as in Book 2 of the *Iliad*, when Odysseus tells the Achaeans: “Endure, my friends, and abide for a time, that we may know whether the prophecies of Calchas be true [*etetion*], or no.”

The absence of possible eyewitnesses or trustworthy accounts also plays a role in two instances in the *Homeric Hymns*, first when no one is able to tell Demeter the truth about the abduction of Persephone, simply because “no one, either of the deathless gods or of mortal men” had heard or seen anything: “But no one would tell [*muthēsasthai*] her the truth [*etētumos*], neither god nor mortal man; and of the birds of omen none came with true news (lit. true messenger) [*etētumos aggelos*] for her.” The second instance is in the Hymn to Pythian Apollo, when the master of a group of Cretans, abducted by Apollo, asks him where he has taken them: “Now tell [*agoreuson*] me truly [*etētumon*] that I may surely know it: what country is this, and what land, and what men live herein?” Thus we can also notice a striking asymmetry between men and gods, where men always ask the gods for what is *etumon*, but the gods merely respond with *alētheia*.

Krischer indicates a few passages in which the usage of *etumos* seems less clear. In all three cases we are dealing with a combination of a variant of *etumos* with a word for story or messenger. However, upon closer inspection it will appear that based on our analyses above it is possible to find a clear interpretation. The first instance appears in Book 23 of the *Odyssey*, in a context where Penelope doubts whether Odysseus has

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89. HH 3.467–68, trans. Evelyn-White: καὶ μοι τούτ’ ἀγόρευσον ἔτητμον, ὄφρ’ εὖ εἰδώ: / τίς δήμος; τίς γαῖα; τίνες βροτοὶ ἐγγεγάασιν;
indeed returned to the court as her nurse Eurycleia’s eyewitness account seems to indicate: “But this is no true tale \([muthos \ etētumos]\), as thou tellest it \([\text{agoreueis}]\); nay, some one of the immortals has slain the lordly wooers in wrath at their grievous insolence and their evil deeds.”\(^91\) It is not that Penelope doubts the veracity of her servant’s account; she is rather suspicious of a possible divine intervention instead of the actual return of Odysseus. Hence the usage of \(\text{etētumos}\) instead of \(\text{alēthēs}\). The second case is the above-mentioned phrase from the Hymn to Demeter, “true messenger \([\text{etētumos aggelos}]\).”\(^92\) As said, \(\text{alēthēs aggelos}\) would make no sense in this context as Demeter has found that there are no eyewitnesses to the abduction. A similar phrase is found in Book 22 of the \(\text{Iliad}\), although more problematic in terms of interpretation. Achilles has killed Hector and is pulling his dead body around through the dust behind his chariot. His father and Hecabe already know this and loudly lament their fallen son and hero. Yet his wife Andromache is still unaware of his untimely death: “but the wife knew naught as yet the wife of Hector—for no true messenger \([\text{etētumos aggelos}]\) had come to tell \([\text{ēggeil’}]\) her that her husband abode without the gates.”\(^93\) The general situation here is that the truth in the sense of \(\text{alētheia}\) is known in Troy. Several eyewitnesses have confirmed the death of Hector, and his father and Hecabe, among others, have acted upon these accounts with displays of mourning. That no “true messenger” has come to Andromache doesn’t imply so much that she hasn’t been informed about the circumstances and details of her husband’s death, but rather that the fact of his death, “that Hector is dead,” has not yet been communicated to her.

In all these cases, \(\text{etumos}\) is used not for things that may escape our attention or may be overseen, but rather for true things in the sense that they are not lies or false promises made in dreams. Whereas in the case of \(\text{alēthēs}\), an observer is always implied, a judgment of \(\text{etumos}\) may be made without him. \(\text{Alēthēs}\) requires a subjective, eye-witness verification, whereas \(\text{etumos}\) does not. \(\text{Alēthēs}\) calls upon memory, whereas \(\text{etumos}\) is by definition anamnesic. As succinctly summarized by Pratt:

\begin{quote}
Aletheia has a subjective component that etetumos does not. The speaker of aletheia has fully in mind what really happened and wishes to speak it forth honestly and fully; the speaker’s knowledge and good intentions are equally
\end{quote}

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\(^{92}\) HH 2.46: ἐτήτυμος ἄγγελος.

essential. A speaker of etetuma (or of etuma, I do not believe the two are distinguishable) need have no such knowledge or intention. The word merely describes a correspondence between the speaker’s words and the reality he or she describes.94

**Epic and Tragic Truths**

In two well-known lines from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, which we also featured as a motto to this thesis, alēthēs and etumos are placed in contrast. The first words that the Muses teach Hesiod while he is pasturing his sheep are, “We know how to speak many false things [pseudea] as though they were true [etumoisin]; but we know, when we will, to utter true things [alēthea].”95 In this translation by Evelyn-White, both words, etumoisin and alēthea have both been rendered with “true.” More recent translations, however, attempt to differentiate the two, for example in the recent Hesiod edition translated by Most: “We know how to say many false things [pseudea] similar to genuine ones [etu-moisin], but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things [alēthea],”96 and in the monograph on Hesiod by Jenny Strauss Clay: “We know how to compose many lies [pseudea] indistinguishable from things that are real [etumoisin]; And we know, when we wish, to pronounce things that are true [alēthea].”97 The first line of the citation reminds us the abovementioned lines from the Odyssey: “He spoke, and made the many falsehoods [pseuda] of his tale seem like the truth [etumoisin].”98 The second line, however, explicitly introduces a contrast between etumos and alētheia. In her discussion of theis passage, Strauss Clay states the following:

The difference between ἀληθέα and ἔτυμα, while often ignored, is crucial not only for this passage, but for Hesiod’s entire undertaking. Aletheia exists in speech, whereas et(et)uma can inhere in things; a complete and accurate account of what one has witnessed is alethes, while etumos, which perhaps derives from εἶναι (“to be”),99 defines something that is real, genuine, or corresponds to the real state of affairs. [...] Etuma refer to things as they really are and hence cannot be distorted; aletheia, on the other hand, insofar as it is a full

96. Hes. Th. 27–28, trans. Most. He is, however, inconsistent by translating etētuma in Hes. WD 10 with “truths.”
99. Cf. Krischer, “Ετύμος und ἀληθής,” 166. This etymology is doubted by Levet and has recently been disputed in Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 473.
and truthful account, can be willfully or accidentally deformed through omis-
sions, additions, or any other distortions. All such deformations are *pseudea*. 100

According to Strauss Clay, the Muses’ paradoxical statement emphasizes the complicat-
ed relation between the poet Hesiod and the Muses. Whereas the Muses speak directly
through Homer and therefore the entire question of truth is relagated to the inaccessible
realm of the divine, Hesiods speaks literally *from* the Muses, and therefore has to pass
judgment on the veracity of the Muses’ narrative, aware that they may cloak falsehoods
as truths [*etumoisin*], but also that they may actually narrate true events [*alēthea*] that
they have witnessed during the many ages of their existence: “His Muses insist both on
their capriciousness in dispensing and withholding the truth and on the impossibility
of distinguishing their lies from things as they truly are, an impossibility, to be sure, for
human beings.” 101

It is strange that in his discussion of fragments from Hesiod in the Parmenides lect-
ures, Heidegger does not refer to these prominent lines. Instead, he zooms in on a later
verse, in which Nereus is described with the epithets *apseudea* and *alēthea*:102:

> Νηρέα δ’ἁψευδέα καὶ ἀληθέα – Nereus, the one who does not dissemble, who
> hides nothing – καὶ ἀληθέα: i.e., precisely the one who “does not conceal.” The
> καὶ does not simply add the ἀληθέας to the ἀψευδής; and neither is ἀληθέας just
> a repetition of ἀψευδής, as if the same thing were being said twice. The sense
> here is rather that the non-hiding is grounded in the non-concealing. […] The
> non-hiding in the non-concealing: ἀληθές. 103

A bit later Heidegger again emphasizes that “Hesoid gives simple, univocal information
concerning this word and its basic meaning,” claiming that “[ψ]ευδῆς is determined on
the basis of ‘-ληθῆς.’” 104 But if this is so, why does he need to have recourse to an epithet
– often petrified phrases with fixed metrical form and little semantic content – when in
the opening lines Hesiod gives a much more nuanced and complex view of the interplay
between truth and falsehood in his work? Again, it seems that a confrontation with *etu-
mos* is laboriously avoided.

100. Strauss Clay, *Hesiod’s Cosmos*, 60–61
102. Hes. Th. 233.
The situation is completely different in the proem to *Works and Days*. As Hesiod will not be treating a divine subject matter but rather the human life of which he himself is well informed, he does not need to add the codicil that falsehoods may end up appearing as truths, and that eyewitness accounts, although probably part of the story, will be unverifiable for mortal eyes. The *Works and Days* therefore has the character of a manual for human life, based on lived experience, and Hesiod can thus simply state: “Yours to make straight the decrees with justice, But, as for me, I would declare [muthēsaimēn] to Perses the way things are [etētuma].” Pratt suggests that with this word, Hesiod is able to construct “a different notion of poetic truth, a metaphorical notion that is compatible with fiction in a way that the model of truth (aletheia) constructed by the Homeric passages is not.”

The contrast between *alēthēs* and *etumos* partially persists in the tragic poets, most clearly in the oldest one, Aeschylus. Nevertheless, in his work *alēthēs* has already subsumed the more specialized forms of *atrekēs* and *nēmertēs* that we still found the Homeric epics, and the word *etumos* has become constrained merely to statements that are true without being truthful. Tragic poetry thus shows the next stage of the ascent of *alētheia* as the sole word for truth in Greek thought. This becomes evident once we inspect a few instances of *etumos* in Aeschylian tragedy.

In the *Seven Against Thebes*, the chorus first enters in terrified excitation about the army of Polynices approaching the gates of Thebes, singing: “Their army is let loose! Leaving camp, - look! - the mounted throng floods swiftly ahead. The dust whirling in the air tells me this is so—its message [aggelos] is speechless [anauodos], yet clear and true [etumos].” As in *Homeric Hymn* 2.46 and *Iliad* 22.438 we are dealing here with a message that is already known in terms of its content through eyewitnesses; in the first lines of the tragedy a scout has already reported as such. The cloud of dust, in spite of being “speechless,” is truly a confirmation of this fact, beyond and even before any eyewitness account offered by the scout. Moreover, the qualification of the message as *etumos* itself may be a pun on the name of the ruler of Thebes, Eteocles, whose name

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means “truly [eteo-] glorious.” By breaking the promise to share the kingdom inherited from Oedipus by himself and his brother Polynices, the latter now sends the “truth” of breaking that agreement back home in a war of succession.

Other instances of etumos are even weaker in terms of the amount of truth that is conveyed by them. In the Agamemnon, when the chorus internally speculates on Agamemnon’s possible return to Argos, it first states “Heralded by a beacon of good tidings [euaggelou] a swift report [baxis] has spread throughout the town. Yet whether it is true [etētumos], or some deception of the gods, who knows?”\textsuperscript{109} Note that here that the good news is merely some type of rumor (baxis), and that its truth is not based on any direct observation of Agamemnon arriving on the shore of Argos. Moreover, its truth is contrasted with a possible deception by the gods. And as we have seen before in Homeric texts, it is always the truth as etumos that is posited against the interference of the gods.

A few lines down, when the chorus again considers the truth of the beacon signals, the adjective alētheis is used precisely because in this context they see a herald running toward the city from the seashore, who will hopefully confirm the truth communicated by the beacons, namely that Agamemnon indeed has arrived: “We shall soon know about this passing on of flaming lights and beacon signals [phruktōrias] and fires, whether they perhaps are true [alētheis] or whether, dream-like, this light’s glad coming has beguiled our senses.”\textsuperscript{110} Moreover, the truth as alētheia is here contrasted not with the possible deception of the gods, but rather with the deception of dreams. It would make very little sense to use etumos in this context, as we have seen that dreams may be etuma, but definitely not alēthē. Other instances of etumos by and large conform to the Homeric usage. In a later passage in the Agamemnon, the chorus questions Cassandra’s actions if she truly (etētumōs) has foreknowledge of her own death.\textsuperscript{111} And in the Eumenides, the choir of Furies prophecy that “many sorrowful wounds, given in truth [etuma] by children, wait for parents in the future time.”\textsuperscript{112}

Note that in all these instances etumos appears in the stasimon. In Greek tragedy, the language of the chorus is distinct from the Attic dialect used by the actors, employing a stylized version of the Doric dialect. In addition to a style of speaking that was gener-

\textsuperscript{109} Aesch. Ag. 475–79, trans. Smyth: πυρὸς δ’ ὑπ᾽ εὐαγγέλου / πόλιν διήκει θοὰ / βάξις: / εἰ δ’ ἑτήτυμος, / τίς οἶδεν, ἢ τι θείόν ἐστί πῆ ψυθός.—
\textsuperscript{111} Aesch. Ag. 1296: ἑτήτυμος.
\textsuperscript{112} Aesch. Eum. 496–8, trans. Smyth: πολλὰ δ’ ἑτυμα παιδότρωτα / πάθεα προσμένει / τοκεῦ- / σιν μεταθείς ἐν χρόνῳ.
ally already perceived to be archaic in itself,\textsuperscript{113} the usage of this dialect, as well as many terms from Homeric language itself points to the archaic origins of Greek tragedy. It should therefore not surprise us that a word for truth that was already in decline during Aeschylus’s life – it is for example already completely absent in its original meaning in Pindar, the lyric poet contemporary to Aeschylus\textsuperscript{114} – is present precisely in the most archaizing and “foreign” passages of Attic tragedy.

There are a few exceptions to abovementioned distribution of \textit{etumos} in Aeschylean tragedy. The first one occurs in the \textit{Persians}, when Queen Mother Atossa has conjured the ghost of her deceased husband Darius to tell him of the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks at Salamis, although apparently Xerxes has been able to escape the slaughter.

\begin{quote}
Atossa: To his joy he [Xerxes] reached the bridge yoking the two continents.
Darius: And reached our continent in safety? Is this certain [\textit{etētumon}]?
Atossa: Yes, a proven report establishes this. Doubt there is none.\textsuperscript{115}
\end{quote}

The usage of \textit{etētumon} instead of \textit{alēthes} here seems puzzling, as Atossa clearly confirms that there is a “proven report,” that is, an eyewitness story to corroborate the news of Xerxes’ safe exit. However, it seems that Darius is not speaking of that kind of truth, instead he laments in the next line: “Alas! The fulfilment of the oracles has indeed come swiftly, and it is my son upon whom Zeus has caused their issue to descend.”\textsuperscript{116} So even though \textit{etētumos} is employed outside a choric passage, its usage nonetheless conforms to its semantics in other instances. The other two divergences from the common distribution are found in \textit{Prometheus Bound}, in lines 295 (\textit{etum'}) and 596 (\textit{etuma}). In both cases \textit{etumos} is used in a dialogue, first by Oceanus and second by Io, and not by the chorus. In neither case the context conforms to the ones we have encountered before. Within classical Greek scholarship, however, the authenticity of this play has become increasingly contested,\textsuperscript{117} and perhaps these two usages of \textit{etumos} uncommon to the rest of the Aeschylean corpus may add to the already existing evidence that it has been wrongly ascribed to him.

\textsuperscript{113} Goldhill, “The Language of Tragedy,” 129.
\textsuperscript{116} Aesch. Pers. 739–40, trans Smyth: φεῦ, ταχεῖά γ’ ἦλθε χρησμῶν πρᾶξις, ἐς δὲ παῖδ’ ἐμὸν / Ζεὺς ἀπέσκηψεν τελευτὴν θεσφάτων:
Two other instances in Aeschylus, again in choral passages from respectively the *Agamemnon* and the *Libation Bearers*, give us a hint of the development of one of the last vestiges of *etumos* as truth in late antiquity, namely etymology. The chorus in the *Agamemnon* speculates on the truth of Helen’s name:

> Who can have given a name so altogether true [*etētumōs*] – 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 [*Helenan*]? For, true to her name, a Hell she proved to ships [*helenaus*], Hell to men [*helandros*], Hell to city [*heleptolis*].

The truth as *etumos* of Helen’s name is first of all given by *tis hontin’ oukh horō*, literally “something we cannot see.” Immediately *alētheia* is out of the question here: what we cannot see, observe, or somehow verify with our senses cannot be *alēthēs*. The second instance is in the *Libation Bearers*, when the chorus speculates on the truth of the name of Zeus’s daughter Justice, establishing an etymological link between the two: “and in the battle his hand was guided by her who is in very truth [*etētumos*] daughter of Zeus [*Dios kora*], breathing murderous wrath on her foes. We mortals aim true to the mark when we call her Justice [*Dikan*].” In both cases the truth the chorus speaks of is given by the gods and takes the form of the well-known proverb that *nomen est omen*. It is this conception of *etumos* as truth that we will further discuss in Example 3, in the context of Plato’s *Cratylus* and the development of etymology.

**Alētheia as Path**

After Aeschylus, *etumos* steadily loses terrain to *alēthēs* as the common word for truth.

We can only speculate as to the reasons for this semantic shift, although Krischer sug-

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120. The latest attestations appear to be in fragments of Callimachus, as late as the 3rd century bce. Alexandrian grammarian Hesychius is very clear when he writes Ἑτά— ἀληθῶς, ἀγαθά. ᾿Ετανόν— ἀληθῶς, σφόδρα. ᾿Εταυτῷ— ἀληθῶς. ᾿Ετεόν— ἀληθῆς. ᾿Ετήτυμα— ἀληθῆ. ᾿Ετήτυμος— ἀληθῆς. ᾿Ετητὺμος— ἀληθῆς. ᾿Ετυμὸν— ἀληθῆς. ᾿Ετυμώνιον— ἀληθῆς. ᾿Ετυμως— ἀληθῶς. See Levet, *Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque*, 2, n. 4; 46.
gests that “die zunehmende Entfaltung des abstrakten Denkens,” has played a role; in other words, the development of rational, philosophical thought itself must be credited for the suppression of *etumos* as a category of truth. Cole points out that it is first in the odes of Pindar and the fragments of Parmenides that *alētheia* acquires the extended meaning it will have in the Greek of Socrates and Plato, that is, not only expressing truth according to subjective eyewitness accounts, but also objective, so to say factual truths. Moreover, both authors introduce the idea of truth as a path to be walked, truth as a *hodos*. Cole cites the following two fragments from respectively the *Third Pythian Ode for Hieron of Syracuse* and Parmenides’ fragment 2 as evidence:

> But if any mortal has the path of truth [*alatheias hodon*] in his mind, he must fare well at the hands of the gods as he has the opportunity.

> Come now, I will tell thee – and do thou hearken to my saying and carry it away – the only two ways [*hdoi*] of search that can be thought of. The first, namely, that *It is*, and that it is impossible for anything not to be, is the way of conviction [*peithous…keleuthos*], for truth is its companion [*alētheiēi gar opēdei*]. The other, namely, that *It is not*, and that something must needs not be, – that, I tell thee, is a wholly untrustworthy path [*atarpon*]. For you cannot know what is not – that is impossible – nor utter it;

In both citations we find a novel use of the noun *alētheia* unattested in previous epic or tragic texts. Pindar speaks of the “path of truth,” (*alatheias hodon*), whereas Parmenides invokes a series of semantically proximate terms: the ways (*hdoi, keleuthos*) of “*It is*,” of conviction on which truth is one’s companion (*opēdei*), and the path (*atarpon*) of “*It is not.*” In epic texts, *hdoi* and *keleuthos* generally have the neutral meaning of “path” or “journey,” whereas the two instances of *atarpon* in Homer indicate a path that is re-

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121. Krischer, “*Etymos und Alethes,*” 172.
spectively “rugged”\textsuperscript{125} and “jagged” or “rough.”\textsuperscript{126} It may be tempting to translate it with Heidegger’s Holzweg. The figure of truth as companion here refers back to fragment 1, in which a noble youth (Parmenides himself?) is guided onto a car by the goddess Alētheiē, Truth. Again I quote extensively in order to show how the figure of truth as accompanying the youth on the royal road to Being is set in the poem.

And the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and spake to me these words: –
Welcome, noble youth, that comest to my abode on the car that bears thee tended by immortal charioteers! It is no ill chance, but justice and right that has sent thee forth to travel [neesthai] on this way [hodon]. Far, indeed, does it lie from the beaten track [patou] of men! Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of persuasive Truth [Alētheiēs], as the opinions [doxas] of mortals in which is no true belief [pistis alēthēs] at all. Yet none the less shalt thou learn of these things also, since thou must judge approvedly of the things that seem to men as thou goest through all things in thy journey [perōnta].\textsuperscript{127}

The image drawn up by Parmenides moves far beyond the epic imagination. Nowhere in the Homeric literature do we encounter Truth as a goddess, and at no point is truth related to the image of traveling or journey, passing on a path of persuasion away from the beaten track. And if we now return to the argument set up by Heidegger in his Parmenides lectures, namely that Parmenides is the first Greek philosopher who gives us a glimps of a thinking of alētheia that in no way relates to the metaphysical tradition formalized by Aristotle of alētheia (and later veritas) as correspondence, we can only conclude that the “originary” articulation of alētheia as unconcealment by Parmenides in fact coincides with the assimilation of etumos in the domain what is alēthes. Parmenides develops a completely novel image of truth, while paradoxically the “basic meaning” of

\textsuperscript{125} Hom. Il. 17.743, trans. Murray: παιπαλόεσσαν ἀταρπόν.
alētheia in Parmenides is itself already complicated and compounded by an even earlier stratum of meaning.  

This becomes clear once we inspect fragment 8 from Parmenides’ poem, where the path of truth is in fact described as etētumos, appearing fully synonymous to alēthēs. The path of “It is,” the path of Being introduced in fragment 2 as opposed to the wayward track of Non-Being is first called “uncreated” and “indestructible,” without beginning or end, past of future. He then recapitulates the dichotomy from fragment 2:

“Is it or is it not?” Surely it is adjudged, as it needs must be, that we are to set aside the one way as unthinkable [anoēton] and nameless [anōnumon] (for it is no true way [ou gar alēthēs estin hodos]), and that the other path [tēn d’<hodon>] is real [pelein] and true [etētumon].

The path of Non-Being is considered to be “unthinkable” and “nameless” or unnamable, anonymous. It is a path that no language can ever attach to, in fact, the logos of Non-Being is no logos whatsoever, a point that will be taken up at length (and contested) in Plato’s Sophist. The path of Non-Being is therefore “no true way.” The other path of Being is, on the contrary, real, or perhaps more correctly, “coming into being,” or “to emerge, to rise up in the unconcealed” (pelein) and “true” (etētumon). Etētumos here appears to be used entirely synonymously to alēthēs in the previous line. In this sense “uncovered-ness” appears to be for Parmenides in no way the sole, privileged aspect of Being, contrary to what Heidegger may suggest.

So if we combine our observations on the way in which Heidegger on the one hand insistently deprecates a mere etymological argument while essentially founding his line of reasoning on derivational relations, while on the other hand proposing a novel concept of truth that appears in Parmenides, which in fact for the first time in Greek thinking fully incorporates that what is etumon into alētheia, we may provisionally conclude that what remains unthought in Heidegger is precisely the way of the etumos. Or we may say that Western philosophical thinking, as initiated by Parmenides’ poem, starts

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128. Thus any refutation of Heidegger’s interpretation of Parmenides’ alētheia based on earlier sources such as Homeric texts (e.g., Bröcker, “Parmenides’ Αλήθεια”) is useless, as Parmenides is precisely inventing a new meaning of alētheia.
130. Heidegger, Parmenides, 90.
131. Heidegger does discuss fragment 8, but does not refer to these lines. See Heidegger, “Moira (Parmenides VIII, 34–41),” in Early Greek Thinking.
at the moment that what is *etumon* is no longer distinguishable from what is *alēthes*. In this sense, this properly “philosophical” truth is obscured in more ways than Heidegger suggests.
Traces of an Atomic Reality

As we have tried to show in the previous example, the contrast in epic and tragic texts between \( \text{alēthēs} \) and \( \text{etumos} \) is that the former always depends on subjective, eye-witness verification and appeals to memory, whereas the latter refers to truth that relies on neither subjective observation, nor the power of memory; it is used for things and stories that are true in themselves.

Apart from the different inflections of \( \text{etumos}, \text{etētumos}, \) and \( \text{eteos} \) that we have encountered, there is one other, adverbial, usage in the tragic ad epic corpus that appears to be somewhat at a semantic distance, namely the adverbial wordgroup \( (\text{ei}) \text{ eteion/etūtōn/etētumon} \), which appears at several points in Homeric texts, meaning as much as “in reality,” “in truth,” or “verily.” This particular usage is mostly accompanied by clitics signaling a form of rhetorical emphasis.

For example, in Book 13 of the \textit{Iliad}: “But if in very \( [\text{ei dē}] \) truth \( [\text{etētumon}] \) the warrior son of Atreus, wide-ranging Agamemnon, is the cause of all […]”. The clitic \( \text{dē} \) here emphasizes the conditional clause introduced by \( \text{ei} \), reinforced by the adverbial use of \( \text{etētumon} \): “if indeed truly.” We find a similar construction in Book 18 with the clitic \( \text{nai} \) instead of \( \text{ei} \): “Aye, verily \( [\text{nai dē}] \), as thou sayest \( [\text{tauta ge}] \), my child, it is in truth \( [\text{etētumon}] \) no ill thing to ward utter destruction from thy comrades […]” A variety of emphatic clitics appear in the context of this adverbial usage of \( \text{etumon} \), such as \( \text{ge}, \text{toi,} \) and \( \text{per.} \) This adverbial usage usually does not so much call for a verification but rather reinforces the protasis of a conditional sentence, raising the stakes of the conversation. In other words, the employment “truly” or “verily” could in these cases be interpreted not as a reference to “truth” or “reality,” but rather as a rhetorical gesture.

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There is however at least one attestation of *eteon* in epic texts which neither follows the adjectival pattern discussed in the previous section, nor the adverbial usage in a conditional context. The *Homeric Hymn* to Hermes sings the praises of the son of the mountain nymph Maia and Zeus, “a son, of many shifts, blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, a watcher by night, a thief at the gates,” who stole Apollo’s sacred oxen in the evening of the day he was born.

The story of the theft explicitly introduces the theme of a dysfunctional memory or a “memory of absence,” thus signaling a remove from the realm of *ālētheia*. When Hermes passes a shepherd that witnesses him sneaking away with Apollo’s herd, he says: “Old man, digging about your vines with bowed shoulders, surely you shall have much wine when all these bear fruit, if you obey me and strictly remember not to have seen what you have seen [*idōn mē idōn*], and not to have heard what you have heard [*kōphos akousas*].” The shepherd nevertheless betrays Hermes to Apollo when the latter passes by to inquire after his lost livestock. Apollo tracks down Hermes to his cave where he finds Hermes feigning sleep in his cradle:

He squeezed head and hands and feet together in a small space, like a new born child seeking sweet sleep, though in truth [*eteon ge*] he was wide awake.

In this context *eteon* refers to the situation as it is “in reality” or “in truth.” Hermes is only feigning sleep while actually being wide awake and following Apollo’s every move. And when interrogated by the latter, it is he, not the shepherd, who says “I have not seen them [*ouk idon*], I have not heard of them [*ouk puthomēn*].”

This poetic space of deceit, obfuscation, and wilful amnesia is one of the few locations that allows us to trace the epic usage of *eteos*, *etumos*, and *etētumos* into the philosophical discourse of the fifth century. It is a unique case, where we neither find an adjectival usage, as explored in the previous chapter, nor an emphatic adverbial usage.

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as discussed above. Rather, *eteon* appears to refer to a reality as perhaps only Apollo can observe, a “true reality,” allowing him not to be deceived by Hermes’ skilled lies.

The first and only place in philosophy for this type of “truth” or “reality” to persist, where it is indeed reinvented, is the work of the philosopher Democritus. His work is of particular interest to us here, in the sense that his large oeuvre – of which only scraps remain – developed at a remove from what would become the lineage Plato–Aristotle, and the Western metaphysical tradition in general. Democritus was said to be one of the great competitors of Socrates in Athens, which would be the reason that he is never mentioned in the latter’s work, although Derrida locates an oblique reference in the *Timaeus*.10 In fact, Plato is said to have disliked Democritus so much that he would have liked to see all his books burned. According to Diogenes Laertius,

Aristoxenus in his Historical Notes affirms that Plato wished to burn all the writings of Democritus that he could collect, but that Amyclas and Clinias the Pythagoreans prevented him, saying that there was no advantage in doing so, for already his books were widely circulated. And there is clear evidence for this in the fact that Plato, who mentions almost all the early philosophers, never once alludes to Democritus, not even where it would be necessary to controvert him, obviously because he knew that he would have to match himself against the prince of the philosophers.11

And, as Derrida writes, this hatred has had considerable consequences for the history of philosophy:

the Democritean tradition [...] has been subjected since its origin, and first of all under the violent authority of Plato, to a powerful repression throughout the history of Western culture. One can now follow its symptomatology, which begins with the erasure of the name of Democritus in the writings of Plato, even though Plato was familiar with his doctrine. He probably feared that one might draw some conclusion as to the proximity, or even the filiation, of some of his philosophemes. I leave it to you to pursue this path as well.12

Taking up this path here, it is indeed true that we have very little evidence – and nearly all of it is second-hand – of Democritus’s philosophical views. The few snippets that have been transmitted to our current era sketch out a philosophical system that is very different form the metaphysics that would dominate philosophy until Nietzsche and

Heidegger. What is at the core of these fragments is a neologism presumably coined by Democritus, a nominal form of \textit{etumos}: \textit{eteē}.\textsuperscript{13}

One of the more well-known citations directly juxtaposes the two different conceptions of truth from epic and tragic texts: “In reality \textit{[eteēi]} we know nothing; for truth \textit{[alētheia]} is in the depths \textit{[en buthōi]},”\textsuperscript{14} and “Yet it will be clear that to know what kind of thing each thing is in reality \textit{[eteēi]} is impossible \textit{[en aporōi]}.”\textsuperscript{15} Truth as \textit{alētheia} is here posited as an object of knowledge which is difficult, if not impossible to obtain; it is in the depths (\textit{buthōi}) or, even worse, beyond any horizon of access (\textit{aporōi}). Not only is truth in reality (\textit{eteēi}) extraordinarily difficult to reach, man is subtracted from reality itself; that is, man as concept, as \textit{Dasein} if you will, has nothing to do with atoms: “By this principle man must know that he is removed from reality \textit{[eteēs]}.”\textsuperscript{16} Unfortunately, this is also the only citation in which \textit{eteē} is used non-adverbially, which leaves us with a great uncertainty as to what it exactly meant in Democritus’s larger philosophical system.

According to Taylor, Democritus’s use of the neologism \textit{eteē} means “real” or “true,” the expression \textit{eteēi} being equivalent to \textit{tōi onti} “in being, what is,” as a technical expression for the atoms.\textsuperscript{17} This relation between \textit{eteē} and \textit{to on} is established by Democritus on the epistemological premise that neither is accessible to knowledge. The following two fragments relate the accessibility to knowledge \textit{tōi eonti} and \textit{eteēi}: “That in reality \textit{[eteēi]} we do not know \textit{[sunienen]} what kind of thing each thing is or is not has been shown many times,”\textsuperscript{18} and: “In fact \textit{[tōi eonti]} we know \textit{[sunienen]} nothing firm \textit{[atrekes]}, but what changes according to the condition of the body and of the things that enter it and come up against it.”\textsuperscript{19} Apart from the parallel construction, it should be pointed out that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{13} A rare verbal counterpart, \textit{etazō}, is found in DK 200 B266 = T D130, which Taylor translates with “prosecute.”
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{DK} 68 B17 = T D15: \textit{ἐτεῇ δὲ οὐδέν ἴδμεν· ἐν βυθῷ γὰρ ἡ ἀλήθεια}, trans. Taylor.
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{DK} 68 B8 = T D21: \textit{καίτοι δήλον ἐσται ὅτι ἐτεῇ οἷον ἕκαστον γιγνώσκειν ἐν ἀπορῳ ἐστί}, trans. Taylor, modified.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{DK} 68 B16 = T D19: \textit{γιγνώσκειν τε χρῆ ἄνθρωπον τὸδε τῷ κανόνι ὅτι ἐτεῆς ἀπῆλλακται}, trans. Taylor, modified.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Taylor, \textit{The Atomists}, 217.
\item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{DK} 68 B10 = T D18: \textit{ἐτεῇ μὲν νυν ὅτι οἶον ἕκαστον ἔστιν ἢ οὐκ ἔστιν οὐ σθνίεμεν, πολλαχῇ δεδήλωται}, trans. Taylor, modified.
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{DK} 68 B9 = T D17: \textit{ἡμεῖς δὲ τῷ μὲν ἐόντι οὐδὲν ἄτρεκες συνίεμεν}, \textit{κατὰ τε τῶν ἑπεισιόντων καὶ τῶν ἀντιστηριζόντων}, trans. Taylor.
\end{itemize}
in the fragment citation we find the word *atrekes*, which in epic texts is semantically very close to *alēthes.*

If we take *alētheia* in *T D15* and *atrekēs* in *T D17* to refer to the same form of truth, this may support the thesis that for Democritus truth as *alētheia* is an object of knowledge, albeit difficult to attain, whereas *eteē* describes the condition under which such a truth may be obtained. In this sense, Democritus inherits the distinction between *alēthēs* and *etumos* from Greek epic literature, in which *alētheia* as a true verifiable account of facts can only happen if some god has not muddled with the *etumos*-ness of the situation. *Eteē* thus conditions and precedes *alētheia*: in reality (*eteēi*) everything is made of atoms, and it is in this truth that truth (*alētheia*) is difficult to reach.

Whereas there seems to be a certain semantic affinity between *eteē* and *alētheia*, they are differently contextualized. *Eteē* is beyond any sensory observation, whereas *alētheia* seems to be only removed or inaccessible because of its (potentially unbridgeable) epistemological distance. The distinction between the two words for truth set up in the ancient literary tradition of Homer and Hesiod therefore seems to continue well into Democritus’s philosophical considerations.

As to the question why Democritus felt the need to invent this new concept we have very little evidence. Taylor suggests that this invention should be positioned in the larger fifth- and fourth-century discussion on the distinction between *phusis* and *nomos*. Within this debate we will see that *eteē* is reduced to two other philosophical concepts, namely *phusis* and *alētheia*. There is one specific fragment in which *eteē* is contrasted with *nomos*: “By convention [nomōi] there is sweet, by convention [nomōi] sour, by convention [nomōi] hot and cold and color; in reality [*eteēi*] there are atoms and void.” Taylor argues that *eteē* would be reserved for the reality put forth in Demo-

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20. Cole, “Archaic Truth,” 13. “It is possible to know on the basis of one’s own information that a particular statement is *etymos*, or even that it is unerringly so [...] but to be in a position to judge the *atrekeia* or *alētheia* of anything more elaborate than a brief statement of present intention [...] implies prior possession of all the information being conveyed” (17).


critus’s atomic theory, whereas his usage of phusis in other fragments would be better aligned with more familiar philosophical positions from that period.

Democritus coins a new term for “truth” or “reality” to indicate that the truth about things, or (equivalently) the way things really are, is precisely specified by his own theory, as opposed to others. There is, then, a radical opposition between the real nature of things as described by that theory and the commonsense picture of the world given by perception and expressed by our ordinary ways of speaking.23

Taylor thus isolates Democritus from the textual evidence that seems to suggest that etēē as a concept is not a mere ideosyncratic invention but rather a continuation of a discourse on truth from the epic tradition that largely precedes the philosophical developments of the fifth and fourth centuries. Taylor excises Democritus’s epistemological thought from his larger body of work, thus conforming more to the model set by Plato. What in Democritus is called etēē is subsequently rendered phusis in Plato. This interpretative tradition is continued well into Latin texts, where Democritus’s concept of etēē is consistently translated in Latin by natura. For example, Cicero renders Democritus’s statement that “In reality [etēē] we know nothing; for the truth [alētheia] is in the depths” as “blame nature [naturam = etēē] for having hidden truth [veritatem = alētheia] quite away, in an abyss, as Democritus says.”24

At the same time, and along different philosophical trajectories, the core of Democritus’s work remains inaccessible to later authors of antiquity, who consistently misconstrue or ignore the difference between etēē and alētheia against the background of the nomos–phusis debate. For example, in his account of the Democritean philosophy written about five centuries later, Sextus Empiricus already conflates both when he explains in Against the Mathematicians that

In some places Democritus does away with the sensory appearances, and says that none of them appear in reality [kat’ alētheian], but only in opinion [kata doxan], and that what is real [alēthes] in things [en tois ousin]. For he says “By convention [nomoi] there is sweet, by convention sour, by convention hot and cold and color; in truth [etēē] there are atoms and void.” That is to say, the sensible qualities are conventionally considered [nomizetai] and thought to exist [doxazetai], but in reality [kat’ alētheian] they do not exist, but only atoms and

In Sextus’s paraphrase of Democritus’s maxim, we can readily observe the interpretation whereby “in reality” (eteēi) is rephrased as “according to truth” (kat’ alētheian) and even as what is “true in beings” (alēthes en tois ousin), whereas the Democritean “by convention” (nomōi) is read as “according to opinion” (kata doxan), a reading strengthened further by the conjunction “conventionally considered and thought to exist” (nomizetai [...] einai kai doxazetai).

Galen, in On the Elements According to Hippocrates, has the following explanation:

“For by convention [nomōi] colour, by convention sweet, by convention bitter, but in reality [eteēi] atoms and void” says Democritus, who thinks all the perceptible qualities are brought into being, relative to us [pros hēmas] who perceive them, by the combination of atoms, but by nature nothing is white or black or yellow or red or bitter or sweet. By the expression “by convention” [nomōi] he means “conventionally” [nomisti] and “relative to us” [pros hēmas], not according to the nature [phusin] of things themselves, which he calls by contrast “reality” [eteēi] forming the term from “real” [eteon] which means “true” [alēthes].

Galen compares Democritus’s nomōi with “according to us” (pros hēmas) and “conventionally” (nomisti), echoing Sextus’s “according to opinion” (kata doxan) and “conventionally considered” (nomizetai). Democritus’s concept of true reality (eteēi) is here further interpreted than “true in beings” (alēthes en tois ousin) but equated to “the nature of things” (kat’ autōn tōn pragmatōn tēn phusin), in anticipation of Cicero’s later Latin translation with natura. And finally, to conclude a semantic change we have been fol-

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26. Galen, On the Elements according to Hippocrates, 1.2 = DK 68 A49 = T 179d: 'νόμῳ γάρ χρωμῆ, νόμῳ γλυκῷ, νόμῳ πικρῷ, ἐτεῇ δ’ ἄτομα καὶ κενὸν’ ὁ Δ. φησιν ἐκ τῆς συνόδου τῶν ἄτομων γίγνεσθαι νομίζων ἀπάσας τὰς αἰσθήσεις ποιότητος ὡς πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς αἰσθανόμενους αὐτῶν, φύσει δ’ οὐδὲν εἶναι λευκὸν ἢ μέλαν ἢ ξανθόν ἢ ἐρυθρόν ἢ πικρόν ἢ γλυκόν τὸ γάρ δὴ 'νόμῳ ταύτῳ βούλεται τῷ οἷον νομιστί· καὶ 'πρὸς ἡμᾶς', οὐ κατ’ αὐτῶν τῶν παραγμάτων τὴν φύσιν, ὅπερ αὐτὸ πάλιν ἐτεῇ καλεῖ, παρὰ τὸ 'ἐτεόν', ὅπερ ἀληθές δηλοῖ. For both Sextus’s and Galen’s interpretations, see Taylor, “Nomos and Phusis in Democritus and Plato,” 2–3.
lowing through a variety of authors, eteē, Galen concludes, is formed from the adjective eteon, meaning “true” (alēthes).

So in the doxography of both Galen and Sextus Empiricus we are witness to a shift in vocabulary in which nomos moves into the direction of doxa and eteē toward alētheia. The latter shift occurs of course in parallel to the disappearance of etumos as an adjective in Greek literature and philosophy that we discussed in the previous example. Plato’s antipathy for Democritus has been the reason that eteē never entered “mainstream” philosophical discourse through the classical lineage Plato–Aristotle. As a concept developed by a rival philosopher, eteē was immediately discarded by Socrates, or at least by his pupil Plato, and fully replaced by alēthēia and phusis.

**Nietzsche Finds Democritus**
The material evidence is univocal on whose side later textual and philosophical traditions shared themselves. That at the same time Democritus is the only philosopher to pick up eteos/etumos/etētumos as the word for truth inherited from epic literature gives us an answer as to why alētheia proved by and large dominant as the philosophical word for truth from Plato onward. Being a watchword of a rival philosophical system, Plato had to eliminate it.

The same holds for Heidegger, whom one would expect to have encountered Democritus in his backward expansion beyond Platonic philosophy on the way to “Thinking.” Derrida already remarked that “Heidegger remains altogether silent regarding Democritus.”

27 He locates one passing reference in “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις” (1939), where Heidegger interprets a section from Aristotle’s Physics to refer implicitly to Democritus, and two references in “What Is a Thing?” (1935–36). First as a predecessor

27. Derrida, “My Chances / Mes Chances,” 353. The connections made between Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Freud in this essay merit a thorough analysis, which however is beyond the purview of this thesis; it would necessitate a close reading of the etymological function in psychoanalysis in a way that complicates and problematizes Sebastiano Timpanaro’s opposition between philology and psychoanalysis in The Freudian Slip.

28. Heidegger, “On the Essence and Concept of Φύσις in Aristotle’s Physics B, 1,” 205. A later addition to the text, marked by square brackets states that “From the viewpoint of the history of being, the basis of ‘materialism’ as a metaphysical stance becomes apparent here.” Unfortunately Heidegger never bothered to read Democritus directly, basing himself here only on Aristotle’s – Plato’s student – description.
to Galileo and the law of inertia, referring to Democritus’s “fundamental principles.”

This is followed later by “Democritus and Plato,” in one breath with the philosopher who wanted to annihilate his heritage, where Heidegger seems to take both philosophers together as expounding a metaphysics in which things are seen “according to their mere appearance, their shape, position, and extension.”

In stark contrast with Heidegger, whose non-arrival at Democritus parallels his ignorance of *etumos* as another Greek word for true, it appears that Friedrich Nietzsche begins his budding career as philologist-turned-philosopher (although his oeuvre motivates one to reject any real opposition between these two practices) with a long and intimate encounter with Democritus. The three main points mediating this encounter were his study of Friedrich Albert Lange’s *History of Materialism* in 1865; a lecture course in the winter semester of 1869–70 on the pre-Platonic philosophers, whose manuscript was reworked in the summer of 1872, but which was only translated and published in English in 2006; and finally the work *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* from 1873.

The influence of Friedrich Albert Lange, a now largely forgotten historian of materialist philosophy, on Nietzsche’s early formative years has often been understated and remains relatively unknown in the field of Nietzsche studies. And, again, within the literature dealing with the influence of the former on the latter, Lange’s treatment of Democritus is minimal. George Stack’s study *Lange and Nietzsche*, to date the broadest investigation of their relation, the Greek philosopher is only cited once in passing, notwithstanding the fact that the first chapter of Lange’s *History* is called “Early Atomists, especially Demokritos.”

As is very clear from the first sentence, Lange considers Democritus to be the apex of ancient materialist thought, who arrives “from the first hesitating and imperfect systems” at a “rigidly consistent and calmly reasoned Materialism.” Yet, “[w]ith few great men of antiquity can history have dealt so despitefully as with Demokritos. In the distorted picture of unscientific tradition, almost nothing appears of him except the name of the ‘laughing philosopher.’”

34. Lange, *History of Materialism*, 3 n. 1.
Although Lange’s treatment appears to rely on less source material than Nietzsche’s, and has the bent of a history of philosophy, it is his evaluation of Democritus as the founding father of materialism that returns with Nietzsche, albeit this time informed with the rigorous and intense approach to textual sources of a philologist, which allows him to evaluate the reception of Democritus in much more textual detail than Lange. Moreover, it appears that Nietzsche was interested, much more than Lange, in the relation between Democritus’s physics and ethics. According to Nina Power,

This is not to say that Nietzsche will discard the influence of Lange but rather that he will move beyond Lange’s Kantian agnosticism regarding what lies behind the objects of knowledge towards a philosophy of hypotheses, creativity and experimentation.36

In fact, Nietzsche will claim that his philologically driven reconstruction of Democritus’s thinking is itself a creative act. “I have constructed entirely afresh,”37 he claimed.

Like Nietzsche’s engagement with Lange, this early encounter with Democritus – and pre-Platonic philosophers in general – has received relatively little critical attention in the large corpus of Nietzsche studies. As James Porter expresses a few years before the publication of the lecture series, “The story of Nietzsche’s involvement with Democritus has been a matter of near total neglect. [...] These problems [sc. the inaccessibility of the relevant materials] notwithstanding, there has long been a mass of material ready to evaluate, and its neglect is astonishing.”38 Besides the lecture series translated by Greg Whitlock and Porter’s monograph, the critical situation remains rather poor. Jean-Luc Nancy refers to Democritus’s important position in Nietzsche’s oeuvre in a lecture from 1972.39 There is also a brief article by Nina Power, which relates Nietzsche’s early encounter with Democritus to the later development of the “will to power,”40 a book chapter by Jessica Berry on the influence of Democritean ethics on Nietzsche,41 and Paul Swift’s monograph Becoming Nietzsche: Early Reflections on Democritus, Schopenhauer and Kant.

38. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 25. In a no doubt ironic gesture, the frontispiece of Porter’s book contains a page from Nietzsche’s notebooks, starting with the following sentence: “Aristoxenus erzählt, daß Plato die Schriften des [unleserlich] habe verbrennen wollen.”
41. Berry, “Nietzsche and Democritus.”
Swift points out the importance of Democritus for Nietzsche’s own development from strictly trained philologist to philosopher. In his work, Nietzsche found “an intimate relationship between the system and the thinker” and “a poetic view of the world.” Swift also sees resemblances between Democritus’s “striking” aphorisms and Nietzsche’s own style, and between “the only philosopher from the ancient Western world who had a reputation for laughter,” and that which “Nietzsche’s Zarathustra proclaims as most holy.” And finally, as regards to ethics, “Democritus offers a type of ethics, but one that seeks no grounding in other worlds.” Porter’s evaluation of the importance of Democritus for Nietzsche also emphasizes its formative influence on his philosophical outlook:

It is through the unlikely marriage, in 1867, of materialism and a “skeptical” philology […], that Nietzsche discovered how both could be used as tools for critically interrogating the metaphysical tradition from Parmenides to Plato, Kant, Schopenhauer, and beyond. […] Reconstructing Democritus philosophically is a complex and critical act of negation and affirmation that allows Nietzsche to keep the moves of atomism afloat as a strategic counter to the metaphysical, silent reading of Democritus […]. Nietzsche’s skeptical philology and his rescue of Democritus from the philosophical tradition are of a piece.

Nietzsche, in his early writings, philosophically rehabilitates Democritus precisely in an attempt to formulate his anti-Platonism. A small note from 1869 about the organization of his lecture series on the pre-Platonic philosophers already succinctly indicates his attitude to both: “Democritus. One who has universal knowledge. […] Plato. Universal aggression.” This hostility toward Plato must certainly have been further triggered by Diogenes Laertius’s relation of Plato’s hatred for Democritus’s works. Even though this anti-Platonism is already apparent in these early writings, it is usually relegated to his later period when he calls Plato, in “What I Owe to the Ancients,” a “proleptically Christian.” Ironically, the erasure of Democritus in the entire post-Platonic metaphysical tradition has even obfuscated, at least until recently, the origins of Nietzsche’s animosity. An erasure of the erasure, which I therefore would like to quote extensively:

42. Swift, Becoming Nietzsche, 23.
43. Swift, Becoming Nietzsche, 23.
44. Swift, Becoming Nietzsche, 23.
45. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 22.
46. Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers, xxiv.
47. Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols, in The Anti-Christ and Other Writings, 225: “In the end, I have a deep mistrust of Plato: I find him so much at odds with the basic Hellenic instincts, so moralistic, so proleptically Christian[.]”
Bad things have happened to the writings of Democritus: although they would be characterized as full of insightful judgments, as stylistic beauties, as model writings in a philosophic presentation, they would be nonetheless destroyed because in later centuries their justification would be felt as more and more strange, and especially by Christianity as it discarded the grounds for comprehending Democritus, as Aristotle had taken exception to his rejection of teleology. All but the hardest fate had already caught up to them a half century after the death of their composer: and this is truly the reason that the Christian scholars and monastic transcribers forced their hands from Democritus, to remove him as if he were possessed, a plan which Plato had kindled, to throw the collected writings of Democritus in the fire.

[...]

We are still very much guilty of the death sacrifice of Democritus, and only to some extent have we made good on the indebtedness to him by the past. In reality there was scarcely a more meaningful writer this diverse who had to suffer attacks whose origins sprang up from the most different motives. Theologians and metaphysicians had heaped their deeply rooted resentment (Groll) against materialism; the divine Plato held that his writings were so dangerous that he thought they should be annihilated in a private autodafe and only through reflection would he be dissuaded, that it would already have been too late, since the poison itself would already have been disseminated too far. Later the obscurantists of antiquity would avenge themselves upon him, while smuggling their magical and alchemist writers into the establishment, and by doing so left fallow the father of all enlightenment and rational tendencies in the call for a great wise man. The setting in of Christianity finally achieved its follow through on the energetic plan of Plato: and certainly the anti-cosmological writings of the ancient Democritus [...] appeared as the reincarnation of heathenism. In our time, it finally remains that we also continue to deny the philosophic greatness of this man and he is recognized as a sophist. These attacks on Democritus are all set into motion from a basis which we can follow no further. On the contrary, we have an attack to meet them.48

One can see in this ardent defense of his hero very clearly the prefiguration of many tropes appearing in Nietzsche's work in the late 1880s, before his so-called “collapse” and “mental illness,” which again should remind us that the continuity between the philologist and the philosopher Nietzsche is not negligible, and suggests, perhaps, that a more productive, albeit tentative, relation between the two can in fact be established based on the work of Democritus and Nietzsche.

In the 1872 manuscript of the 1869–70 lecture course on pre-Platonic philosophers, Nietzsche devotes a chapter to the atomists Leucippus and Democritus, spending very little time with the former and again lamenting the absence of comprehensive sources

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concerning the latter: “We very much encourage updated collection of the fragments.”49 In a way that seems to be much more on par with the lecturing tone he has adopted with his treatment of the other pre-Platonic philosophers, and at striking odds with his emotional defense in his private writings, he qualifies Democritus as the first Greek philosopher to overcome the mythical, poetic worldview of previous philosophers: “Democritus was the first to strictly exclude the mythical”50:

Of all the more ancient systems, the Democritean is of the greatest consequence. The most rigorous necessity is presupposed in all things: there are no sudden or strange violations of nature’s course. Now for the first time the collective, anthropomorphic, mythic view of the world has been overcome. Now for the first time do we have a rigorous, scientifically useful hypothesis.51

According to Nietzsche, this worldview reappears in the distinction between primary and secondary qualities in John Locke,52 and forms the basis of materialism, as Nietzsche had previously encountered in Lange’s work.53 From Democritus’s actual writings, he only cites fragment B9 we have already discussed above, in the form as conveyed by Sextus Empiricus in Adversus Mathematicos54:

Democritus holds fast to what Parmenides said, that Being (ὄν) must be absolutely of the same sort at every point.[…] Only our senses show us qualitatively determinant differences: “By convention sweet […] by convention bitter, by convention hot, by convention cold, by convention colour; but in reality atoms and the void. … None of these appears according to truth but only according to opinion: the truth in real things is that there are atoms and void.”55

Nietzsche fails to comment explicitly on the peculiar occurrence of the word etēē at this point, to which his philological sensibilities should have alerted him. However, he

49. Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 123. His call was heeded by Diels & Kranz.
52. Cf. Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 125.
54. Note that the collection of pre-Socratic fragments prepared by Diels and Kranz was only published in 1903. Whitlock erroneously speaks of “his [sc. Nietzsche’s] own paraphrase in Greek or a severe corruption of the original.” Curiously, the “proper word” order he cites as a correction derives from the section in Adversus Mathematicos, substituting the sentence after the Democritus citation quoted by Nietzsche with the sentence preceding it (Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 124, n. 24).
implicitly makes the connection between Parmenides’ Being or beings (onta) and  
eteē:  
“All qualities are conventions (νόμῳ); the ὄντα differ only qualitatively.”56 Following the  
opposition between nomōi and eteēi in Democritus, we must thus equate “beings” with  
what exists “in reality.” And then, surprisingly, we find Nietzsche bringing up the “ex-  
ample of the letters” that we previously found in Plato’s Theaetetus and Statesman (see  
Introduction). As he continues,

Thus all qualities should be reduced to quantitative differentials. They differen-  
tiate themselves solely through shape (ῥυσμος, σχῆμα), arrangement  
(διαθιγή, τάξις), and position (τροπή, θέσις): we distinguish A from N by shape,  
AN from NA by arrangement, and Z from N by position.57

Suddenly, we transported back to a Platonic discourse where atoms and letters (stoikhe-  
ia) coincide, and – here Nietzsche makes his important contribution – brought forward  
in the context of Democritean eteē. But as Porter points out,  

the analogy to letters [...] already suggest[s] a minimum quantum of sensibil-  
ity, as if in anticipation of a future impingement on our sensation of the more  
familiar “secondary” qualities: the features of atoms represent a minimum of  
projected sensation onto the assumedly nonphenomenal conditions of sens-  
ing.58

Thus the example of the letters, like any example, will turn out to be paradoxical, i.e.,  
to violate the reason of either deduction or induction, of homonymy or synonymy. It is  
what Nietzsche calls a “prōton pseudos, or false premise,” a “fictional foundation” of all  
atomism.59 Thus, as false premise, paradigm of distinguishing letters, their shapes, arran-  
gements, and positions, is what is exemplary for the underlying truth of the qualities  
that our senses apprehend. It is a materialism that in the end turns out to be a let-  
trism, or a materialism that in spite of its false premise remains true for us60:

[M]aterialism is a worthwhile hypothesis of relativity in truth; accordingly,  
“all is false [prōton pseudon]” has been discovered to be an illuminating notion

57. Nietzsche, The Pre-Platonic Philosophers, 124.  
58. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 88–89.  
59. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 89.  
60. Perhaps the example of atom–letters came to Nietzsche by way of Lange. Accord-  
ing to Stack, “Lange notes that the letters ’EUROPA’ might be formed if they were  
blindly or randomly drawn from a box of printer’s type” (Lange and Nietzsche,  
36–37).
for natural science. We still consider, then, all is results to be truth for us, albeit not absolute. It is precisely our world, in whose production we are constantly engaged.\textsuperscript{61}

Democritean Ethics and Jan Patočka

Following Lange, Democritus’s argument about the unknowability of reality allows Nietzsche to liberate philosophy from its end to arrive at truth—\textit{alētheia}, and thus to open the question about the service of philosophy to life itself.\textsuperscript{62} As we will see in Example 5, this is a core question for the later work of Michel Foucault on the relation between the philosophical life and the “aesthetics of existence,” which itself appears to be a reflection of his early forages into the work of Nietzsche.\textsuperscript{63} And, as with Nietzsche, we will find that this question is tied up with the question of the \textit{etumos}, or \textit{eteē}, namely that which maybe not teleologically, transcendentally, or metaphysically true, but is nonetheless true for us.

The decoupling of, or, in fact, non-correlation between \textit{alētheia}—truth and ethics on the one hand and metaphysics on the other that is advocated by Democritus under the conceptual reign of \textit{eteē} is for Nietzsche the core of his materialist enterprise. We should therefore go further than Power, who suggests that Nietzsche intends “the ethical dimension within the [sc. Democritus’s] physics,” which would merely lead to “intellectual honesty.”\textsuperscript{64} As Jessica Berry claims, “Democritus’s place” is established “at the head of a robust tradition of ancient ethical thought,”\textsuperscript{65} and we thus have to take Nietzsche at his word when he says that “Die ethischen Schriften also zeigen, wie in der ethischen Seite der Kern sein<er> Philosophie liegt.”\textsuperscript{66} Besides providing the basis of atomism and modern scientific thought, and thus a certain measure of “intellectual honesty,” the liberating effect on Nietzsche of being freed from any teleology thus also extends to his ethics.

In two articles from 1945 and 1946, one of the few treatments of Democritus in the twentieth century, Gregory Vlastos, who like Nietzsche was intent on prying the teach-

\textsuperscript{61} Nietzsche, \textit{The Pre-Platonic Philosophers}, 130. Interpolation of Greek following Porter’s translation in \textit{Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future}, 111–12.

\textsuperscript{62} Swift, \textit{Becoming Nietzsche}, 9.

\textsuperscript{63} Cf. Agamben, \textit{The Use of Bodies}, 100.

\textsuperscript{64} Power, “On the Nature of Things,” 125.

\textsuperscript{65} Berry, “Nietzsche and Democritus,” 101.

er Socrates apart from his pupil Plato,\textsuperscript{67} discusses the ethics and physics of Democritus, and, more precisely, the relation between them.\textsuperscript{68} He does so through several lemmata, elaborating Democritus’s extant fragments dealing with ethics. Vlastos is at pains to distinguish Democritean ethics from later thinkers: “The contrast with Socrates and Plato remains unbridgeable.”\textsuperscript{69} And similarly he warns against interpreting him in the vein of later Hellenistic thinkers – to whom we very often owe the transmission of his fragments. Rather, Vlastos attempts to construct an internal coherence between the fragments,\textsuperscript{70} which is something also done more than half a century earlier by Nietzsche, albeit most certainly unbeknownst to the former.

In his discussion of the “pleasant and the good,” Vlastos wonders how a physiologos such as Democritus could think of the good of the soul in terms of pleasure. Based on a reading of contemporary tragic poets he first remarks that there is nothing novel or uncommon about considering the quality of life in these terms, and the parallels between epistemology, physics, and ethics holds firmly: “[P]leasure is the sign, the appearance of ‘what agrees with us.’ The parallel in the theory of knowledge is ‘appearances are the sight of things unseen.’ The object as atomic pattern which constitutes well-being is ‘unseen’ in itself; pleasure is the ‘appearance’ which shows it up.”\textsuperscript{71}

That Vlastos’s interpretation of fragment B69 thus agrees with Nietzsche’s close and personal engagement with both the ethical and physical system of Democritus. His atomism precisely liberates ethics from its metaphysical “superstitions.”

We can now make good sense of the crucial fragment B. 69, “The good and the true are the same for all men; the pleasant differs for different people” (ἄλλῳ ἄλλο), and integrate Democritean ethics and epistemology: (i) “The pleasant” in B. 69 corresponds to “sweet, bitter” etc. in B. 9 […]. In both cases we have “appearances,” i.e. felt qualities which vary from one percipient to another, because in each instance they depend on the percipient’s bodily condition and reflect its peculiarities. (ii) “The good and the true” in B. 69 correspond to “being” ([τὰ] ἐτεῆ [δūνα]) in B. 9 etc. “Being” is obviously the atoms and the void, and “the good” cheerfulness and well-being. Paired with “the true” in opposition to “the pleasant” in B. 69 “the good” can, therefore, only refer to atomic “being” itself.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{67} See Vlastos, The Philosophy of Socrates.
\textsuperscript{68} Vlastos, “Ethics and Physics in Democritus,” 1945 & 1946.
\textsuperscript{69} Vlastos, “Ethics and Physics in Democritus,” 1945, 582.
\textsuperscript{70} Berry, who follows and elaborates on Vlastos, mainly follows the same line.
\textsuperscript{71} Vlastos, “Ethics and Physics in Democritus,” 1945, 589.
\textsuperscript{72} Vlastos, “Ethics and Physics in Democritus,” 1945, 589–90.
Vlastos here explicitly supplements *eteē* “in reality” with *onta* “beings,” as referring to “atomic ‘being’ itself,” which is continuously subtracted from our immediate sense perception, of which we can apprehend only “appearances,” or Locke’s “secondary qualities,” such as “pleasure.” He thus confirms Nietzsche’s claim that Democritus’s ethics and physics cannot be thought apart. This then allows for Nietzsche’s claim that his ethics is of the highest importance; for it allows the contemplation of a philosophical life for us. Another result of this radical decoupling performed by Democritus is that human life becomes dependent on itself, and is, in fact, self-fashioning and self-transforming. Human discoveries such as speech and techniques learned from experience are not “external arrangements but his very life (βίος).”

Jan Patočka takes up Democritus’s ethics in his lecture series *Plato and Europe,* which explicitly departs from pre-Socratic origins. The main topic of the lectures are the “care of the soul,” which Foucault explicitly commented upon in his last lecture series at the Collège de France, *The Courage of Truth,* to which we shall return in Example 5:

*[Plato and Europe]* is a very interesting text because it is, I believe, the only one, among modern books of the history of philosophy at any rate, to give a very important place to the notion of *epimeleia,* of care, in Plato. He sees Western metaphysics, and consequently the destiny of European rationality, as being rooted in this notion of care.

Although Foucault admits that his emphasis is on the “care of the self,” rather than on the “care of the soul,” Patočka’s definition of the latter is very close to the way that Foucault discusses the self in relation to *parrhēsia.* Instead of a simple reflex of the metaphysical body–soul dualism, for Patočka the soul is defined, following its “Greek origins,” as “what is capable of truth within man.” And it is this truth that we should read in the lineage of *eteē,* and not *alētheia* – an immanent truth, and not a transcendent one.

Not unlike Nietzsche, Patočka’s search for the Greek origins of philosophy starts before Plato and Aristotle, and aims to show “the basic mythical framework” that fa-

74. Foucault, *The Courage of Truth,* 127. For a more in-depth reading of the similarities between Patočka and Foucault regarding *epimeleia,* see Szakolczai, “Thinking Beyond the East–West Divide”; Forti, “Parrhesia between East and West.”
75. For further comparison between the work of Foucault and Patočka, see Szakolczai, “Thinking Beyond the East–West Divide: Foucault, Patočka, and the Care of the Self”; Simona Forti, “Parrhesia between East and West: Foucault and Dissidence.”
77. Cf. Derrida’s observation that Patočka’s “genealogist tendencies seem at times more Nietzschean than Husserlian or Heideggerian. Moreover, Patočka cites
cilitated the emergence of Western philosophy.\textsuperscript{78} He then makes a stunning claim that brings us back to the shift from \textit{muthos} to \textit{logos} and from \textit{etumos} to \textit{alēthēs} as discussed in Example \textsuperscript{179}: “[A] human being cannot live without myth, because \textit{myth is truth}. Real myth is truthful. And as long as a human being lives in truth […] then that first, radical, and still-\textit{unreflected manifestation} expresses itself \textit{in the form of myth}.” And later, “we still live in myth just because we live in the \textit{natural world}, in a world that manifests itself to us.”\textsuperscript{80}

The Democritean overtones of this passage cannot be missed. We live in myth insofar as it is an expression of the first “\textit{still-unreflected manifestation}” of the world, a manifestation of \textit{eteē}, in which we cannot but live. Thus the remarkable statement, “\textit{myth is truth}.” Again, Patočka does not address a transcendental truth outside the philosopher’s cave – it is the truth of the cave as such: “Metaphorically speaking, we are not concerned with the Platonic ascent from the cave, but to the contrary, with that second Platonic act – the \textit{return back down into the cave}.”\textsuperscript{81}

The passage that explicitly deals with Democritean philosophy reworks this point. Citing several fragments that all revolve around the concept of \textit{eteē} (B6, B7, and B10), Patočka first emphasizes the fact that “man got himself into the world of truth really by losing his way.”\textsuperscript{82} However,

\begin{quote}
\textit{The most ingenious move in Democritus’s thinking lies in this: just as Heraclitus says, most people, the normal human being is (ἐτεῆς ἀπήλλακται [separated from reality]), but the philosopher can carry out such a deep cut, which will convert all of reality from the motion of manifesting into constant manifestedness, which consists in that, that we penetrate beyond the region of what is visible in the ordinary sense of the word.}\textsuperscript{83}
\end{quote}

Patočka appears to recast the philosopher here as the figure that reaches for \textit{eteē}, or, in fact, seems to claim that this is his purpose. This can be accomplished, then, precisely through the care of the soul, to care for that which is “\textit{capable of truth within man}.” But we should go one step further than Patočka and acknowledge that this truth the soul

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{78. Patočka, \textit{Plato and Europe}, 42.}
\footnotetext{79. See also Iribarren, “Du muthos au logos.”}
\footnotetext{80. Patočka, \textit{Plato and Europe}, 43. Emphases in the original.}
\footnotetext{81. Patočka, \textit{Plato and Europe}, 41. Emphasis in the original.}
\footnotetext{82. Patočka, \textit{Plato and Europe}, 66–67.}
\footnotetext{83. Patočka, \textit{Plato and Europe}, 67.}
\end{footnotes}
етсяе

seeks out is not “τὴν ἀλήθειαν (the truth)” or “unconcealment,” which surreptitiously folds back a certain Platonic or Heideggerian into Democritus. This truth the soul seeks is precisely etеē itself.

In another text, Patočka refers to a “metaphysical duality”: a Platonic metaphysics “from above, a metaphysics of the logos and the Idea,” and a Democritean metaphysics “from below […] a metaphysics of things in their sheer thinghood.” We may perhaps rephrase this into a metaphysics of alētheia and a “metaphysics” of etеē, respectively. To cite, in the latter case, the word with quotation marks signals the fact that the term metaphysics itself, including tropes such as “materialism,” has always been formulated explicitly in the context of truth as alētheia. The simple dichotomy proposed by Patočka, in spite of its clarity and acknowledgment of the profound influence of Democritus on the history of Western philosophy, obscures his repression within metaphysics that we have ventured to unearth.

Democritean Philology

Nietzsche’s encounter with Democritus and his subsequent, slow re-emergence in philosophical discourse are only one part of the story. For his confrontation with Democritus’s antiteleological thinking also has a profound influence on Nietzsche’s philological work, described by Porter as a moment of “conversion.” Namely, this encounter is precisely the point at which philology – whose development we will trace in the next chapter – and philosophy converge. As Nietzsche stated in his speech “Homer and Classical Philology” from 1869, “philosophia facta est quae philologia fuit [What was once philology has now been made into philosophy].”

This turn from philology to philosophy, or, rather, the absorption of Nietzsche’s early philological studies, especially of Democritus, into his philosophical work has been admirably teased out in Porter’s monograph Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, which describes the trajectory of Nietzsche’s initial skeptical engagements with Democritus’s lapidary inheritance up to the moment where his extreme skepticism and doubt turn upon themselves, and, through a Hegelian “negation of the negation,” phi-

84. Patočka, Plato and Europe, 68.
86. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 32.
87. Cited in Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 35. See also Wismann, “Nietzsche et la philologie.”
Philology is refounded: “Philological certainty rests on the quicksands of doubt; nothing is certain unless we make it so.”

Thus Democritus’s own skepticism and antiteleological stance is paired with Nietzsche’s skepticism of Democritus’s “extant” fragments. The “separation from reality” from Democritus’s fragments has now become the hallmark of Nietzsche’s philological work and his philological inquiry into Democritus’s philosophy has turned into the philosophical work of grappling with Democritean philology. According to Porter,

In the case of Democritus, the convergence is all the more intense, and the analogies penetrate down and up the grand edifice of philological understanding. Here, the texts are themselves about the constitution of matter, and philological method must reach beyond philology in order to confront the problems of natural science knowledgeably. Convergence becomes reflection, and as a consequence Nietzsche’s philology begins to emulate Democritean physiology itself.

The atomistic view and analysis of language that is the result of this convergence, expedited by a Democritean philology that parallels its physics, immediately appears to imply a critique of language, as it “dissolve[s] into a welter of meaningless elements.” Words literally become atoms, and the *rhusmos*, the shape of the words becomes the rhythm of the lines sung in lyrical poetry: “Rhythm colors thoughts, permits a certain selection of words, *groups together the atoms of the sentence*.” Nietzsche here explicitly recalls the Greek analogy between letters and elements, *stoikheia*, which we have encountered already several times before.

For Nietzsche, Democritus himself is a figure of “total transformation,” of an *Umwertung aller Werte*, a point of overdetermination where philology and philosophy collide and produce a short-circuit that keeps on recursively producing ever new feedback loops. Porter speaks of the “overwhelming symmetries [...] the principles of atomism, the forms of their transmission, and the philology that must embrace both of these aspects,” a “dazzling traffic jam,” and a “skein [...] too tangled to be completely unraveled.”

Owing to his radical expulsion from the history of philosophy, Democritus’s atomistic world view finds a shelter in philology, which Nietzsche at the same time attempts to

rewrite along materialistic–atomistic lines. The gesture of recuperating and problematizing Democritus is the same as recuperating and problematizing the gesture of philology itself, in which the illegibility with which philology constantly wrestles is compounded by philosophy’s illegibility and erasure of the very oeuvre that is supposed to transform these modes of (mis)reading and (mis)analysis, being “the bane and scourge of some of the most successful forms of philosophy in the West.”

The collision of physics and philology is put in more contemporary terms by Sean Braune, departing from a late reflex of Nietzsche’s obsession with Democritus’s atomism: “The concept ‘atom,’ the distinction between the ‘seat of a driving force and the force itself,’ is a sign language derived from our logical-physical world.” Although starting from a rather late entrypoint into atomism, Lucretius’s De rerum natura, which follows the lineage from Democritus to Epicurus, Braune refers to the relation between atomism and what James Joyce referred to as the “abnihilisation of etym” in Finnegans Wake:

The abnihilisation of the etym by the grisning of the grosning of the grinder of the grunder of the first lord of Hurtreford explodotonates through Parsuralia with an ivanmorinthorrorrumble fragoromboassity amidwiches general uttermosts confusion are perceivable moletons skaping with mulicules while coventry plumpkins fairlygosmotherthemselves in the Landaunelegant of Pinkadindy. Similar scenatas are projectilised from Hullulullu, Bawlawayo, empyreal Raum and mordern Atems. They were precisely the twelves of clocks, noon minutes, none seconds. At someseat of Oldanelang’s Kougerrig, by dawnybreak in Aira.

Braune’s brief reading of this paragraph signals the fact that Finnegans Wake itself is characterized by a constant collision of etymologies, of different etyms bouncing into each other and creating completely new forms of language. In the analysis of Donald and Joan Theall, this citation from Finnegans Wake can be read as follows:

“[T]he abnihilisation of the etym” [is] a phrase which weaves together references to war, to the destructive transformation of the natural world and to the transmutation of language, and more particularly of writing, in our supermechanized world. The etym, Joyce’s imaginary unit for the true source of a word in historic terms, and the atom, as the basic unit of matter until 1931.

96. Joyce, Finnegans Wake, 353.
when the possibility of atom smashing arose, are based on a conception of assemblages of different bits.97

At the same time, the “abnihilisation of the etym,” appears to me a clear reference to Democritus himself, who clearly posited atoms and the void (nihil) as the two building blocks of the universe, and Joyce’s call for the atom’s “abnihilisation” – as opposed to its annihilation – may be read as a recuperative move aimed to “abnihilate” the figure of Democritus and his atomism itself.

In a way, what Braune calls terms the “etymic approach” toward the “overdetermination” of Finnegans Wake can be neatly paralleled with Democritus’s atomic approach toward the seemingly overdetermined causal relations within our universe. In the same way that etymic theory backgrounds meaning, atomic theory backgrounds teleology. According to Braune, “The ‘etym’ is the ‘imaginary unit for the true source of a word in historic terms,’ but it can also be a letter, or the letter itself.”98 This definition resonates with the relation between letters and atoms that we have pointed at at several points in our text. The science of the collision between etyms can be thus termed etymology.

Ironically, philosophy’s hostility to Democritus has been equalled by its enmity toward etymology. As we will set out to discuss in the next example, the status of Democritus, whose eteē was never fully digested by philosophy, is very similar to the way in which etymology has been first ridiculed and then relegated to, again, the field of philology, where it transformed into the enterprise of comparative linguistics, reshaping philological practices from the inside out. For Nietzsche, Democritus was always a “counter-Democritus […], a Democritus who is never merely invented as a fiction but a resistant figure who can only be written against,” representing “the falsehood of all […] origins.”99 In spite of claims to the contrary, etymology works in the same way against the origins of language, always displacing such origins to an ever earlier state of language until language itself appears to dissolve into atoms, or, in fact, etyms.

The philosophical rejection of etymology, and the many ways in which it has attempted to subdue its power over rhetorical structures and modes of argument – even inside those oeuvres that have been most often accused of “etymologizing,” such as Heidegger’s and Derrida’s – will thus appear to parallel the philosophical reduction of Democritus to a “cipher.”100 If Democritus is a “figure for the failure of Western phi-

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100. Porter, Nietzsche and the Philology of the Future, 113.
losophy to originate itself,”¹⁰¹ then etymology must signify the concomitant failure of language to originate itself. That etetē can thus only be recuperated for etymology and a recuperation of etymology through an etymological gesture must therefore be added to Porter's “dazzling traffic jam,” with a disentanglement that will always already be to come.

Spartan Etymology and the “Penetrating Principle”

Perhaps, etymology, the science of true names, begins with the destruction of Troy. Its mythical origins are recounted by Aeschylus, who provides us with the following definition in the strophe α’ of the second stasimon in the Agamemnon, delivered after the herald brings Clytaemestra the news of the safe return of the Argive host:

Who can have given a name [ōnomazen] so altogether true [etētumōs] – 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 [Helenan]? For, true to her name, a Hell she proved to ships [helenaus], Hell to men [helandros], Hell to city [heleptolis]1.

As we may recall from our first example, the oeuvre of Aeschylus stands at the border between the wide-spread usage of etumos in epic literature, and its complete obliteration in the philosophical and sophistical texts of classical Athens. That this citation comes from a choral passage is an indication of its antiquity, as a deliberate archaism or perhaps as the witness to a common “folk etymology.” But the fact that Helen is from Sparta, and therefore supposedly a native speaker of Doric Greek, amplifies the dramatic tone of this choral passage, which is, according to tragedic tradition, written in the Doric dialect. Her name is therefore especially “true” because the dialect in which the passage is written matches her native tongue, and the enemy of Athens (Sparta) becomes a mirror of the enemy of Greece (Troy).

Additional evidence that Aeschylus was not just punning comes from antistrophe α’, the immediate response sung by the chorus to the opening of the second stasimon:

To Ilion, its purpose fulfilling, Wrath brought a marriage [kēdos] rightly named [orthōnumon] a mourning [kēdos]2.

1. Aesch. Ag. 681–90, trans. Smyth. See also above, 60.
When in strophe α' speaks of “true naming [ἐνομαζέν ... ἐτεῦμος]” of Helen, antistrophe α' responds with the “rightly named [ὁρθὸνυμόν]” κῆδος, which has the double, and seemingly opposite meanings of “mourning” and “marriage.” Aeschylus is thus here concerned with finding an explanation – the truth, if you will – for the destruction of Troy in the incidents that immediately preceded it, the arrival of Helen in Troy and her marriage with Paris, its prince.

Troy thus becomes the site where etymology first enacts itself. Bypassing Athens completely, it arrives from Sparta in Troy, only to return to Argos in an utterly unintelligible form. Cassandra, who accompanies the entrance of Agamemnon on stage at the end of the second stasimon is a seer endowed with a prophetic voice that unfortunately no one can understand. As Clytaemnestra mockingly states, she speaks “some unintelligible barbarian language, like the swallows do.” Thus, the figure of etymology, born from true and correct names with double meanings, already arrives in classical Greece mangled and incomprehensible, on or perhaps beyond the edge of understandable language.

Following this tragic homecoming, very little of the word etumos, or its relatives, has survived in the Platonic corpus. This is related, as we have shown above, to the fundamental importance of ἐτεῖ in the thinking of Democritus, in tandem with a more general decline in the usage of the word. Nevertheless, it appears at a few points, among others twice in the Phaedrus. In both cases, etumos is deployed in combination with logos, and, moreover, within the context of a citation. Socrates himself at no point endorses etumos or speculates on it.

First on Stephanus page 244a, where we at the same time find a first connection – perhaps introduced by Plato to discredit this Democritean concept – with madness, which will appear more often in the Cratylus, where Socrates quotes the following lines from Stesichorus, son of Euphemus of Himera: “And I must say that this saying is not true [οὐκ ἔστι ετυμός λόγος], which teaches that when a lover is at hand the non-lover should be more favored, because the lover is insane, and the other sane.” And later on, Socrates quotes an unknown Spartan, who would have claimed that “a real [ἐτυμος] art of speaking, [...] which does not seize hold of truth [ἀλήθειας], does not exist and nev-

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er will.” Note again, that like Helen, both Stesichorus and the unknown Spartan are speakers of the Doric dialect, i.e., are foreign to the Ionian of classical Athens.

We will encounter these two citations in and from the *Phaedrus* in more detail in Example 5, but suffice it to say that when *etumos logos* appears in the Platonic corpus, it is neither as an integral part of the discourse, but always as citation, and that even when cited, it is always in order to delegitimize it – either through aligning it with madness, or simply by pointing out its inexistence.

However, in his lengthy commentary on the *Cratylus*, Francesco Ademollo convincingly shows that Democritus is not entirely absent from the Plato’s work, although again, as always, never mentioned in person. It concerns a lengthy etymological and “difficult” explanation of the word *dikaion* (just), which stands out not only for its complexity but also for Hermogenes’ incredulous response to it: “It appears to me, Socrates, that you have heard these things from someone and didn’t come up with them yourself.”

Socrates’ explanation is as follows:

Those who believe that all there is [to pan einai] is in the act of travelling [poreiai] think that most of it is such as to do nothing else than moving [khorein], but that there is something passing through all this [dia de toutou pantos einai ti dieixon], through whose action all that comes to be comes to be [di’ hou panta ta gignomena gignesthai]. This second component, they think, is very quick [takhiston] and fine [leptotaton]. For otherwise it could not go through all there is, if it were not very fine, so that nothing was impervious to it [hoste auto meden stegein], and very quick, so as to treat the other things as if they were standing still. And so, since it governs all the other things by going through them [epitropoei ta alla panta diaion], it was correctly called by this name, dikaion, acquiring the power of kappa for the sake of euphony.

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6. Ademollo, *The Cratylus of Plato*, 215–23. See also Ademollo’s article regarding the appearance of Democritus in Proclus’s commentary on the *Cratylus*, where it appears that Democritus himself was a conventionalist. See Ademollo, “Democritus B26, on Names.”
Thus *dikaion* derives from *dia-ion* “passing through.” That which passes through (*diex-ion*) is is very quick (*takhiston*) and fine (*leptotaton*) and goes through everything there is, which itself is in constant movement and flux (*khōrein*). We find here a clear relation with the discussion of *khōra* in the *Timaeus*, where it is introduced under dreamlike circumstances. Recall that in the *Statesman*, paradigms or examples – those non-deductions and non-inductions that are the eminent way thorough which etymology progresses – are presented “as if a dream.”9 And the *Timaeus* presents us *khōra* as “the very thing we look to when we dream.”10 Thus examples and *khōra* find each other in the dream space – a space in which *etumos* wins over *alēthēs*, as we know from Hesiod.11

Moreover, the relation with *khōra* here is important, as this “receptacle” is also a clear (yet again unacknowledged) reflex of atomistic space, or, the “void.”12 This is what Ademollo, not without a sense of humor as we will see, calls the “Penetrating Principle,” “the generic outline” of which “fits none better than Democritus, whom Socrates does not mention at all.”13

Further evidence from the *Cratylus* brought forth by Ademollo suggests that in fact “Spartan” itself may be a metonymic displacement for Democritus – something that would resonate with the fact that the only appearances of *etumos* in Plato’s oeuvre appear to coincide with something “Spartan.”14 The etymology in question is, rather ironically, that of *sophia* (wisdom).

Certainly wisdom [*sophia*] signifies the touching of movement [*phoras ephapisthai*]. It is very obscure and very foreign [*xenikōteron*]; but we must recall from the poets that in many places they say, of whatever of the things beginning to advance quickly, “it rushed” [*esuthē*]. And the name of a Laconian among the highly reputed ones was precisely “Sous”: for this is how Lacedaemonians call the quick dash. Therefore *sophia* signifies touching of this movement [*tēs phoras epaphēn*], on the assumption that the beings are in movement.15

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12. See Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 159, and chapter 5 below.
14. It indeed appears that part of the opposition *alethes–etumon* at some point may have been dialectal in nature, with *etumon* surviving longer in the Doric dialect than in Attic (Levet, *Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque*, 35–37).
The etymology of wisdom thus seems to rely on the touching of constantly quickly moving, in fact, being rushing in quick dashes (sous). Ademollo is suspicious of the explanation that sous is a Laconian (Spartan) word for “quick dash,” and points out that it is rather a “technical term in Democritus’ physics.”16 Thus Plato created “a sort of comical smokescreen with his reference to the historical Σοῦς and to a fictitious Laconic term.”17

**Etymological Anxiety**

In spite of this atomistic cameo, the distrust of Plato for the etumos logos, as an element foreign to his Attic philosophy, and moreover a reminder of his philosophical enemy Democritus, is perhaps most significantly displayed in the one dialogue that philosophical tradition has taken to deal explicitly with etymology, namely the Cratylus.

It is our aim to determine what is philosophically at stake in this dialogue, as it also forms a blueprint of philosophy’s often problematic relation with etymological thought, and, by extension, etumos as truth. That etymology as such remains undefined, and that the dialogue merely suggests an investigation into the “correctness of names” (orthotēs onomatōn),18 also urges the important question at which moment, and under which conditions, the Cratylus became ex post interpreted as the first extensive treatise on etymology as well as on the troubled relation between etymology and philosophy.19 The text, after all, was written by a philosopher.

The Cratylus is one of the most problematic texts in the Platonic corpus, a “curious dialogue,” cloaked in “a certain atmosphere of mystery,”20 not because its provenance cannot be ascertained or because its authorship is disputed, but owing to doubts about its very aim. Harold N. Fowler, the translator and editor for the Loeb edition, for example, claims that the “Cratylus cannot be said of great importance in the development of the Platonic system, as it treats of a special subject somewhat apart from general philosophic theory.”21 This “special subject” would be the origin of language, and indeed

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19. For an attempt to trace the survival of etumos in the specific sense of etymology, see Quincey, “Etymologica.” According to Levet, the first attestation of etumos in the sense of the true meaning of a word (so not just a proper name) is to be found in Pseudo-Aristotle’s *De Mundo* (Le vrai et le faux dans la pensée grecque archaïque, 2, n. 10).
it seems that within the scholarly community there is a tendency to relate Socrates’ fundamental question of the correctness of names to the search for this origin.

Other scholars focus mainly on the conceptual, or even logical, tools that are suggested in the Cratylus: “The real purpose of the dialogue, so far as it has any purpose beyond the preservation of a picture of Socrates in one of his more whimsical moods, is to consider not the origin of language, but its use and functions.”\(^\text{22}\) Again other scholars have questioned the assessment of the Cratylus as unimportant and developed interpretations that closely read along the lines of the explicit question addressed in the dialogue, the question of the correctness of names.\(^\text{23}\)

Surprisingly few scholars, however, have attempted to formulate a reading of the Cratylus that regards the text as a unified work, not merely as a somewhat disjunctive investigation into the origin of language, the correctness of names, or the conceptual tools available to linguistic analysis, but rather as an argument about how these questions and instruments, all of a decidedly etymological nature, relate to the philosophical enterprise Socrates is putting forward, dialectics.\(^\text{24}\) Any interpretation that wishes to engage this dialogue on this level, such as the present one, however, cannot but marvel at the enormous amount of scholarly literature that attempts to disavow or ridicule most of the lines of argument in it.

The problematics of the meaning of the Cratylus is compounded by the question of how serious the philosophical and linguistic speculations contained in it are. Throughout the history of its reception, the Cratylus has been insistently marked as a humoristic, satirical, and ironic text, more so than any other Platonic dialogue. For the general attitude toward the etymologies in the Cratylus we may refer to Sandys’s standard work on philological history, A History of Classical Scholarship, in which he does not refrain from repeatedly scolding authors for their deployment of etymological arguments. He speaks of etymologies as “fanciful”\(^\text{25}\) or “far-fetched”\(^\text{26}\) and quotes another philologist claiming that in the Cratylus Socrates was “ridiculing the fancies of a new school of sophists and grammarians,” but “when the fervour of his etymological enthusiasm has abated”, he ends, as he began, with ‘a rational explanation of language.’\(^\text{27}\) When Socrates etymologically

\(^{22}\) Taylor, Plato, 78.

\(^{23}\) See, among others, Anagnostopoulos, “Plato’s Cratylus”; “The Significance of Plato’s Cratylus.”


\(^{25}\) Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship, 1.146, 147.

\(^{26}\) Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship, 1.93.

\(^{27}\) Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship, 1.93.
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analyzes the Greek word *anthrōpos* as *ho anathrōn ha opōpen* “he who looks up and sees,” he is “ironic,” whereas “in a more serious mood” he observes that “in speaking of the gods, we are only speaking of our names for them.” Authors that conversely refrain from etymologies, such as Quintilian, are praised for their “refined and carefully written criticism” as “a monument of trained insight, grounded on manly and sober sense.”

Thus, etymology, which investigates the origin of words by going back in time, because the “ancient word […] is more likely to be correct than the present one.” is actively gendered and ridiculed as something inviting irony and parody, something not serious, and as the object of addiction. And moreover, “women […] most of all preserve ancient speech.” Classicist Harold Fowler even goes as far as translating “most addicted to preserving old forms of speech.” At the same time, Stoics are often referred to as having an “addiction to etymology.” Such a gendered addiction is uncalled for in the etymological tradition, but nevertheless has constantly lingered in philosophical discourse concerning speech and language, as Avital Ronell has argued in *Crack Wars*.

This line of thought is consistently present in most of the literature on the *Cratylus* and its place in the Platonic corpus. In his introduction to the *Cratylus*, Fowler writes the following commentary on the supposed “wittiness” of the text:

> The dialogue cannot be satisfactorily translated, because the numerous etymologies cannot be appreciated without some knowledge of Greek; nevertheless it is interesting, even though the etymologies be not properly understood. Some of them are manifestly absurd, and in some cases the absurdity is obviously intentional. Evidently some current theories of language are satirized in these instances; in fact, the dialogue appears to contain many references, the meaning of which can only be guessed, because we do not know the persons to whom the reference is made. Even so, however, the wit and humour of the dialogue are apparent.

This short introductory paragraph raises multiple issues that haunt the reception of Plato’s *Cratylus*. These issues pertain, according to Fowler, first to the impossibility of a “satisfactory translation,” signaling a first aspect of etymologies, namely that they re-

32. For example, Allen, “The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology,” 14, the opening phrase: “The Stoics were notorious for their addiction to etymology.”
Sist translation. As John Henderson notes in the first English translation of Isidore de Seville’s *Etymologiae siue Origines*, “Translating etymologies levels distinctions between evident and fantastic, credible and absurd, agreed and beyond countenancing.”

Etymology, as first pioneered in Plato’s *Cratylus*, disrupts the procedures of translation, it obstructs the otherwise seemingly supple passage from one language to another and it is a symptom of what every translator is knowingly or unknowingly aware of; that the conditions of the possibility of translation are the very conditions of the impossibility of translation. As we will see throughout this chapter, this impossibility is constitutive of translation, which can never fully escape indulging etymological reason. Even merely “translating” etymology into a discourse on etymology immediately forces the question how to interpret etymology without reference to the etymology of the word etymology.

Although the *Cratylus* may not be appreciated “without some knowledge of Greek,” the text contains “many references, the meaning of which can only be guessed.” Nevertheless, Fowler ascertains that “evidently some current theories of language are satirized,” even though their references and context remain obscure. Fowler’s rhetorical twist after the semicolon even suggests that the “evident satire” is supported by the absence of clear reference; “apparently” the “current theories” satirized by Socrates were so obscure that they left no trace in the history of philosophy. The satire, “wit and humour,” that Fowler observes in the *Cratylus* and which are “obviously intentional” are thus an immediate effect of an absence of reference, a memory lapse, interpretative black holes that abound in the “interesting” text. Put differently, Fowler has to giggle because he has no clue what Socrates, Cratylus, and Hermogenes are talking about; even his certainly extensive knowledge of Greek does not guarantee a “full understanding of the text.”

The problems concerning a proper understanding of the text as signaled by Fowler allow him to conclude that “the *Cratylus* cannot be said to be of great importance in the development of the Platonic system, as it treats of a special subject somewhat apart from general philosophic theory.” Etymology, and adjacent questions concerning the origin of language are thus “somewhat” separated from philosophy, and a “special subject,” which nevertheless should interest because of its “technical perfection,” “great brilliancy and remarkable common sense.” These lines are characteristic for the treat-

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ment of etymology in philosophy, as something separated from it, yet not completely separable, a special remainder that nevertheless mobilizes the technical apparatus that philosophy enjoys employing.

Fowler is not alone in his confused evaluation. For example, Paul Friedländer, in his standard introduction to the work of Plato, states: “The Cratylus is much more like a medley of merry pranks than a scientific treatise in linguistics.” Thomas Wheaton Bestor calls it an “eccentric piece of work [...] with no obvious organization and bizarre digressions.” And amidst a plethora of interpretations that Socrates’ etymological arguments may allow, even the literary one is not shunned: “In allowing himself to rejoice, and to James Joyce, as in these instances, Plato exploits the subterranean riches of language, in full awareness of their cognitive shortcomings.”

Plato’s mastery as philosopher is throughout stressed. No commentator would claim that the great one himself would be somehow out of his mind. Sometimes the fact that the Cratylus seems to present us with an at least ambiguous discourse of etymology leads commentators to include Plato as a predecessor in the ironizing tradition of the Enlightenment. For example, Paul Shorey, in his “résumé of the entire body of the Platonic writings,” pompously entitled What Plato Said, places Plato from the very beginning of his “résumé” in the Voltairean tradition in which etymology is considered to be “a science in which vowels count for nothing and consonants for very little,” and, Shorey adds, “Plato said something like it before him.” Plato is thus immediately located as an antecedent to the Voltaire’s enlightened critique of etymology, and claims that

Plato in the Cratylus parodies the etymological speculations of his day, making punning etymologies the vehicle of numerous Platonic thoughts and fancies, suggests sound principles of the science of language by means of outrageous etymologies [...]. Etymological punning or symbolism recurs in several other dialogues as a feature of style and method. The tendency only culminates in the Cratylus, in which it runs rampant but is obviously not taken seriously. [...] This is about all that we need to know in order to understand the Cratylus.

Like Fowler, Shorey considers the Cratylus to be a work of “parody,” which however, underneath the “outrageous” etymologies suggests “sound principles of the science of

37. Friedländer, Plato, 32.
42. Shorey, What Plato Said, 259.
language.” Somewhere underneath the “style and method” of “rampant” “etymological punning or symbolism,” which is, moreover, “not taken seriously” we may discern “Platonic thoughts and fancies.” Plato’s usage of etymology is thus justified as method to induce a satirical effect, or as a stylistic form dissimulating “sound principles.” Plato thus never seriously engages in etymology and merely employs it as a rhetorical effect. But an effect for whom? Why does he deploy this style? And why does it seem that on closer reading this supposedly superficial and stylistic form of argument is much more anchored in philosophical reason than above authors are willing to acknowledge?

The anxiety for etymology, the references to satire, irony, and fanciness, dissimulate the question that lies at the core of the Cratylus, namely the question concerning the relation between language and philosophy, and the way in which the form of language may in one way or the other dictate the form of philosophy. This is precisely what is at stake in etymological reason and related desires for origins, the grounding of language in some type of arkhē, whether natural or conventional. What is missed by disavowing the critique of etymology proposed in the Cratylus is that they form a philosophical attempt to answer to this desire, and are therefore not a mere effect of style.

Even though the present investigation of the Cratylus positions itself, perhaps prematurely so, on the side of seriousness, we would do well to keep in mind that there is nevertheless always, in Socrates’ own words, “both a serious and a childish account”43 for the nature of names. And taking the Cratylus seriously does not imply that it is devoid of any comedy. Indeed there is an implied comical note in the dialogue as becomes already clear form the opening lines. This suggests that first of all we should avoid falling into the trap of assigning the Cratylus a place as either capricious or serious text. That some of the arguments put forward seem comical does not disqualify them as properly philosophical arguments. The acknowledgment of at least some philosophical function of etymology thus implies that comedy, satire, irony, humor, should indeed be accepted as integral elements of philosophical discourse. The Cratylus deals with precisely that aspect of language that allows us to understand the wittiness of the dialogue itself. Not taking etymology seriously is therefore paradoxically the end result of understanding the Cratylus and therefore taking it – to a certain extent – seriously.

Reversing the positions defended in most of the commentary tradition of the Cratylus, Shane Ewegen starts out from the acknowledgment that the Cratylus is meant as “comedy,”44 while its classical reception, as we have sketched out above, has mainly been

44. See Sallis, Being and Logos, 185.
of a twofold nature. First through either an anachronistic reading of its contents within the framework of the Aristotelian philosophy of language, which eventually spawned an etymological tradition that stands at the foundation of comparative linguistics, and thus contemporary linguistics in general. This first “etymological” interpretation of the Cratylus could be said not to be taken seriously by philosophy, rejected as the pure speculation of language.

The second consistent trait of Cratylus’s reception has been a resistance to the comedy of the Cratylus. But as David Sedley comments, “if Plato was joking, the joke flopped.” Ewegen suggests two reasons why the comedic nature of the Cratylus is overlooked – or, more precisely, not seriously and systematically investigated. The first is that compared with other Platonic dialogues, the Cratylus contains very little dramatic action. The second is that a “comedic” dialogue would be at odds with what the rest of Plato’s oeuvre tells us about his stance toward comedy – namely one of mild disdain. In response, Ewegen argues as regarding the first that in spite of the general absence of dramatic action, the dramatic moments that do occur in the Cratylus are of a comic nature. Regarding the second point, he argues that Plato’s relation with comedy was more complex, and that comedy and laughter are in fact constitutive elements of philosophizing.

To these two counterarguments of Ewegen’s, I would like to add a third, namely that Plato had every reason to turn a contemplation on the correctness of names into a farce, knowing how tightly such correctness was tied to the idea of etumos logos, and its close connection to the “laughing philosopher.” The obscurity of the latter however, has made Plato’s ridicule increasingly unreadable for later generations of interpreters. It is an ironic inversion that precisely the obscurity the target of his ridicule ensured the subsequent, widely spread anti-comedic reading of the Cratylus.

In spite of the historical (or historicist) inaccuracy endemic to the reception of the Cratylus – its retroactive reading as a theory of language and semantics and as a serious endeavor to develop such a theory – the Cratylus in many ways stands at the beginning of a long tradition of etymological literature in the West, a tradition that at the same time is at odds with Western metaphysics, even for those philosophers, such as Heidegger, who attempted to deconstruct this tradition. Following Ewegen, the development of a serious science of etymology is thus based upon a giant misunderstanding of Plato’s

45. Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 2.
46. Sedley, Plato’s Cratylus, 39.
47. Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 6–7.
dialogue, which were first and foremost meant to ridicule any attempt to philosophize from and with words, or to assume any material reality or truth inherent to language.

**Wondering about Hermes**

Hermes has already crossed our path several times as a master of dissimulation and deceit, and as a figure in which the contrast between *etumos* and *alēthēs* is most pronounced. Recall first how he stole Apollo’s oxen and then feigned sleep while the angry god came to his cave to look for his cattle: “He squeezed head and hands and feet together in a small space, like a new born child seeking sweet sleep, though in truth [ετεόν γε] he was wide awake.”

Not being a mere mortal, Apollo does not only need to rely on his eyesight and quickly understands that Hermes is deceiving him; Apollo “saw” the truth—ετεέ.

Nevertheless, Hermes continues to dispute Apollo’s account of the theft and wants to bring up the case to Zeus and the council of the gods. After Apollo gives his side of the story, about how his oxen were taken away and how he found a baby straddled in a crib lying straight to his face, Hermes comes up to Zeus and says, “Zeus, my father, indeed I will speak [καταλέξω] truth [αληθείην] to you; for I am truthful [νημερτῆς] and I cannot tell a lie [παύεσθαι] […] This I say truly [ατρέκεος].” The truth—αληθεία (and its synonyms, νημερτῆς and ατρέκεος) here is the truth of an eyewitness, that which can be verified by perception, no matter what the underlying truth of the matter is. In fact, the play between *etumos* and *alēthēs* is precisely what underlies all forms of deceit: now you see it, now you don’t. Ironically, Hermes himself claims to be the only eye-witness to the non-theft, as he claims that Apollo “brought no witnesses with him nor any of the blessed gods who had seen the theft.” Zeus, of course, is hardly impressed with this αληθεία and orders Hermes and Apollo to find the cattle together and settle their dispute.

I have brought up Hermes as the figure of the play—and the boundary and limit—between *etumos* and *alēthēs*, because he again plays an important—if absent—role in the one Platonic dialogue that is all about the correct (or true) meaning of words, the *Cra-

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tylus. For the Cratylus is “set at the limit”\textsuperscript{51}: after the dialogue ends, Cratylus and Hermogenes wander off into the countryside as they had planned to do,\textsuperscript{52} while Socrates stays in the city; it sits at the limit between the “correctness of names” “by nature”\textsuperscript{53} (Cratylus) and “by convention”\textsuperscript{54} (Hermogenes) with Socrates never showing his cards; and there is a boundary between Cratylus and Hermogenes themselves, the former being a full citizen of Athens, whereas the latter is a “bastard” (nothos).\textsuperscript{55}

The dialogue operates at a boundary not only because of the physical position, opinion, or citizenship status of its participants. It is at the limit of what is possible in a philosophical investigation about logos, one that lingers continuously on the edges of seriousness and irony and through its deconstruction of language insistently undermines the coherence of any logos.

Due precisely to its general object – λόγος – the entire dialogue could be said to take place at the very limit of what can be said within a philosophical inquiry. Because the object of the inquiry (i.e., λόγος) is also the medium through which the inquiry will take place, the text teeters at the very limit of speech, of what is possible in human discourse (λόγος).\textsuperscript{56}

Hermes does not only hover over the dialogue as a god of boundaries and limits, but also as the contested progenitor of one of the participants, Hermogenes, “offspring of Hermes,” who himself was a bastard son of Zeus. For it is the doubt about the correctness of his name that prompts Hermogenes to call in Socrates into his dispute with Cratylus, who had claimed that Hermogenes is not his real name:

So I ask him [erōtō] whether his name is in truth [tēi alētheiai] Cratylus, and he agrees that it is. “And what is Socrates’ name?” I said. “Socrates,” said he. “Then that applies to all men, and the particular name by which we call each person is his name?” And he said, “Well, your name is not Hermogenes, even if all mankind call you so.” Now, though I am asking him [erōtōntos] and am exerting myself to find out what in the world he means, he does not explain himself at all; he meets me with dissimulation [eirōneuetai], claiming to have some special knowledge [en heautōi] of his own about it which would, if he chose to speak it out clearly, make me agree entirely with him. Now if you could interpret Cratylus’s oracular speech [manteian], I should like to hear you.\textsuperscript{57}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Pl. Crat. 440e: πορεύου εἰς ἀγρόν.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Pl. Crat. 383a: ὀρθότητα [...] φύσει.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Pl. Crat. 384d: ὀρθότης ὀνόματος ἢ συνθήκη καὶ ὁμολογία
\item Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 32.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Pl. Crat. 383b–384a, trans. Fowler: ἐρωτῶ οὖν αὐτὸν ἐγὼ εἰ αὐτῷ Κρατύλος τῇ
\item \textsuperscript{57} Pl. Crat. 383b–384a, trans. Fowler: ἐρωτῶ οὖν αὐτὸν ἐγὼ εἰ αὐτῷ Κρατύλος τῇ
The context of this initial question is already steeped in comic allusions. First of all, Hermogenes complains about Cratylus’s “dissimulating” or “ironizing” tone (eirōneuetai), teasing him with “oracular speech” (manteian) that his name is not his name, without revealing to him why that would be the case. That Socrates, the great master of irony would be called upon to “clarify” such irony is in itself a comical gesture that should not be overlooked. Apart from Socrates’ own “oracular speech,” which appears later on in the dialogue, his response again alerts us to the underlying wordplay and insinuation:

But as for his saying that Hermogenes is not truly your name, I suspect he is making fun [skōptein] of you; for perhaps he thinks that you want to make money and fail every time. But, as I said, it is difficult to know such things. We must join forces and try to find out [skopein] whether you are right, or Cratylus. 58

Socrates suspects that Cratylus’s joke on Hermogenes’ name may be related to his failure to make money; Hermes is the god commerce, and if that’s not an option, cunning and theft. Hermogenes’ lack of business instinct is here contrasted with Socrates’ stinginess, who just before admits that he “doesn’t know the truth,” as he only heard Prodicus’s “one-drachma course” on the subject, instead of the complete fifty-drachma one. Knowing Socrates’ contempt for sophistry, this gesture of ridicule sets the tone for an investigation that verges between “making fun” (skōptein) and “finding out” (skopein).

However, Ewegen suggests that the joke on Hermogenes’ lack of commercial instinct may hide a more vulgar joke, which precisely turns around Hermogenes’ inheritance of Hermes’ “well-endowedness.” For as a marker of boundary and limits, Hermes is often monumentalized as “herm,” a boundary stone topped with an ithyphallic bust of Hermes. 59 Claiming that Hermogenes is definitely not true to his name thus implies that

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59. Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 51.
he does not have the erotic prowess his name would suggest, and that Cratylus has some “special knowledge” by himself (en heautōi), suggests that the relation between Hermogenes and Cratylus may well be that of lovers. How else would Cratylus feel comfortable joking around about Hermogenes’ penis size? Although Ewegen, in scholarly fashion, makes the caveat that “there is no definitive textual or historical evidence to support this conclusion,”60 he pursues it, because the interpretative yield of such a claim is irresistible.

For the erotic undertone is already signalled from the beginning, both by the repeated usage of the verb “to ask” (erōtō, erōtōntos), which is homophonous with erōs, and the fact that Socrates himself is indeed interested in only “erotic matters.”61 This play of words, which is made explicit later on in the Cratylus,62 emphasizes Cratylus’s questioning of Hermogenes’ name, which makes his first word, erōtō, all the more funny. In this context, Ewegen points out that the “correctness” (orthotēs) of names, has a vulgar secondary meaning of “erection.”63 This links the discussion on the “correctness” of names that is at the core of the Cratylus thus directly to Hermes’ ithyphallic nature and Hermogenes’ supposed lack of erotic capabilities.

Finally, then, there is the suggestion of Hermogenes’ patronym Hipponicus, meaning a victor in a horse race. Again, the horse is here a signifier for masculinity and sexual appetite.64 Ewegen approvingly cites Aristotle’s History of the Animals as a case in point: “[T]he horse is the most salacious of animals after the human species.”65 And suggests that also at other moments in Plato’s oeuvre the relation between horses and sexual desire is suggested. He brings the example from the Phaedrus, where the soul in ascent to the Beautiful is described as a chariot drawn by two horses, one of which “forcing them to approach the beloved and propose the joys of love [aphrodisiōn kharitos].”66 The pres-

60. Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 52.
63. Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 57. See Henderson, The Maculate Muse, 112: “ὀρθῶς, upright, is common and perfectly proper in the meaning ‘erect.’”
64. Henderson, The Maculate Muse, 126: “ἵππος, horse, is mentioned by Hesychius as indicating the genitals of both sexes, although its applicability to the female member is difficult to imagine.”
The etymology of this double entendre makes Socrates’ first invocation of Hermogenes’ patronym all the funnier:

Hermogenes, son of Hipponicus [hipponikou], there is an ancient saying that knowledge of high things is hard to gain; and surely knowledge of names is no small matter [smikron].

The juxtaposition of “hung like a horse” Hipponicus and the ironic statement that the knowledge of names is “no small thing,” again signals the comical undertone present from the very beginning of the dialogue, and the same joke is in fact repeated toward the end, when Socrates asks Cratylus:

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 [Smikriōnos], Hermogenes,” would he be saying or speaking or uttering or addressing these words not to you, but to Hermogenes – or to nobody?

Thus the size of Hermogenes’ member and his sexual prowess become a running joke throughout the dialogue, and the “inspection” (skopein) of his name indeed becomes a matter of joking (skōptein), following precisely the etymological games set out in it, as if, indeed, Hermogenes is “not in control” of his “inheritance.” At several points, Ewegen suggests similarities between the role of erotic subtext in the Cratylus and in the Symposium, which, like the Cratylus, opens with a phallic joke, namely Glaucon coming up from behind (opisthen) to Apollodorus, calling him “Phalerus,” a wordplay on Apollodorus’s hometown Phaleron and the word phallos. And whereas the Cratylus deals with the “correctness of names,” the Symposium turns out to be an etumos logos, a “true discourse,” on love.

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71. See Foucault, The Use of Pleasure, 235, and Example 5 below.
The Namegiver and Etymological Relation

So at the invitation of Cratylus and Hermogenes, Socrates indulges in the question concerning correctness of names. The *Cratylus* is not about the “truth” (*etumos*) of names, but about their correctness (*orthotēs*). Hermogenes has stated that he believes that “no name belongs to any particular thing by nature [*phusei*], but only by the habit [*nomōi*] and custom [*ethei*] of those who employ it and who established the usage.” We are very far removed here from the Aristotelian notion of “convention” and subsequent linguistics founded on the arbitrariness of the sign. The opposition concerning the correctness of names, between Cratylus and Hermogenes, is the opposition between *phusis* and *nomos/ethos*.

Initially, Plato’s intervention concentrates not so much on whether this *nomos* is in fact adhered to by the speaking community, but bases the convention of a community to speak according to a certain *nomos* on the righteousness of the one who gave this *nomos*. Speaking correctly (*orthōs*) is only possible if the words that are spoken would be somehow correctly legislated. This legislation itself however, should be performed “according to nature.” Thus in his first gesture, Socrates already complicates the opposition between nature and convention by making one the precondition for the other.

After a series of analogies, the right way of cutting and being cut, the right way of burning and being burnt – analogies that will survive in the future treatises on grammar as default examples of transitive verbs – Socrates arrives at discussing the right way of naming and being named, namely by nature. This however does not entail that Socrates agrees with Cratylus that names would somehow derive directly from nature, as if a stone would by itself provide us with its name: “A name is, then, an instrument [*organon*] of teaching and separating essence [*ousias*].” This separation of being by means of naming is not an operation in which every man can partake, but is reserved for the “rarest among artisans,” the lawgiver. The actions of the lawgiver are defined in a series of Socrates’ questions:

Then, my dear friend, is it not necessary that the lawgiver [*nomothetēn*] knows to posit [*tithenai*] in sounds and syllables the name [*onoma*] emerged [*pephukos*]
Even before Socrates engages in any of the etymological investigations of divine names or common nouns, we find that the very definition of the lawgiver is etymologically defined.\textsuperscript{78} Socrates relates the word lawgiver (nomothetēs) to the act of positing (tithenai) sounds and syllables into a name (onoma), and this positing – here in the medium form tithesthai, recapitulating the argumentative form of preceding series of active and medium verbs: temnein/temnesthai; kaein/kaesthai; legein/legesthai\textsuperscript{79} – of names (onomata) as the work of the “positer of names” (onomatōn thetēs). The etymological argument thus suggests onomatōn thetēs > nomothetēs. And this positing of names, as Socrates explains may only be done beautifully – kalōs onomata thēsesthai,\textsuperscript{80} with the same juxtaposition of “names” and the verb “to posit” – if the lawgiver is supervised by a dialectician. The philosopher therefore suddenly appears at the origin of namegiving, the origin of language, as the supervisor of the process. The originator of words (the lawgiver) is tightly related to the best employer of those words, the dialectician. The origin of correct names is thus related to the correct user of those words. The question of the origin of language therefore seems to become the question of the usage of the language of philosophy as such.

Hermogenes, advocate of the theory of convention, however, isn’t immediately won over by Socrates’ “technological explanation,”\textsuperscript{81} which, we ought to note, has preceded by a series of questions, suggesting this is also not what Socrates truly thinks of the matter. Is this really a proof of the correctness of language according to nature? Socrates however reminds him quickly of the fact that he departed on this argument without knowing the truth, and that the only thing they have discovered until now is only “some correctness according to nature,”\textsuperscript{82} the kind of correctness still remains to be determined.

\textsuperscript{77} Pl. Crat. 398d-90a: ἄρ’ οὖν, ὦ βέλτιστε, καὶ τὸ ἐκάστῳ φύσει πεφυκὸς ὄνομα τὸν νομοθέτην ἐκεῖνον εἰς τοὺς φθόγγους καὶ τὰς συλλαβὰς δεῖ ἐπίστασθαι τιθέναι, καὶ βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα, πάντα τὰ ὄνοματα ποιεῖν τε καὶ τίθεσθαι, εἰ μέλλει κύριος εἶναι ὄνομάτων θέτης;

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Demand, “The Nomothetes of the Cratylus,” 107.

\textsuperscript{79} Pl. Crat. 387a–c.

\textsuperscript{80} Pl. Crat. 390d.

\textsuperscript{81} See Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 75ff.

\textsuperscript{82} Pl. Crat. 391a: φύσει τέ τινα ὀρθότητα. My emphasis.
Hermogenes and Socrates subsequently reject a sophistic solution to determine the kind of correctness they are after, and move on to poetry, where they consider the names of Astyanax and Hector,3 the former the son of the latter. They notice that both names seem to refer to the royal decendence of both characters in the Iliad, and Socrates asks “am I wrong [lanthanō] in guessing that we have found some trace [ikhnous] of Homer’s opinion about the correctness of names?”84 This trace is nothing but the trace of a family resemblance, a genealogical imprint in each word. Nevertheless, Socrates warns Hermogenes that he shouldn’t be tricked. Thus the following citation, in which Socrates gives us one of the first formal aspects of etymological relation, remains embedded under the constant doubt that the entire operation is a sophisticated fraud or a giant joke, an accusation that will forever haunt etymology:

[W]hether the same signifies in certain syllables or others, the thing doesn’t; and if some letter [gramma] is added or subtracted, it doesn’t either, so long as the essence [ousia] of the thing named remains in force [enkratēs], being shown in the name.85

The object signified by a certain syllable is thus not affected if it is expressed by a different set of syllables. This would amount basically to nothing but an affirmation of the possibility of synonymy. The difference between a synonymous and an etymological (or in Aristotelian terms, paronymous, relation) lies in force with which the essence of an object is made clear in the name. Etymology thus still remains dependent on some, even the most minimal, expression of the force of the essence in the name.

The Example of the Letters and Elements
The example that Socrates subsequently uses is deceiving in its simplicity. Instead of discussing proper names of heroes or gods, he takes the proper names of letters as an example, an example that we have already encountered within a different, though essentially related context in the Statesman and Nietzsche’s analysis of Democritus’s atomism:

83. See Ewegen, Plato’s Cratylus, 103–4 for the double entendre.
84. Pl. Crat. 393b: ἀλλὰ λανθάνω καὶ ἐμαυτὸν οἷόμενός τινος ὡσπερ ἰχνος ἐφάπτεσθαι τῆς Ὁμήρου δόξης περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος;
But for instance, of the letters [stoikheion], you know that we say the names, but not just those letters [stoikheia] themselves, except for four, ε, υ, ο, and ω.  
For the other vowels [phōnēesi] and consonants [aphōnois] you know that we speak [legomen] them by positing around [peritithentes] other letters [grammata], making names. So long as we posit it [sc. the stoikheion] inside [entithōmen], showing its force [dunamin], it is correct to call it by that name that will show it to us. Like the bēta: you see that by positing additionally [prostethentōn] the η, τ, and α no distress is caused, so that it wouldn’t not show the nature of that letter [stoikheiou] for (?) the whole name that the lawgiver wanted; thus he knew well to posit [thesthai] the names for the letters [grammasi].

This fragment, which features a first attempt from Socrates’ part to define an etymological relation. It describes the way in which the letter β, called by its name bēta, still shows the nature of the phoneme /b/, the initial sound of the name, even though three other letters are added to it. The interplay between spoken language, with the verb to speak (legomen), vowels (phōnēesi), and consonants (aphōnois), which derive from the word for sound or voice (phōnē), the word letter or element (stoikheion), and letter (gramma) which is related to the verb to write (graphein).

Is Socrates talking about the written letter β and its name or about the spoken sound, or phoneme, /b/ and its name? And when he suggests that the additional η, τ, and α cause “no distress,” does this mean that when saying /bēta/ we understand the relation with the sound /b/ or written letter β, or that when we write βητα we understand its reference to the sound /b/ or as the name of its first letter β? What is at issue here is whether etymology, in this initial Socratic definition, operates on the level of spoken language or written language. Even today, this distinction seems blurred in very simple etymological relations. For example, within Indo-European linguistics, it is unquestioned that the English “gender” and Greek γένος have the same root, even though its written form is incomparable, whereas inspection of the written form of the English “knee” reveals a family relation with Dutch “knie,” even though in English the written

86. In Plato’s time these letters did not yet carry their now common names epsilon, upsilon, omikron, and omega, respectively.
letter k is no longer pronounced. Etymology, concerned as it is with the origins of words, thus consistently blurs the boundaries of spoken sounds and written letters.

Although the distinction between written letter and spoken sound is often projected onto the Platonic corpus, there seems to be little evidence that the difference between writing and speaking letters should be considered on par with the distinctions applied in modern linguistics. Nevertheless, in his article “Letters and Syllables in Plato,” Gilbert Ryle suggests that “Plato uses stoicheion nearly uniformly for ‘phonetic element,’” and that he “uses grammata quite impartially for phonetic elements and characters.”

As both words are indeed deployed in above citation, I suggest we devote some time to analyzing the implications of such a claim. “Gramma,” Ryle continues, “despite its etymology, did not for Plato connote writing.” This in itself seems a surprising claim. Even though indeed Plato nowhere in the Cratylus refers to the act of writing, grammata is used several times explicitly in the context of painting, and it seems curious that in a treatise devoted to etymology, Plato would take an adverse position in not even alluding to the etymological relation between writing (graphein) and grammata. The materiality of the grammata, owing to its determination as instrument (organon), and thus compared to the shuttle of a weaver, seems incontestable and the emphasis on the phōnē in Ryle’s explanation definitely has a phonologocentric ring to it.

But did Plato mean to construe his model in phonetic terms? Prima facie the answer is “no.” If he had meant this, he would surely have told us that he was talking phonetics and not graphology. The few commentators whom I have read have assumed that Plato is talking about characters and collocations of characters and have not even mentioned the alternative possibility. On the other hand, there are things which Plato says which cumulatively point so strongly in the affirmative direction that I think “yes” is the right answer. I also hope that it is, since the semantic view which results is both true and important.

If we once again return to our citations from 393d, there seems to be some evidence in favor of the view that spoken sounds have a place in Socrates’ considerations. Referring to stoikheia, he discusses “other vowels [phōnēesi] and consonants [aphōnois] you know that we speak [legomen].” But otherwise sound (phōnē) itself does not seem to be operative in the given example.

89. Pl. Crat. 431c.
Other evidence also turns out to be suspicious. When Ryle refers to Theaetetus 202e–203e, it is true that Socrates both treats letters and syllables as unanalyzable units. This, however, does not imply that we are dealing in both cases necessarily with phonetic units, but rather that knowledge of a syllable does not imply knowledge of its stoikheia, if any. The opposition that Socrates sets up is between the letters (stoikheia) among the letters (grammatōn) and syllables, not between mere grammata and syllables, as is the case in the Cratylus. Moreover, Socrates clearly states the effort of distinguishing letters is done both “by sight” and “by hearing.”

His second example was concerned with Sophist 253a, where the Stranger discusses the bonds that vowels (phōnēeta) create between other letters (grammata). Ryle immediately concludes from this that these bonds can only be thought in phonetic terms, even if Theaetetus clearly states a few sentences later that the art of joining different letters belongs to grammar, not the phonetic properties of Greek – and it should be noted that in many languages, vowels are not necessary to form well-formed syllables. And when discussing the passage from the Statesman that we already discussed above, he expresses his honest surprise over the fact that “Plato did not bluntly tell us that he was describing not how the child learns to read and write his characters, but only how he learns to discriminate by ear and with his tongue the phonetic values of the letters of the alphabet, i.e., the audible vowels and consonants.” Thus Ryle’s desire to find evidence that Plato’s theory of language was thoroughly based on sounds even brings him to be baffled about Plato’s lack of clarity on the subject, in fact, even using words of reading and writing.

**Elementary Powers**

Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether such divisions can be readily made in the Cratylus. The opposition between “phonetics” and “graphology,” as assumed by scholars such as Ryle, may blind us to what is precisely at stake in Socrates’ discussion of letters within the present etymological context. The two different words that Socrates employs, both being translated by the English word letter, namely stoikheion and gramma, may

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91. Pl. Theaet. 202e.
94. Additional evidence against such a phonocentric reading of the Cratylus may be found in later treatises on grammar, as described by Sextus Empiricus: “Element [stoikheioi] is said in three ways, the written character [graphomenou kharaktēros] and shape, and its force [dunameōs] and also its name [onomatos].” (Sext. Emp. Adv. Math. 1.99, trans. Blank, amended)
allow us some insight in the way that the force (dunamis) of an essence is expressed in a name. What will appear is not so much a “semantic view,” but rather a dynamic view of signification. As Francesco Romano expressed succinctly: “What is relevant to the ‘correctness’ of names is ‘form,’ or better, ‘the signifying power’ [sc. dunamis], not ‘matter’ [sc. the material aspect of a name, the grammata].”

First of all, it seems from the above citation that stoikheion may express dunamis, whereas this is not the case for gramma. Let’s recall that any letter (gramma) may be added or substracted, as long as the essence remains in force, that is, supposedly through at least one stoikheion. This division between etymologically empowered letters, and letters without such power is substantiated by other evidence. For example, the entire vocabulary of the addition of letters, described by a sequence of variations of the verb “to posit” (thesthai) with different prefixes determining the location of the additional letters: around (peri-tithentes), inside (en-tithōmen), and added on (pros-tethentōn), concerns only gramma. This is also maintained further on in the text. Socrates talks about “putting in or taking out letters [grammata]” and “inserting letters [grammata].” Moreover, a stoikheion may have a nature (phusis), whereas this is never the case for a gramma. Also, gramma is usually mentioned in combination with the technical concept of syllable (sullabē), whereas stoikheion never appears in this technical context.

As regards the question whether β would be a gramma or a stoikheion, this entirely depends on the function of the letter within the name, presenting an etymological core or being just an additional letter, inserted for euphony, by foreign influence, or because of the passing of time. In above citations, for example, Socrates explicitly calls the four letters ε, υ, ο, and ω stoikheia, whereas further on he calls the letter alpha a gramma. Again the difference must be sought in whether the letter in question expresses dunamis or not. In the former case, the stoikheia ε, υ, ο, and ω are mentioned because they have no gramma around them in their name, as for example in the case of bēta. In the latter case, it is a question of the gramma alpha being removed in the derivation of the word for human (anthrōpos) from “he looks up at (anathrei) what he has seen (opōpe).” Thus the gramma alpha is dropped from anathrei > anthr-.

However, it seems that in a few instances, a stoikheion may also be considered to be a gramma. For example in the 393d citation, where Socrates first refers the name of the

95. Romano in Proclus, Lezioni, xxv, quoted from Del Bello, Forgotten Paths, 60.
98. Pl. Crat. 399b.
elements (stoikheion) but closes with the positing of names to letters (grammasi). And similarly in 426d–e:

Well, the element [stoikheion] rhō, as I was saying, appeared to be a fine instrument of movement to the name-poster for the imitation of rapid motion, and he often applies it to it. In the first place, in the words ῥεῖν (flow) and ῥοή (current) by means of this letter [grammatos], then in τρόμος (trembling) and in τρέχειν (run), [...], he expresses the action of them all mainly by means of the rhō.99

It thus seems as if whatever is a stoikheion is also always a gramma, but not the other way around. Perhaps we could wage the definition that in the Cratylus, the stoikheion is an “empowered gramma.” This is a tentative difference that neither gives in to the speech/writing opposition advocated by Ryle, nor to the claim that there is no significant difference whatsoever between gramma and stoikheion.100

In his dialogue with Hermogenes Socrates returns one more time to the definition of the natural correctness of names, namely as a relation of mimesis. The solution of mimesis is formulated in response to a question that will haunt any etymological approach after the Cratylus: we may trace the origins of some words in other words, but what to do with those unanalyzable “roots”? “So, as for the first names, which are not based upon others, in what way do they make beings [ta onta] apparent to us as far as possible [dunaton], if indeed they are names?”101 Once again it is a question of the power (dunamis) of signification, and in case of the first names this power derives from the imitation of the essence (ousia) of beings (ta onta). As was the case with the “derived,” non-primary words, Socrates again differentiates between letters (grammata) and elements (stoikheia), the latter ones always endowed with powers (dunameis).

But what would be the method of division starting from which the imitator


100. For example in Barney, Names and Nature in Plato’s Cratylus, 89, n. 12, even though she acknowledges that stoikheion is “the more precise term” than gramma, without, however defining what this precision consists in.

101. Pl. Crat. 422d–e: εἶεν: τὰ δὲ δὴ πρῶτα, οἷς οὕτω ἔτερα ὑπόκειται, τίνι τρόπῳ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν ὁτι μάλιστα φανερὰ ἦμιν ποιήσει τὰ ὄντα, εἶπερ μέλλει ὄνόματα εἶναι; ἀπόκριναι δὲ μοί τόδε:
begins the imitation? Now isn’t it the case that since the imitation turns out to be imitation of essence \([\text{ousia}]\) in letters \([\text{grammata}]\) and syllables, the most correct method is first to divide the elements \([\text{stoikheia}]\), just as those setting their hand to rhythms first go through the powers \([\text{dunameis}]\) of the elements \([\text{stoikheia}]\), then those of the syllables, and in this way only then move on to the investigation of rhythms, and not before?\(^{102}\)

Socrates argues that, and this is a classical mimetic account that we will henceforth encounter in many etymologically oriented theories of the origin of language, the sound (and often also the form) of letters would in some way imitate the essence of the referent. For example:

The element \(\text{rhō} \), as I was saying, appeared to be a fine instrument of movement to the name-positer for the imitation of rapid motion. […] \(\text{Iōta}\) again he employs for all subtle things, […] just as by means of the \(\text{phi}, \text{psi}, \text{sigma}, \) and \(\text{zēta}\), because they are letters like the wind, naming all those things that imitate them [sc. windy sounds]. And whenever he somehow imitates windyness, the name-positer appears to bring on most of those letters everywhere. And again the useful power \([\text{dunamin}]\) of the compression of the \(\text{delta}\) and the pressure of the tongue of the \(\text{tau}\) seemed to lead the way for the imitation of binding and rest. And seeing that the tongue glides most in the \(\text{labda}\), he named \(\lambda\varepsilon\iota\) (level), \(\text{ὁλισθάνειν} \) (glide) itself, \(\text{λιπαρόν}\) (sleek), \(\text{κολλῶδες}\) (glutinous), and all other such words imitating it.\(^{103}\)

Even though it will become soon clear that Socrates himself does not sustain such a mimetic account of language, and that such a theory is mostly perceived, especially by those scholars already suspiscious of anything that reeks of an etymological argument,

\(^{102}\) Pl. Crat. 424b–c: ἄλλα τίς ἂν εἴῃ ὁ τρόπος τῆς διαιρέσεως ὅθεν ἄρχεται μιμεῖσθαι ὁ μιμούμενος; ἢρα οὖν ἐπίτειπε συλλαβαῖς τε καὶ γράμμασιν ἡ μίμησις τυγχάνει οὕσα τῆς οὐσίας, ὃς ὅταν ἐπιλέσθαι τὰ στοιχεῖα πρῶτον, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐπιχειροῦντες τοὺς ρυθμοὺς τῶν στοιχείων πρῶτον τὰς δυνάμεις διειλόντο τὸς τόνθα τῶν συλλαβῶν ὀρθῶς ήδη ἐρχονται ἐπὶ τοὺς ρυθμοὺς σκεφόμενοι, πρότερον δὲ οὖ;  

\(^{103}\) Pl. Crat. 426d–427b: τὸ δὲ οὖν ῥῶ τὸ στοιχεῖον, ὥσπερ λέγω, καλὸν ἐδοξεῖν ὄργανον εἶναι τῆς κινήσεως τῷ τὰ ὀνόματα τιθεμένῳ πρὸς τὸ ἀφομοίουν τῇ φορᾷ, […] τῷ δὲ αὐτῷ πρὸς τὰ λεπτὰ πάντα, […] ὥσπερ γε διὰ τοῦ φεῖ καὶ τοῦ ψεῖ καὶ τοῦ σίγμα καὶ τοῦ ξητα, ὃτι πνευματώδη τὰ γράμματα, πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα μεμίμηται αὐτοῖς ὄνομαζων, ὅσον τῷ ψυχρόν τῷ νεκρόν καὶ τῷ ἡγεμόνως καὶ ὅλως σεισμόν καὶ ὅταν τὸ φυσῶδες μιμήτω, πανταχοῦ ἐνταῦθα ὡς τὸ πολὺ τὰ τοιαῦτα γράμματα ἐπιφέρειν φαίνεται τὸ τὰ ὀνόματα τιθεμένους. τῇ δὲ αὐτῷ δὲ δέλτα συμπιέσεως καὶ τοῦ ταῦ καὶ ἀπερείσεως τῆς γλῶττης τῇ δύναμιν ἡράσθην αὐτῷ χρῆσθαι πρὸς τὴν μίμησιν τῷ ἀφομοίου καὶ τῇ στάσεως, ὅτι δὲ ὀλισθάνει μάλιστα ἐν τῷ λάβθα ἡ γλῶττα κατιδώ, ἀφομοίων ὀνόμας το ταυτήτα οὕτως αὐτῷ καὶ τῷ ’λιπαρόν’ καὶ τῷ ’κολλῶδες’ καὶ τάλα πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα.
as “fanciful,” the question remains why a translator like Fowler – and I have followed his example in this – nevertheless insists in translating the sequence *leia, olisthanein, liparon,* and *kollōdes,* with a comparable series of l’s in English: “level,” “glide,” “sleek,” “glutinous.” There seems to be no inherent necessity in the text itself to do so, except for a certain piety of the translator. But how does such a piety on the one hand sustain the “manifest absurdity” of these etymologies, while at the same time – whether “intuitively” or not – suggesting in English the same type of “liquidity” in words as Socrates does in Greek? Would the absurdity of the mimetic enterprise not be served by a series of completely divergent, but nonetheless “correct” translations such as “smooth,” “sprain,” “shining,” and “viscous”?

Translation is therefore always already etymological. And if translation is, so is writing, including philosophical writing. No matter how much Plato attempts to reduce the “correctness of names” to sexual innuendo, and in spite of the caveats of Socrates at every turn – “but watch me and don’t let me trick you”\(^{104}\) – it is precisely Socrates’ ridiculous divinations that allow us to translate the *Cratylus* in the first place.

**Philosophy’s Distrust**

In all of this, it is unclear whether philosophy can be of any help. Recall that at the beginning, Hermogenes asks Socrates for an explanation of Cratylus’s claim that his name is not Hermogenes, “even if whole mankind” would call him so.\(^{105}\) Socrates suspects that Cratylus is making fun of Hermogenes, perhaps for the intimate reasons we already attended to above, but also because being a son of Hermes would imply making a good living by trade, which is what Hermogenes does not seem to excel in.\(^{106}\) But then again, Socrates says, “if I had attended Prodicus’s fifty-drachma course of lectures, after which, as he himself says, a man has a complete education on this subject, there would be nothing to hinder your learning the truth about the correctness of names at once; but I have heard only the one-drachma course, and so I do not know what the truth is about such matters.”\(^{107}\)

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104. Pl. Crat. 393c: φύλαττε γάρ μη πη παρακρούσωμαι σε
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The dialogue thus starts off on a joke about Socrates’ ignorance on the subject matter caused by his stinginess. At the same time these jokes introduce the proper thematics of dialogue, namely the correctness (orthothēs) of names, whereas the joke on Socrates’ knowledge of the subject makes an obvious reference to the practice of the sophists and orators to ask money for their courses, something Socrates has always refused to do.\footnote{108} A “complete education” on the subject of etymology,\footnote{109} as Socrates says, is therefore immediately situated in the practice of sophistry and rhetoric; etymology is nothing a philosopher would engage in. At a certain point in the investigation on the correctness of names, Socrates says to Hermogenes that

The best way to investigate, my friend, is with the help of those who know; and you make sure of their favour by paying them money. They are the sophists, from whom your brother Callias got his reputation for wisdom by paying them a good deal of money. But since you have not the control of your inheritance, you ought to beg and beseech your brother to teach you the correctness which he learned of Protagoras about such matters.\footnote{110}

Socrates thus tells Hermogenes to turn to his brother, the sophist Callias, and pay for the wisdom of the natural correctness of words, money that Socrates himself refused to spend. But, reminding Hermogenes that he is as broke as himself because he is not in control of his inheritance (tōn patrōiōn), Socrates humorously suggests that he may as well “beg and beseech him.” The philosopher is again figured as the poor guy, unable to pay for sophisticated education and at a remove from the paternal. Philosophy, jokingly, thus enters the realm of etymology on its own terms, expecting to overcome language, whether conventional or natural, in order to arrive at, as Socrates phrases it toward the end of dialogue, a learning “without names,”\footnote{111} that is, the rejection of any etymological pursuit within philosophy.\footnote{112}

So let us inspect how Socrates himself closes his dialogue with Hermogenes, who advocated a conventional approach to the correctness of language, with a radical plea for the natural – Cratylus’s – view, even going as far as positing a mimetic theory for

\begin{footnotes}
\item[108] Pl. Euth. 3d.
\item[109] Pl. Crat. 384b: περὶ τοῦτο πεπαιδεύσθαι.
\item[110] Pl. Crat. 391b–c: ὀρθοτάτη μὲν τῆς σκέψεως, ὦ ἑταῖρε, μετὰ τῶν ἐπισταμένων, χρήματα ἐκείνων τελοῦντα καὶ χάριτας κατατιθέμενον. εἰσὶ δὲ οὕτωι οἱ σοφισταὶ, οἵσπερ καὶ ὁ ἀδελφὸς σου Καλλίας πολλὰ τελέσας χρήματα σοφὸς δοκεῖ εἶναι. ἐπειδὴ δὲ οὕκ ἐγκρατής εἰ τῶν πατρίων, λιπαρεῖν χρή τὸν ἀδελφὸν καὶ δεῖσθαι αὐτοῦ διδαξαί σε τὴν ὀρθότητα περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἣν ἐμαθεῖν παρά Πρωταγόρου.
\item[112] See Ademollo, The Cratylus of Plato, 445.
\end{footnotes}
the primary words. Nevertheless, it remains uncertain to what extent Socrates is here defending his own, or for that matter Plato’s views. Socrates has warned Hermogenes several times that he might “trick” him,\(^{113}\) that he is merely giving a “childish” account,\(^{114}\) that their investigation is a “game” (agōn),\(^{115}\) and that his mimetic opinions about the earliest names are “hybristic” and “laughable.”\(^{116}\) And as soon as he turns to Cratylus, he suggests: “It seems to be necessary to reexamine what I am saying,”\(^{117}\) and reformulates his initial hypothesis, this time without explicit reference to nature: “Correctness, we say, of a name is that which indicates what [hoion] the thing [pragma] is like,”\(^{118}\) namely that which “imitates the essence [ousia] of things [pragmatōn].”\(^{119}\)

Whereas in his dialogue with Hermogenes, Socrates is attacking the idea that every name is entirely conventional, ending up with a mimetic account of language in which all stoikheia would express some archetypical quality in the way that they imitate nature, he attempts in his dialogue with Cratylus to argue precisely against such an account. Restating his final mimetic theory, Socrates asks Cratylus: “And the lambda [is like] leioi (smoothness) and malakoi (softness) and those things we just now said?”\(^{120}\) – Yes, Cratylus affirms. “So what about the lambda lying inside [egkeimenon]? Doesn’t it show the opposite of hardness?”\(^{121}\) Apart from the double entendre of Cratylus’s answer “Well maybe it isn’t in a hard/correct [orthōs] inside [egkeitai], Socrates,”\(^{122}\) he cannot but affirm that the only possibility would be the the letter lambda does not belong there, and has been added by any of the previously discussed means.\(^{123}\) It is therefore properly a

\(^{113}\) Pl. Crat. 393c.

\(^{114}\) Pl. Crat. 406c.

\(^{115}\) Pl. Crat. 421d.

\(^{116}\) Pl. Crat. 426b.

\(^{117}\) Pl. Crat. 428d: δοκεῖ οὖν μοι χρῆναι ἐπανασκέψασθαι τί καὶ λέγω.

\(^{118}\) Pl. Crat. 428e: ὀνόματος, φαμέν, ὀρθότης ἐστὶν αὕτη, ήτις ἐνδείξεται οἷόν ἐστι τὸ πρᾶγμα.

\(^{119}\) Pl. Crat. 431d: τὴν οὐσίαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἀπομιμούμενος.

\(^{120}\) Pl. Crat. 434c: τὸ δὲ λάβδα τὸ λείῳ καὶ μαλακῷ καὶ οἷς νυνδὴ ἐλέγομεν;

\(^{121}\) Pl. Crat. 434d: ἦ καὶ τὸ λάβδα ἐγκείμενον; οὗ τὸ ἐναντίον δηλοῖ σκληρότητος;

\(^{122}\) Pl. Crat. 434d: ἦ καὶ τὸ λάβδα ἐγκείμενον; οὗ τὸ ἐναντίον δηλοὶ σκληρότητος; Κ: ἦ καὶ τὸ λάβδα ἐγκείμενον; οὗ τὸ ἐναντίον δηλοὶ σκληρότητος; Κ: ὥσπερ καὶ ἂν τυχόν ἀντι τοῦ λάβδα ρῶ δεῖ λέγειν. – “taking out [exairōn] and inserting [entitheis] letter where necessary, and to me that seems correct/erect [orthōs]. And now perhaps we should say a rhō (i.e., hard) instead of lambda (i.e., soft).” The conversation goes on rather hilariously with Socrates asking Cratylus “do you know then what I mean when I say ‘hard’ even though there’s a lambda in it?”

\(^{123}\) And continuing the double entendre. Pl. Crat. 434d: ὅσπερ καὶ ἂ νυνδὴ σὺ πρὸς ἔρμον ἐλεγεῖς ἐξαιρόν τε καὶ ἐντιθείς γράμματα οὐ δέοι, καὶ ὀρθῶς ἑδόκεις ἐμοίγε. καὶ τοῦ ἐναντίον τοῦ λάβδα ρῶ δεῖ λέγειν. – "taking out [exairōn] and inserting [entitheis] letter where necessary, and to me that seems correct/erect [orthōs]. And now perhaps we should say a rhō (i.e., hard) instead of lambda (i.e., soft)."
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letter (gramma), and cannot be a stoikheion as for example in the earlier examples, such as leion and malakon.

However, when asked how it is nevertheless possible that we understand sklērotēs to mean hardness instead of something like “gliding,” Cratylus has no recourse but to affirm that this is a matter of custom, in other words, of convention. Thus both in the dialogues with Hermogenes and Cratylus, Socrates is able to come up with a counterargument to both the conventional and the natural theory of the correctness of names. This leaves us with the question about Socrates’ (or Plato’s) own position in this discussion, and the philosophical necessity of disproving both views on the correctness of names and the accompanying theory of their possible origins. Throughout the remainder of the discussion with Cratylus, Socrates’ position, and therefore the proper dialectical, philosophical position emerges:

As for myself it pleases me that the names are like the things as far as possible [dunaton]; but this is not truly so, as Hermogenes [says], this attractiveness of likeness is importunate, and it is necessary to use this commonplace thing, convention, for the correctness of names. Maybe, and as far as possible [dunaton], it may be said most beautifully when all or most things would be said in likeness [of things], that is, were befitting.124

But this is not the case, and Socrates “would be amazed if names were consistent among themselves.”125 Thus Socrates ends up formulating a distrust of language that has become symptomatic for Plato’s dialectical method and in fact the entire philosophical enterprise. Philosophy is marked by a distrust in language precisely because of the etymological powers of attraction, whether natural or by convention. The fact that any word may seem “correct,” no matter whether as pun or not, is in itself the reason for philosophy’s conflicted relation with language – a conflict that we must see as correlative to the repression of Democritean etê and the entire range of subtexts and undercurrents we have been trying to bring to the fore. As Weingartner formulates it, if either Hermogenes or Cratylus were correct, the method of dialectic as a road to the achievement of knowledge would be impossible. [...] But Socrates’ firmness on this point should not trap us into forgetting that Plato believed

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that the search for knowledge required language as an indispensable means. The positions both of Hermogenes and Cratylus are threats to the very possibility of the utilization of this means.\(^{126}\)

The philosophical desire to escape language, whether into the things themselves, the Real, or absolutes is formulated within these few lines, within the only discussion that properly situates this problematic.\(^{127}\) Namely that although language seems to offer in many ways an access to reality, it nevertheless in the end always fails to do so coherently. The rift that opens between this semblance of reality and the desire for philosophical coherence separates precisely the two approaches defended by Hermogenes and Cratylus: the total separation between language and things, and the total coincidence between them. Thus it seems, according to Socrates, “that it is possible [\textit{dunaton}] to learn beings without names.”\(^{128}\)

From the moment that Socrates formulates this “hermeneutics of distrust,” etymology will always be the signifier of the attempt to cross this rift and reach either form of metaphysical closure. According to Simon Keller, the \textit{Cratylus} is an “attack upon etymology as a form of philosophical inquiry.”\(^{129}\) It is the distrust that Socrates first formulates that resonates in the critiques of the \textit{Cratylus} as “a picture of Socrates in one of his more whimsical moods,” and a “medley of merry pranks”: utter anxiety with any disclosure of the complication that philosophy’s \textit{only medium}, language, always already poses. “That most of these names tend toward the same” should not “deceive” the philosophical enterprise.”\(^{130}\)

Certainly no man who has a mind service do his own soul and himself by turning to names, having trusted in them and and the ones who have posited them.\(^{131}\)

\(^{127}\) Or as Bruce Rosenstock suggests, “the \textit{Cratylus} puts into doubt the possibility of employing rhetoric-free discourse, one in which philosophy might be able to enunciate the truth [\textit{sc. alētheia}] without ambiguity” (“Fathers and Sons,” 386).
\(^{131}\) Pl. \textit{Crat.} 440c: οὐδὲ πάνω νοῦν ἔχοντος ἀνθρώπου ἐπιτρέφαντα ὀνόμασιν αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν αὐτοῦ ψυχὴν ἑραπευεῖν, πεπιστευκότα ἐκείνοις καὶ τοῖς ἑμένοις αὐτά.
Etymological Technique
In his summary of the *Cratylus*, Friedländer comments:

The reader, however, looks back once again upon the work as a whole. The two sets of etymologies – as amusing as they are wearying – were of some use after all, it appears in the end, even though we must not put too much confidence in the method itself.  

We have discussed the entire *Cratylus* under the assumption that it is known what etymology is. Most of the literature on this text also tacitly assumes some understanding of this context. Yet nowhere in the *Cratylus* do we find the word etymology, or any reference to one of the Greek words for true, *etumos*. What we do find, however, are these sets of “etymologies,” puns, or jokes, serious or not so serious, based on convention or on nature. And in spite of the philosophical content of the dialogue, its subtextual reflex of Plato’s dislike for Democritus, the sexual innuendo (at some point Socrates even jokes that “our ancestors made good use of the *iōta* and the *delta*, and not in the least the women who want to save the old sound most of all”), questions of inheritance and fatherhood that together with etymology will provide the breeding ground for psychoanalysis, there is a substance to Socrates’ divinely inspired words, in response to Cratylus’s oracular speech. Because in the *Cratylus* Socrates first formulates the etymological techniques, no matter how far-fetched, that will be the basis for classical philology and modern linguistics. Thus seriously taking up a bad joke, the offspring of the *Cratylus* collides once again with philosophy in the work of Nietzsche, the result of which we have briefly surveyed above.

As Gérard Genette observes, “The *Cratylus* did reveal a gap – indeed even pronounced a divorce – between the indirect (‘etymological’) motivation of derivative words and the direct (mimetic) motivation of the *prōta onomata* or, rather, actually the phonic elements alone.” This gap allowed the etymologers after Socrates, ignoring the warning signs that all of this may well be an elaborate hoax – the many times in which the

133. Pl. *Crat.* 418b–c: ὅσθ' ὅτι οἱ παλαιοὶ οἱ ἡμέτεροι τῷ ιότα καὶ τῷ δέλτα εὖ μάλα ἐχρώντο, καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα αἱ γυναῖκες, αἶπερ μάλιστα τὴν ἀρχαίαν φωνὴν σφύζουσι. The sexual innuendo is already signalled by the preceding *erō*; the *delta* was used to refer to the form of female pubic hair (an upside-down *delta*, see Henderson, *The Maculate Muse*, 146), and the form of the *iōta* is clearly phallic. Note again that relating women with a preference (Fowler translates even “addiction”) for old language clearly genders the etymological enterprise.
whole enterprise is called laughable and absurd –, and develop the techniques Socrates’
divinely inspired pioneering techniques. So let us inspect precisely the etymological
functions he has developed.

After first discussing the tentative etymologies of a few proper name, Socrates de-

cides that these are too treacherous:

Now the names said of heroes and men may equally deceive us; for many are
given [keitai] according to the eponyms of the ancestors […]. It seems to me
necessary we had better get rid of these; but we are most likely to find the cor-
rectly given ones [keimena] in the eternal and absolute beings; for there the
names ought to have been given with the greatest care; perhaps some of them
were postited by a power more divine than is that of men.\[135\]

The etymological apparatus is not immediately made explicit. The first etymology given
by Socrates is the noun “gods” (theoi, theous), which he derives from the heavenly bodies
running (theonta, their) along their heavenly course.\[136\] Then he moves to the noun “spir-
its” (daimones, daimonas), which he, in a rather roundabout way, derived from “knowledgeable” (daēmones). The technique is in both cases the same. “Gods” and “spirits” have
certain attributes: the former go (ionta) around on their heavenly course, whereas the
latter are wise (phronimoi). Socrates then points out two “eponyms”\[137\] that are nearly
homophonous: theonta and daēmones.

But whereas Socrates offers no reason why theoi would derive from theonta, he
suggests that daimones derives from daēmones because “in our ancient sound [en ge tēi
arkhaiai tēi hēmeterai phōnēi] the same name comes together [sumbainei].\[138\] Thus Socrates
conjectures that in the archaic language of the Athenians, in its sound (phōnēi), daim-
ones and daēmones were spoken in such a way that their pronunciation came together or
met. So here we find for the first time the temporal axis of the etymological apparatus,
namely that the origin of a word is often to be found in an ancient or archaic language,
which may even be beyond the reach of human memory or material evidence.

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λεγόμενα ὄνόματα ἴσως ἄν ήμᾶς ἐξαπατήσειεν: πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν κεῖται
κατὰ προγόνων ἐπωνυμίας, […] τὰ μὲν οὖν τοιαῦτα δοκεῖ μοι χρήναι ἐάν: εἰκὸς
dὲ μᾶλιστα ήμᾶς εὑρεῖν τὰ ὀρθῶς κεῖμενα περὶ τὰ ἄει ὄντα καὶ πεφυκότα.
ἐπιστούδησαθαι γὰρ ἐνταύθα μᾶλιστα πρέπει τὴν θέσιν τῶν ὄνομάτων: ἴσως δ’ ἔνια
αὐτῶν καὶ ὑπὸ θειοτέρας δυνάμεως ἢ τῆς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἑτέθη.
After introducing the idea of an “origin [genesin],” Socrates moves on to the next etymology, of ἥρως “hero.” This one is not very difficult, he says, “for the name has diverted [parēktai] only a little from them, it shows the origin from love [erōtos].” The verb paragō, which means to “lead” (agō) “aside” or “away” (par-) has a military connotation but is here for the first time employed for the change or diversion of letters over time; in other words, it is a verb to denote forms of derivation. Later we find a term with the meaning “to bend” (paraklīnō) with the same usage. In this case, it is a noun (onoma) that has diverted, but in another case we find that also a letter (gramma) that can do so. Socrates expounds the derivation of ἥρως from erōs as follows:

Now if you inspect that [sc. the noun ἥρως] according to the ancient Attic sound [tēn attikēn tēn palaian phōnēn], it is easier to know. For it will become clear to you that from the noun “love” [erōtos], from which the heroes [héρωες] were born, it has only diverted [parēgmenon] a little in favor of the noun [sc. ἥρως]. And verily either this says [legei] they are heroes [héρωας], or because they were wise and frightful orators [rhétores] and dialecticians, able to question [erōtan]; for to speak [eirein] is to say [legein]. Thus as we just said, saying in the Attic sound [phōnēi] heroes [héρωες], certain orators [rhétores] and question askers [erōtētikoi] come together [sumbainousin], so that the heroic [héρωικον] race gives birth to the stock of orators [rhētorōn] and sophists.

Considering Socrates’ disdain for orators and sophists, we should definitely read a comical, if not absurdist undertone in this etymological argument, where he derives their origin from the race of demi-god heroes from the times of old. Nevertheless, this passage gives again a considerable part of technical inventory of the etymological apparatus. First, Socrates confirms that the “ancient sound” referred to is in fact “Old Attic.” Then we find a clear contrast between the verbs paragō “to diverge, lead away” and sumbainō

141. Paragō will have an afterlife in the grammatical work of Apollonius Dyscolus (fl. 2nd c. ce), where it is attested several times as a verb denoting inflection.
142. Pl. Crat. 400b.
143. Pl. Crat. 400c.
“come together.” The former is temporal movement forward in time, where nouns such as erōs and hērōs slowly diverge from each other, whereas the latter indicates a coming together at an original and shared source, as in the case of hērōes, rhētores, and erōtētikoi.

As we move down from the divine hierarchy through spirits and heroes, we arrive at humans (anthrōpoi). Here Socrates again gives us an essential piece of technical information, namely about how precisely the divergence of nouns can take place over time:

First it is necessary that we consider the following about nouns [onomatōn], namely that we often insert [epemballomen] letters [grammata] and extract [exairoumen] them from what we want to be naming [onomazontes], and we turn about [metabalomen] the pitch [oxutētas]. Such as Diì philos: to change this from a phrase [rhēma] to a noun [onoma] for us, we extracted [exeilomen] the other iōta from it and pronounced [ephthegxametha] for the acute [oxeias] of the middle syllable the grave [bareian] [sc. Díphilos]. In other cases, contrari-lym we insert [emballomen] letters [grammata] and pronounce [phtheggometha] the graves [barutera] as acutes [oxutera].145

Note first of all that we switch here, at least in part, from the realm of sound (phōnē) to the realm of letters (grammata). This is a switch or confusion, if you are more sceptically inclined, that is characteristic for etymology and is only solved with the invention of the technology of the phoneme. Socrates introduces two new terms, for inserting ((ep)em-ballō, lit. “throwing (on and) into”) and extracting (ex-aireō) letters. This addition and subtraction is a function of time or simply for the sake of ornamentation and is always a “distortion” of the “original word.”146 In syllables the pitch (oxutētas) may be turned about (meta-ballō), from acute (oxeia) to grave (bareia) and vice versa. Note that the case of changing the pitch of a syllable involves pronouncing (phtheggomai) sound, and not letters; pitch accent only became written in the Hellenistic period.

These additional techniques allow Socrates to explain the etymology of the word for man, anthrōpos.

The noun man [ánthrōpos] means that the other beasts don’t inspect, reckon, or look up [anathrei] to what they see but which man [ánthrōpos] has seen [eöraken] at once – that is, he has seen [ópōpe] – and he looks up [anathrei] and reckons that which he has seen [ópōpen]. Therefore of the beasts only man has been correctly [orthōs] called [ónomasthē] man [ánthrōpos], looking up [anath-


146. Pl. Crat. 414c.
The derivation of ἀνθρώπος is thus analogous to that of Diδ φιλοσ. It starts out as a phrase (rhēma) anathreî ópōpe, and becomes a noun by extracting an alpha from anathreî and dropping (i.e., turning the circumflex in a grave) the final accent.

The reduction from a phrase (rhēma) to a noun (onoma) is not always this smooth. Sometimes additional refinement is necessary:

Then wouldn’t it be beautiful if it has [ekhoi] that name for that power which carries [okhei] and holds [ekhei] nature [phusin], calling [eponomazein] it phusekhēn. And it is allowed to refine [kompseuomenon] this and say soul [psukhēn].

The initial phrase here is phusin ekhei, which is combined through the extraction of two letters into the nonsense word phusekhē. According to the manipulations available to us we may extract an additional epsilon, but in order for the upsilon and sigma to change places we need additional refining (kompseuō). A bit later the derivation from Eiremēs to Hermes (Ḥermēs) is called “beautifying” (kallōpizō), and anastrōpē is pronounced “more prettily” (kallōpistheisa) astrapē (lightning). The switching around of letters can also be seen in the derivation of Hera (hēra), which is a disguise (epikruptō) of air (aēr), switching the beginning to the end.

Socrates is not only aware of the “old” sound of his language, he also is able to discern “foreign” influences, that is, modes of pronunciation that are non-Attic (as above in case of the word sophia). An example is one of the etymologies of Athena:

Even better he [sc. the giver of her name] says “mind of a god” [theou noēsin] as if he says that she is a theonoa, using the alpha in a foreign way [xenikōs] for the ēta and extracting [aphelôn] the iota and the sigma.
Again we find first the reduction of a rhēma to an onoma, where the ēta is not simply switched with the alpha, but done so in “a foreign way.” That this foreign way is typical for the Doric dialect is made explicit a bit later, when he discusses the derivation of the word “sun” (hēlios).

It is clear that it would be better if we used the Doric form for the name; because the Doririans call him haliōn. Now haliōs may be according to the collecting [halizein] of men to himself whenever he rises, or because it always turns [aei heilein] around the earth, or because he makes the things that come forth from the earth varied; to make varied and aioleīn are the same.153

Another key point to notice is that overall Socrates does not seem to “count” nominal or verbal inflection when working out which letters are to be added and dropped. For example, the final nu in theou noēsin, different from the sigma and iōta that precede it, is never mentioned.154 Similarly, the change of the ending -ra into -s in order to get from phaeos histora to Hēphaistos155 or the -zein in halizein above appear not to be worthy of note. This seems to suggest at least an intuitive understanding that nominal or verbal inflection is somehow different from etymological derivation.

As the etymologies become more complex, we find an accumulation of other patch-up techniques and multiple options. To get from “foot bond” (posi-desmon) to Poseidon, Socrates suggests comeliness (euprepeia) as a reason for inserting (egkeimai) the epsilon. Elsewhere we find that Pherephatta is preferred over Pherepapha for Persephone, again for reasons of euphony (eustomia).156 Later we find that tekhnē comes from the “possession of the mind” (hexin nou) by adding a tau and removing two omicrons from ekhonoē, where again it seems that the step from hexin nou to ekhonoē is seen as a “regular,” i.e., not an etymological, derivation.157

Other etymologies of Poseidon suggest a first (prōton) pronunciation of sigma as double lambda in order to get from “knowing many thing” (polla eidotos) to get to the

156. Pl. Crat. 404d. Note also that the etymology Pherepapha again explains a name in terms of “touching,” which Ademollo considers a “further point of contact” with Democritus (The Cratylus of Plato, 223).
same name, or to add (proskeimai) a pi and delta to the “shaker” (ho seiōn).\footnote{158} Syllables may be exchanged for letters, for example to get from Homopolo to Apollo, homo is exchanged for an alpha, and a lambda is inserted (embalontes).\footnote{159} Also, letters may be added by “attraction” (proselkō), for example the ēta that is added to phaeos histora to create Hephaestus (Hēphaistos),\footnote{160} and long phrases may be “compressed” (sugkekrotēmenon), such as Selaeneoneaæia into Selanaia,\footnote{161} aeireitē into aretē (virtue),\footnote{162} and aeiskhoroun into aiskhron (ugly).\footnote{163}

Socrates also comes up with a contraption or mechanism (mēkhanē) that allows him to escape from derivations that he feels he is unable to produce: the loanword. “If we somehow seek to how they conform according to the Greek sound, but not according to that from which the name happens to be, you know that’s a dead end (aporoi).”\footnote{164}

Socrates gives us several of such suspected “loanwords”: fire (pur), water (hudōr), and dog (kuōn),\footnote{165} as well as wisdom (sophia)\footnote{166} and distress (algēdōn).\footnote{167} It is ironic that precisely these words are a solid part of Greek’s Indo-European heritage and there not in the least “foreign.” But whether true or false, the technique of the “loanword” as escape hatch whenever an etymology does not work out or seem unlikely remains part of the standard apparatus.

To sum up the technical etymological apparatus developed by Socrates:

- Nouns can diverge (paragō) or bend (paraklinō) and come together (sumbainō) across a temporal dimension. They usually diverge from an ancient (arkhaios, palaios, prōtos) sound, which is nevertheless related to the current language spoken in Athens, namely Attic (attikos);
- Letters may be inserted (emballō, enkeimai, proskeimai) or extracted (exaireō, aphairēo). Addition of letters may occur through attraction (proselkō) and multiple syllables can be compressed (sugkroteō) into shorter forms.

\footnote{158}{Pl. Crat. 402e.} \footnote{159}{Pl. Crat. 405d–e.} \footnote{160}{Pl. Crat. 407c.} \footnote{161}{Pl. Crat. 409c.} \footnote{162}{Pl. Crat. 415d.} \footnote{163}{Pl. Crat. 416b.} \footnote{164}{Pl. Crat. 409e: εἴ τις ζητοῖ ταῦτα κατὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν φωνὴν ὡς εἰκότως κεῖται, ἀλλὰ μὴ κατ᾽ ἐκεῖνήν ξέ ἢς τὸ ὄνομα τυγχάνει ὃν, οἶσθα ὅτι ἀποροῖ ἄν.} \footnote{165}{Pl. Crat. 410a.} \footnote{166}{Pl. Crat. 412b.} \footnote{167}{Pl. Crat. 419c.}
The pitch (oxutētas) of syllables may be turned about (metaballō), from acute (oxeia) to grave (bareia) and vice versa;

• Refinement (kompseuō) or beautifying (kallōpizō) may include any of the above, including switching letters around;

• There may be foreign (xenikos) influence on certain derivations;

• Euphony (euprepeia, eustomia) is a catch-all reason for any change that cannot be explained otherwise;

• A theory of loanwords as final option for words that cannot be etymologically explained.

In spite of the absurdity and ridicule that Socrates expresses throughout the discussion of all kinds of possible etymologies, he does offer a coherent set of tools to approach etymological inquiry, a tool kit that continues to survive, albeit in a slightly more sophisticated form, in many philological and linguistic inquiries. Whether intentional or not, Plato formulated an indispensable basis for his own deconstruction.

**Middle Platonism and the Reconstruction of the Cratylus**

As mentioned before, Plato does not use the word etymology (etumologia) at any point in the *Cratylus*, perhaps again for reasons we have addressed before – namely his philosophical aversity toward the concept of etumos. In fact, he issues a clear warning against the use of the investigation of names for philosophy and thus a clear distrust of etymology as a philosophical practice.

In spite of this warning, the Middle Platonists undertake the task of reconstructing Platonic philosophy, including his view on the correctness of names as elaborated in the *Cratylus* and thus end up creating precisely such a philosophical grounding for etymology. They do so by incorporating views from competing schools, the Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans. Origen of Alexandria describes their respective positions as follows in *Contra Celsum*:

168. For an overview of the development of etymology after antiquity see Mark Amsler’s *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*. The *locus classicus* for the many afterlives of the *Cratylus* is Gérard Genette’s *Mimologics*.

169. Van den Berg, *Proclus’ Commentary on the Cratylus*, 33. Lallot suggests that the etymological endeavors of the Stoics in turn were influenced by the *Cratylus*: “l’expérimentation étymologique à laquelle se livre Socrate dans toute la partie centrale du Cratyle a incontestablement modelé la démarche des Stoïciens” (Lal-
We should respond to this that a deep and obscure debate bears on this topic, that of the nature of names. Are names, as Aristotle thinks, the product of imposition \([\text{thesei}]\)? Or are they, as the Stoics believe, the product of nature \([\text{phusei}]\), positing that the first sounds imitate \([\text{mimoumenōn}]\) the things to which the names \([\text{onomata}]\) belong, on the basis of which they propose some elements of etymology \([\text{stoikheia tina tēs etumologias}]\)? Or are names, as Epicurus teaches, a product of nature yet in a manner different from that of the Stoics, since the first men uttered certain sounds concerning the things?170

The Peripatetics, following Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* and Hermogenes’ position in the *Cratylus*, believe that names are a product of imposition \([\text{thesei}]\), or convention.171 The Stoics hold Cratylus’s view, namely that they are determined by nature \([\text{phusei}]\) on the basis of which they formulate a theory of etymology \([\text{etumologia}]\).172 It is in fact in Stoic theory of language that this term first appears.173 Its meaning, however, does not refer to the “correctness” or “truth” of names, but rather to the “true facts \([\text{etuma}]\) about the objects that they name.”174 According to Van den Berg, whose overview of the early reception of the *Cratylus* I follow here, this is precisely their point of divergence with Cratylus’s doctrine, in the sense that the first namegivers are not merely trying to give the correct and natural name to each sensible object, but rather that they had direct

171. *Ar. DI* 16a19: κατὰ συνθήκην.
172. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*, 1, 144. See also Schmidt, *Stoicorum Grammatica*, 25, and Augustine’s comment: “The Stoics affirm, whom Cicero ridicules in this matter (as Cicero so well could), that there is no word whose origin cannot be explained with certainty. And since it was easy to press them in this matter, if you were to say that it is uncertain by which words you might interpret the origin of some word, they would answer you back that you should seek the origin until you arrive at the point at which the thing coincides harmoniously in some similarity with the sound of the word” (*De dialectica*, VI, trans. Marchand).
173. From Diogenes Laertius, we know of two attestations of the word, in titles of Chrysippus’s works: Περὶ τῶν ἐτυμολογικῶν πρὸς Διοκλέα and Ἐτυμολογικῶν πρὸς Διοκλέα (*D.L. Vit. Phil.*, VII, 200). See also Barwick, *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*, 60.
access to nature and could thus provide superior names. So against Socrates’ distrust, we find Stoic optimism – and thus a blossoming of precisely that which Socrates didn’t consider worth undertaking.

The Stoic influence on the reception of the Cratylus as dealing with etymology and the idea that pursuing etymological research is philosophically relevant may be traced back to Antiochus of Ascalon, the initiator of the “return” to the Old Academy that would give rise to Middle Platonism,\(^ {175}\) and can be first found in the Didaskalikos of Alcinous:

>Again, he [sc. Plato] gives indications of the ten categories both in the Parmenides and elsewhere, and in the Cratylus he goes thoroughly into the whole topic of etymology \(\textit{etumologikos topos}\). In general, the man was supremely competent in, and a connoisseur of, the procedures of definition, division <and analysis>, all of which demonstrate particularly well the power of dialectic.\(^ {176}\)

Thus, Plato, contrary to his own admonitions, is cast into the role of the philosopher who first explored the concept of etymology, and through yet another ironic turn of the intellectual tradition, he was hailed as the “first” etymologist by Dionysius of Halicarnassus.\(^ {177}\) The superior wisdom of the first humans and name-givers proposed by the Stoics was thus mapped back onto the figure of Plato; the etymology of the Cratylus therefore became in a certain sense as important as the etymology in the Cratylus.

In the fifth-century commentary on the Cratylus by the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus we find the first extant interpretation that matches Plato’s treatise on the origin of names with the Stoic concept of etymology, following the developments in Middle Platonism we sketched out above. It is the only extant ancient commentary on the Cratylus\(^ {178}\) and therefore of cardinal importance for our understanding of the transmission history of the text and the way in which “etymology” as post-Platonic term came attached to its Platonic apparatus.

As Proclus’s commentary pitches Plato, against his own admonition, as the ultimate etymologist, the opposite, “conventionalist” side represented by Hermogenes and Aristotle becomes identified with figure of Democritus.\(^ {179}\) Thus the philosopher that made \(\text{etee}\) the foundation of his philosophy and makes an unacknowledged cameo in the Crat-


\(^{176}\) Alcinous Did. ch. 6, 159.43–160.3, trans. Dillon.

\(^{177}\) Dion. Hal. \textit{De Comp. Verb.}, ed. Usener-Radermacher, p. 61, 18–63, 3.


tylus, will proclaim, through the interpretative lens of Proclus, that etumos is unreachable through language.

Democritus who said that names are conventional [thesei] formulated this idea in four dialectical proofs. First, from homonymy: different things are called by the same name; therefore, the name is not natural. Second, from polyonymy: for if different names suit one and the same thing, they suit one another as well, which is impossible. Third, from the changing of names: if names are natural, why did we change the name of Aristocles to “Plato,” but Tyrtamus to “Theophrastus”? Fourth, from the deficiency of similar [derivative] terms: why from “thought” do we say “to think”, but from “justice” we do not also derive a verb? Therefore, names are arbitrary, not natural. Democritus himself calls the first type “polysemantic” [polusēmon], the second “equipoised” [isorrhopon], the third “metonymous” [metōnumon], and the fourth “nameless” [nōnumon].

This Democritean theory of language is compatible with the few other fragments of his philosophy that we are familiar with, in the sense that if indeed the case the “in reality [etetei] we know nothing, and truth [alētheia] is in the depths,” an appeal to the conformity between language and nature would appear rather contradictory. But if it is indeed the case that Democritus supported a conventionalist approach to language, similar to that of Hermogenes and Aristotle, then his absence from the Cratylean dialogue is all the more painful, and the relegation of his atomic theory to a section filled with etymological comedy and inappropriate puns must be read as an insult rather than a hommage.

Proclus is however clearly not aware of the tensions between Democritus and Plato and the philosophical maltreatment of the former by the latter. Nor is he capable of grasping the comical and ironic undertones of the etymological section, because he deals with etymologies from Cratylus 396a–407b in all earnest for nearly half of his commentary, which were definitely of great importance to the philosophical and theological stakes of his project. Our interest, however, is aimed at a few specific chapters that formulate a set of skills necessary for the budding etymologist in which Proclus offers a formalization or at least organization of the etymological techniques that we tried to isolate from the Cratylus.

After excising “people named out of hope and in memory of certain others” from “etymological convention [etumologikou nomou],” Proclus comes up with a list of tech-

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Techniques for those who wish to “etymologize” [etumologēsein]. For example, the awareness of dialect differences in pronunciation and usage, good knowledge of poetic language, and differentiating well between simple and compound names. They should also make sure that the etymology is appropriate and conforms to a name’s meaning. The sixth item is the most interesting, in the sense that it explicitly relates the technical vocabulary of grammatical research with the etymological enterprise.

Sixth, he should also know the modifications [pathē] of words [lexeôn], such as apocope, syncope, ellipsis, pleonasm, running words together [sunaloiphē], removing initial letters [aphairesis], synizesis and such.

In an endnote Brian Duvick traces the provenance of these technical terms:

The term apokopē indicates the cutting off of one or more letters from the end of a word (Apollonius Dyscolus Synt. 6.11 and Aristotle, Poet. 1458b2). The term sunkopē refers to cutting a word short by striking out one or more letters (Apollonius Dyscolus Adv. 169.15). The term elleipsis indicates the omission of a letter (Apollonius Dyscolus Pron. 56.28). The term pleonasmos indicates the superfluous addition of letters (Apollonius Dyscolus Synt. 133.14). The term sunaloipha is a coalescing of two syllables by synaeresis, crasis or elision (Dionys. Halicar. Comp. 6.22). For a discussion of apiffany, the removing of initial (and medial) letters as in susus, see Apollonius Dyscolus Pron. 55.13. The term sunizēsis indicates a melting of two vowels into one without an alteration of the letters, as in poleôs (Gaisford, Etymologicum Magnum, 735–6).

In Proclus’s commentary on the Cratylus we find here a momentary reunion of what had already become formalized terminology for grammatical research and the philosophical pursuit of correct names, whether in jest or as crucial component of neo-Platonic theology. But that is not the only aspect that makes Proclus’s commentary a unique witness to the aftermath of the Cratylus. It also seems to point to a possible split within the pursuit of the etymos, a split that can possibly help us to put some asymmetries in the afterlife of etymology into relief.

At several points in his commentary Proclus does not refer to Socrates’ activity with the Stoic term etumologia, but with the neologism etumēgoreia (etymegory) or the verb etumēgorein (etymegorize). The first occurrence is when Proclus discusses the way in

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which Socrates “analyses [etumēgorein]”\textsuperscript{186} the name of Orestes in Cratylus 394e, and the second time in reference to the analysis of Orestes as well.\textsuperscript{187} What Proclus seems to single out with this term is Socrates’ technique to “first demonstrat[e] the thing under consideration in itself and then, thus, the trace which resembles it and which exists in the syllables of its name,”\textsuperscript{188} This recourse first to the essence of that which is name – a detour through metaphysics, from the eidos to the hulē\textsuperscript{189} – thus could sometimes lead to a less “obvious” etymological solution, as in the case of the name Orestes.

The contrast between Platonic etymegory and “regular” etymology, such as practiced by the grammarians, is made explicit in the paragraph that follows:

In his etymologies [etumēgoreias] Plato, who despises matter [hulēs] but adheres most to the Form [eidous], says that the name “Agamemnon” is derived from his “admirable” [agastos] qualities, not from his “vehement” [agan] ones. The grammarians, however, because they adhere most particularly to the matter but do not observe the form of life [tēs zōēs eidos], may be expected to analyze [etumologēsousin] the name from the opposite point of view.\textsuperscript{190}

Whereas Van den Berg suggests that etumēgoreia is synonymous with etumologia,\textsuperscript{191} Davide Del Bello offers another interpretation, suggesting that “for Proclus etymegoreo seems to allow precisely for the kind of interpretive freedom with respect to etyma that etymologeo strives to eliminate.”\textsuperscript{192} While etymegory would confirm the “argumentative, rhetorical thrust of etymologizing” and the prevalence of “form of life” over “matter,” and ally itself with allegorical modes of reasoning, etymology would reduce everything to the grammatical specificities we have discussed above.

And the latter is indeed what happened. Proclus’s attempt to distinguish etymegory from etymology remained – at least in the textual tradition available to us today – a one-off, and with the shift from the Greek to the Roman world and from paganism to Christianity, etymology lost its philosophical and metaphysical component and etymegorical potential, and following the Aristotelian tradition etymology was subsumed under forms of paronomy such as derivation and inclination, elaborated within a strict lin-

\begin{itemize}
\item 186. Proclus In Crat. LXXXV, 39, 12, trans. Duvick.
\item 187. Proclus In Crat. LXXXIX 45, 14, trans. Duvick.
\item 188. Proclus In Crat. LXXXIX 45, 23–24, trans. Duvick.
\item 189. Van den Berg, Proclus’ Commentary on the Cratylus, 180.
\item 190. Proclus In Crat. XC 45, 23–28, trans. Duvick.
\item 191. Van den Berg, Proclus’ Commentary on the Cratylus, 129, n. 93.
\item 192. Del Bello, Forgotten Paths, 36.
\end{itemize}
guistic framework that saw the development of historical philology and finally linguistics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\footnote{193}

The subversive, etymegorical potential of etymology to undermine – comically or seriously, this is always nearly impossible to determine – philosophical discourse and offer a way within language out of language has, over those centuries never abated. As traced admirably in Gérard Genette’s *Mimologics*, the afterlife of the *Cratylus* and the ideas expressed in enormously varied and full of exceptions to the rule. In another lineage, Heidegger’s disdain for etymology while exploring the inner truth of German language is eerily reminiscent of the Proclean distinction between etymology and etymegory.

\footnote{193. For the development of historical linguistics out of these first etymological explorations, see Yakov Malkiel’s *Etymology*.}
The Socratic Method of Exetasis

Even though, as I have shown, etumos is fully replaced by alēthēs in the literary tradition up to the Platonic corpus, and within philosophy withers away in misreadings of Democritus, “[d]ie Unterscheidung hat sich jedoch in den abgeleiteten Verben ἀληθέειν und ἐξετάζειν einigermaßen deutlich erhalten.”¹ Etymologically, etumos is related to the noun exetasis, “test,” “examination,” “scrutiny,” the accompanying verb exetazō, which means as much as “to examine,” “to inspect,” and “to prove by scrutiny or test.” This verb is composed from the prefix ex- “out” and the verb etazō, which is exceedingly rare in Classical Greek texts. We find it in Democritus:

But things should somehow be arranged so that someone [sc. a magistrate] who does no wrong, even if he vigorously prosecutes [etazēi] wrongdoers, does not become subject to them [sc. those wrongdoers, once the magistrate leaves office], but some law or other device will protect the person who does right.²

And, perhaps not surprisingly, in the Cratylus, where Socrates uses it as an etymology for the noun etos “year,”³ which, ironically, is homophonous to the rare adjective etos, to which etazō is related – another attempt at ridicule?

We could interpret exetasis is that which brings out (ex-) what is eteos or etumos. That which is etumos is therefore that which passes the test, stands up to scrutiny, or may be subjected to inspection. It is in this guise that the older meaning of truth as etumos is retained in the classical language of Athens, namely as that which calls someone to the test to prove his worth. This examination never concerns objects or things, but always a person and his ideas, methods, character, or knowledge. In this sense, it operates in a continuation of the semantic field of etumos as contrasted with alēthēs in epic texts,

¹. Krischer, “‘Ετυμος und ἀληθής,” 164.
². DK 200 B266 = T D130: δεῖ δὲ κἂς ὀφθω καὶ ταύτα κοσμηθῆναι, ἢκως ὁ μηδὲν ἀδικέων, ἢν καὶ πάνυ ἐτάζῃ τοὺς ἀδικέοντας, μὴ ὑπ’ ἐκείνους γενήσεται, ἀλλὰ τις ἢ ἡσιμὸς ἢ τι ἄλλο ἀμυνεῖ τῷ τὰ δίκαια ποιεῖντι. See further Taylor, The Atomists, 230–31.
namely as a truth that has nothing to do with sensory perception, but with the (innate) conditions for perception.

The noun *exetasis* is attested in the Platonic corpus, most prominently in the *Apology*, where Socrates states: “The unexamined life [anexetastos bios] is not worth living for a man.”4 Socrates emphasizes at several points that this examination is fundamental to his vocation; he believed that it was a divine command to spend his life philosophizing and examining himself (*exetazonta*),5 and to teach his students the same method.6 The method also appears explicitly in the *Protagoras*, when Socrates tells his conversation partner: “It is all the same to me, I said, so long as you make answer, whether it be your own opinion or not. For although my first object is to test [exetazo] the argument, the result perhaps will be that both I, the questioner, and my respondent are brought to the test [exetazethai].”7

Classicist Harold Tarrant claims that in Socratic dialogue, *exetasis* is a better term to describe Socrates’ interrogation technique than the usual *elenkhos*, as *elenkhos* defines the other as rival to be refuted, whereas in case of *exetasis* the process is merely an examination of the knowledge of the interlocutor without primarily antagonistic intentions.8 Let us briefly examine this thesis. For example, when Socrates suggests to Phaedrus to question (*exetasai*) Lysias about whether writing is good or bad,9 or when he asks Callicles in the *Gorgias* whether his person would withstand scrutiny (*exetazēi*).10 Socrates himself clearly articulates the difference between *exetasis* and *elenkhos*:

> If any of you argues, and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once, nor shall I go away, but I shall question [*erēsomai*] and investigate [*exetasō*] and refute [*elenxō*] him, and if I find that he does not possess virtue, but says he does, I shall rebuke him for scorning the things that are of most importance.11

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5. Pl. Apol. 28e; 33c.
6. Pl. Apol. 23c–d.
8. Tarrant, “Elenchos and Exetasis,” 72: “Exetasis is the preferred term for the examination process in the Apology for two principal reasons. First, Socrates represents himself as the friend and benefactor of those being examined, not as their opponent. This makes elenchos terminology less appropriate, even though the exposure of culpable ignorance is still very much part of the process. Second, exetasis is specially associated with the examination of the extent of somebody’s knowledge.
11. Pl. Apol. 29e–30a: ἐάν τις ὑμῶν ἀμφισβητήσῃ καὶ φῇ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, οὐκ εὐθὺς ἀφῆσω
Exetasis doesn’t seem so much to be oriented toward proving truth or falsehood, or refuting someone’s argument; it rather seems to be the preliminary work of assessing the argument itself in relation to the person who expounds it. As Tarrant suggests, “Socratic exetasis does not appear to lead to the discovery of truth and falsehood; at best it gives us an indication of those whose leadership might ultimately help us to distinguish the one from the other.” He thus situates it, like David Mirhady, at the center of the Socratic enterprise: “The young men who have the most leisure, the sons of the richest men, accompany me of their own accord and find pleasure in hearing people being investigated [exetazomenōn], and often imitate me themselves, and then they undertake to investigate [exetazein] others.”

However, the most important use of exetasis is not directed toward the other, but directed to oneself. In the Theaetetus, the rhetorical usage of exetasis is evoked as a sophistical practice, whereas self-examination is properly philosophical:

Well, if you and I were clever and wise and had found out everything about the mind, we should henceforth spend the rest of our time testing [exētakotes] each other out of the fulness of our wisdom, rushing together like sophists in a sophistical combat, battering each other’s arguments with counter arguments. But, as it is, since we are ordinary people, we shall wish in the first place to look into the real essence of our thoughts and see whether they harmonize with one another or not at all. […] But since this is the case, and we have plenty of time, shall we not quietly, without any impatience, but truly [tōi onti] examining ourselves [exetazontes], consider again the nature of these appearances within us?"
Socrates here seems to contrast two modes of exetasis; the one gratuitously employed by sophists in their free time as a rhetorical technique and the one employed by Socrates and Theaetetus, which is not turned toward each others’ arguments but “truly” (tōi onti) toward oneself. Thus the only “true” or “real” examination is self-examination, and Socrates’ wording here echoes the proximity in Democritus of ēteēi and tōi eonti.15

Mirhady gives a typical example of the sophistical usage of exetasis in the Apology, in which Socrates does not so much attempt to come up with evidence of his innocence, but rather points to the inconsistencies in Meletus’s accusation that “Socrates is a wrong-doer because he corrupts the youth and does not believe in the gods the state believes in, but in other new spiritual beings.”16 Socrates then proposes to examine (exetazōmen) each point of the accusation,17 but instead of offering counterevidence he starts to point out inconsistencies in Meletus’s argument. As he is apparently corrupting the youth Socrates asks Meletus about those in the city whose instruction he would be acting against. Meletus suggests the laws, judges, and senators of the city. Socrates then sets up the parallel example of horses and horse-trainers, of which there are in fact very few. To claim that there would be so many good educators for the youth and only one who corrupts is therefore by analogy inconsistent. From this Socrates infers that Meletus himself in fact never cared for the education of the youth. Thus Socrates locates a contradiction between Meletus’s indictment and his personal involvement with questions of education and instruction.

Socrates then proceeds to ask Meletus whether anyone would associate freely with someone with a bad influence and whether anyone aiming to do good would voluntarily have a bad influence. Meletus answers negatively, upon which Socrates points out that in that case at worst he must have corrupted the youth involuntarily, in which case a juridical procedure would hardly be the right way to correct his mistake. Here, Socrates points to a contradiction between what the court case states and that which the court case is supposed to accomplish, namely an end to Socrates’ corruption of the youth; thus Meletus is again shown to be disingenuous about his true objectives. Finally, Socrates points to the inherent contradiction in Meletus’s assertion that Socrates is an atheist yet believes in other gods or daimones, whoever they may be.

15. DK 68 B9 = T D16–17.
17. Pl. Apol. 24c.
Thus Socrates concludes his *exetasis* of Meletus, arguing for his innocence based on a contradiction between Meletus’s indictment and his ignorance as regards education; a contradiction between his stated aim and real aim; and a contradiction internal to the structure of his indictment. That is, his choice to focus on education; the action of bringing Socrates to court; and the wording of his argument. This specific tripartition will later reappear in rhetorical treatises of *exetasis*.

Finally, the activity of *exetasis*, which is apparently an activity that also produces pleasure, may even continue beyond death: “I am willing to die many times over, if these things are true; [...] And the greatest pleasure would be to pass my time in examining [exetazonata] and investigating the people there, as I do those here, to find out who among them is wise and who thinks he is when he is not.”18 In this sense it is distinct from *erōtēsis* and *elenkhos*, both of which seem to be of no value in the afterlife. Yet at the same time we will witness a rather quick disappearance of *exetasis* from Plato’s philosophical vocabulary, in spite of Socrates’ obvious liking for it.

This disappearance is effected in two ways. First, because of its considerable overlap with respectively *erōtēsis* and *elenkhos*, in the sense that *exetasis* involves both questioning and refutation/cross-examination in order to reveal the internal contradictions of the opponent’s argument. Mirhady points out that together with *erōtēsis*, *exetasis* has fallen into disuse in the court room, because its dialectical nature proved unwieldy for precise rhetorical framing. Later references by rhetoricians such as Demosthenes occasionally refer to the juridical usage of *exetasis*, which is constrained to a situation in which a person is placed under scrutiny, for example in the following examples from Demosthenes’ speeches: “What is the reason [...] you never once appeared [exētasthēs] as prosecutor [...]?”19 and, “Other slaves one may see called to strict account [exetazo- menos] by their masters, but here we see the very opposite: the fellow, though a slave, calls his master to account [exetazei].”20 In both cases someone is calling someone else to be examined in the Athenian court, to be interrogated as a witness or questioned as a character. Thus its usage has become much more constrained than in Socratic dialogue.

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Moreover, there seems to be a tendency in some Platonic texts to lump *exetasis* together with *elenkhos*, as for example in the *Sophist*, which includes a description of the method of *exetasis* that is very close to Socrates’ deployment of it in the *Apology*:

They question a man about the things about which he thinks he is talking sense when he is talking nonsense; then they easily discover [*exetazousi*] that his opinions are like those of men who wander, and in their discussions they collect those opinions and compare them with one another, and by the comparison they show that they contradict one another about the same things [*peri tôn autôn*], in relation to the same things [*pros ta auta*] and in respect to the same things [*kata tauta*]. But those who see this grow angry with themselves and gentle towards others, and this is the way in which they are freed from their high and obstinate opinions about themselves. The process of freeing them, moreover, affords the greatest pleasure to the listeners and the most lasting benefit to him who is subjected to it. For just as physicians who care for the body believe that the body cannot get benefit from any food offered to it until all obstructions are removed, so, my boy, those who purge the soul believe that the soul can receive no benefit from any teachings offered to it until someone by cross-questioning [*elenkhôn*] reduces him who is cross-questioned [*elenkhomenon*] to an attitude of modesty, by removing the opinions that obstruct the teachings, and thus purges him and makes him think that he knows only what he knows, and no more.22

In this lengthy paragraph, which likens the work of *exetasis* to a medical practice which cures a patient of “obstinate opinions” and “obstructions” – verily a “talking cure” – the Stranger’s terminology slips from *exetasis* in the beginning to *elenkhos* in the end. We are dealing here with a continuum as suggested by the earlier citation from the *Apology*, or we are witnessing the signs of semantic shift in which *exetasis* is no longer considered to be a distinct method, but always employed in combination with *erōtēsis* and *elenkhos*.

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hos, in the courts, in sophistic arguments, and in philosophical instruction. Moreover, Mirhady suggests that perhaps the identification of exetasis with the essence of the Socratic method (which proved lethal to its inventor) led to it being disregarded by future generations of philosophers.23

The Rhetoric of Exetasis
With exetasis as one of the defining aspects of the Socratic method, Plato is also immediately the last philosopher to extensively use the term. Whereas etumos had already been suppressed by alēthēs even before the blossoming of Athenian philosophy, exetasis will only find a marginal position in subsequent philosophers’ works. One of the few instances that it is employed by Aristotle is not in his work on predication or metaphysics, but in his Rhetoric, when he opens with the following words:

Rhetoric is a counterpart of Dialectic; for both have to do with matters that are in a manner within the cognizance of all men and not confined to any special science. Hence all men in a manner have a share of both; for all, up to a certain point, endeavor to criticize [exetazein] or uphold an discourse [logon], to defend themselves or to accuse.24

According to Aristotle, all men share in both rhetoric and dialectic, because all endeavor “to criticize [exetazein] or uphold a discourse [logon].” It however remains unclear to what extent critique as exetasis is part of dialectic and to what extent it belongs to rhetoric, as Aristotle does not return to it for the remainder of the Rhetoric.

There is, however, another treatise on rhetoric, contemporary with Aristotle’s treatise from the 4th century bce, the Rhetorica ad Alexandrum previously attributed to Aristotle but nowadays usually regarded as the work of his contemporary Anaximenes.25 Contrary to Aristotle’s Rhetoric, exetasis is here introduced as one of the possible modes of argument. Its definition is as follows:

To describe it in general terms, investigation [exetasis] is the exposure of

choices or acts or words that contradict each other or the rest of the person’s life, and the investigator must examine whether somehow the speech that he is investigating or the actions of the person being investigated or his choices contradict each other. 2 The method is as follows: see whether, at a previous time, after having been at first a friend to someone he became his enemy and again a friend to the same person, or if he has done something else [contradictory, which may lead to baseness] or if he may in the future do something contradictory to what he has done in the past, if circumstances present themselves. 3 In the same way, see if after saying something he now says the contrary of what he said before, or if he may say something contrary to what is being said or what has been said earlier. 4 In the same way, see whether he has made some choice contrary to what he is choosing now, or what he would choose if circumstances presented themselves. In ways similar to these, take up contradictions in the life of the person being examined with regard to other behaviors that are held in repute. By proceeding through the investigative species in this way you will not miss any mode of investigation.26

Exetasis is thus a complex procedure that investigate the choices, acts, and words – in short, the character – of the person under investigation. Notice again that the emphasis is not on bringing out the truth, but laying bare contradictions and inconsistencies internal to the character of the person under investigation: Did he change his behavior recently? Did he suddenly make different choices? What is at stake are “contradictions in the life of the person,” not so much whether he committed the crime or not. In this sense, Anaximenes describes the same procedure that Socrates used against Meletus in the Apology. Contradictions are brought forth by taking samples from a person’s life and behavior and placing them side by side, to observe contrast or likeness. Mirhady quotes several Athenian orators who seem to use exetasis in the technical sense – itself reminiscent of the Socratic dialectic technique.

I do not blame him for his misfortune, but I do investigate [exetaxō] his character. For the man who hates his child and is a bad father could never become a safe guide to the people; the man who does not cherish the persons nearest and dearest to him will never care much about you, who are not his kinsmen.27

27. Aeschin. 3.78: καὶ οὐ τὸ δυστύχημα ὀνειδίζω, ἀλλὰ τὸν τρόπον ἐξετάξω. ὁ γὰρ μισότεκνος καὶ πατήρ πονηρός οὐκ ἀν ποτε γένοιτο δημαγωγός χρηστός, οὐδὲ ὁ τὰ φίλτατα καὶ οἰκεῖότατα σώματα μὴ στέργων οὐδέποτ’ ὑμᾶς περὶ πολλοῦ ποιήσεται τούς ἀλλοτρίους. Quoted in Mirhady, “The Disappearance and Reappearance of Exetasis,” 406
Even though, in general, objects may not be subjected to the type of examination implied by the verb *exetazō*, there is one type of substance that seems to be exempted, namely things of value, such as gold. For example, Chilon, yet another Spartan, states “By the whetstone gold is tried, giving manifest proof [basanon]; and by gold is the mind of good and evil men brought to the test [elegkhon].” Such appraisal of worth may be subsequently extended to the value of individuals for society. For example, in Xenophon’s *Economics*: “I think that just because she conceals nothing from our knowledge and understanding, the land is the surest tester [exetazein] of good and bad men.” And again in Demosthenes’ pleas: “You are proved [exētasai] after the event to have behaved throughout like a worthless [phaulostatos] and most unpatriotic citizen.” Or similarly, when in one of his speeches Demosthenes puts his Meidias to the test (exetasō) by comparing the latter with himself.

Owing to this proximity of the testing of human character and ideas, and the examination of gold, the verb *exetazō* seems to function here as an alternative to the verbs *basanizō* and *elenkhō* which can also be applied both to humans and gold, or anything else of value, and are equally found in the same contexts. Classicist Page duBois, in her work on the deployment of torture in the Athenian judicial system, shows how the meaning of *basonos* as touchstone for gold, and by extension as instrument for separating the good from the base, acquired its meaning as the torture to which slaves had to be submitted in order to bring forth a truthful testimony. *Basanos* was here contrasted with the technique of *elenkhos* or cross-examination, already familiar from Socratic dialogue, which was used to extract testimonies under oath from citizens, who could not be tortured. Both *basanos* and *elenkhos* were thus juridical procedures to extract the truth (αλήθεια) from a witness, respectively through torture or through oath extraction. *Exetasis*, by contrast, never seems to aim for αλήθεια.

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32. Cf. Antiph. 6.23: “Let him go to the persons who had been present at the accident […] and let him interrogate and cross-examine [elegkhein] them. Let him question the free men as befitted free men; for their own sakes and in the interest of justice, the would give a faithful account [talēthē] of what had occurred. As to the slaves, if he considered that they were answering his questions truthfully [talēthē doko-ien], well and good; if he did not, I was ready to place all my own at his disposal for
EXETASIS

As Mirhady points out, the Rhetorica ad Alexandrum seems to be the only rhetorical treatise to include the eidos exetastikon, whereas Anaximenes, the assumed author of the treatise, had already added that “[t]he investigative species [exetastikon eidos] does not occur often by itself but is mixed with other species and is particularly useful for controversies.”33 Not only is exetasis a mode of investigation that is unaffected by death and continues beyond the grave, it is also always somehow parasitical on other, primary forms of rhetoric, ready to jump in at the moment a controversy cannot be solved by any of the other modes. Exetasis never operates independently but is always already at work in other rhetorical modes. Although this may be the reason it never survived as separate mode of rhetoric, it also suggests that exetasis cannot be reduced to any of the three common rhetorical modes as established by Aristotle, “corresponding to the three kinds of hearers”:

For every discourse is composed of three parts: the speaker, the subject of which he treats, and the person to whom it is addressed, I mean the hearer, to whom the end or object of the speech refers. Now the hearer must necessarily be either a mere spectator or a judge, and a judge either of things past or of things to come. For instance, a member of the general assembly is a judge of things to come; the dicast, of things past; the mere spectator, of the ability of the speaker. Therefore there are necessarily three kinds of rhetorical speeches, deliberative [symbouleutikon], forensic [dikanikon], and epideictic [epideiktikon]. The deliberative kind is either hortatory or dissuasive; for both those who give advice in private and those who speak in the assembly invariably either exhort or dissuade. The forensic kind is either accusatory or defensive; for litigants must necessarily either accuse or defend. The epideictic kind has for its subject praise or blame.34

examination under torture [basanizein], and should he demand any that did not belong to me, I agreed to obtain the consent of their owner and hand them over to him to examine [basanizein] as he liked.” Quoted from DuBois, Torture and Truth, 61.

34. Ar. Rhet. 1358a36–b13, trans. Freese, modified: σύγκειται μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τριῶν ὁ λόγος, ἐκ τε τοῦ λέγοντος καὶ περὶ οὗ λέγει καὶ πρὸς δυνητοῦς, καὶ τὸ τέλος πρὸς τοῦτον ἔστω, λέγω δὲ τὸν ἀκροατήν. ἀνάγκη δὲ τὸν ἀκροατήν ἢ θεωρὸν εἶναι ἢ κριτήν, κριτὴν δὲ ἢ τῶν γεγενημένων ἢ τῶν μελλόντων. ἔστω δ’ ὃ μὲν περὶ τῶν μελλόντων κρίνων ὁ ἐκκλησιαστής, ὃ δὲ περὶ τῶν γεγενημένων ὁ δικαστής, ὃ δὲ περὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ὁ θεωρός, ὥστε’ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ ἐν τρία γένη τῶν λόγων τῶν ῥητορικῶν, συμβουλευτικῶν, δικαινικῶν, ἐπιδεικτικῶν. συμβουλής δὲ τὸ μὲν προτροπή, τὸ δὲ ἀποτροπή: ἄει γὰρ καὶ οἱ ἰδία συμβουλεύοντες καὶ οἱ κοινῆ δημηγοροῦντες τούτων θάτερον ποιοῦσι δίκης δὲ τὸ μὲν κατηγορία, τὸ δ’ ἀπολογία: τούτων γὰρ ὁποτερονοῦν ποιεῖν ἀνάγκη τούς ἀμφισβητοῦντας, ἐπιδεικτικοῦ δὲ τὸ μὲν ἐπαινοῖς τὸ δὲ ψόγος.
All three rhetorical modes discussed by Aristotle are thus tuned to the hearer’s needs, be that a spectator or judge of past or future. This suggests that although exetasis may have participated in the working of all three modes, as is suggested by Anaximenes, it is not directed to any hearer in specific, or does in fact not concern itself at all with an “audience.” It is a method to reveal internal contradictions, to attend to the form of an argument, and does not engage with the establishing of its truth or falsehood. These formal issues may subsequently be used in the argument directed toward the audience, but do not operate on the same level.

Although exetasis is “particularly useful for controversies,” it should be conducted in a “mild” (praiei) way. The mildness with which exetasis should be deployed again shows a link to Socratic dialogue, for example when Socrates suggests to the Stranger in the _Sophist_ that he may choose any interlocutor he want from the boys present on the scene, as “they will all respond pleasantly [praivos] to [him].” At the same time, this prescribed mildness in the end seems to have subdued exetasis to the point of fading away as an empty rhetorical gesture, washed over by more approaches that work better even when used in a harsh manner.

From these readings we can therefore conclude that on the one hand, exetasis is phased out from philosophical discourse owing to its apparent proximity to erotēsis and elenkhos, never appearing as a properly separate, whereas on the other hand in the art of rhetoric, it is considered to be always operative within deliberative, forensic, and epideictic discourse, but without its own proper form. Whether in philosophy or in rhetoric, exetasis never seems to be able to stand on its own and is always dependent on other modes to get to the truth of the matter. Exetasis therefore turns out to be neither dialectic nor rhetoric, neither philosophical nor literary.

Perhaps we may suggest that precisely the free-form, the “non-rhetorical” rhetorics of the _eidos exetastikon_, belonging everywhere and nowhere, is what caused its demise in the strictly organized Aristotelian rhetorical system. But precisely the link between Socrates’ exetasis and the problem of a rhetoric of truth returns in Foucault’s analysis of parrhēsia, an analysis which in turn will bring us, in the next example, back to _etumos logos_.

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Alethurgy and Governing the Self

The series of Collège de France lectures that Foucault held from the academic year 1981-1982 until his death in 1984 reflects his increasing interest for the concept of truth telling, for notions of truth that do not conform to the traditional metaphysical concept of truth as *alētheia*. This decidedly Nietzschean theme concerned what he called earlier, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, a “political history of truth.” In the interval between the publication of the first volume in 1976 and second and third volumes in 1984, this genealogy of truth telling and of different “regimes of truth” unfolds slowly and in a non-linear way through the consideration of the manifestation of truth as a necessary complement to governmental techniques, a theme that he had developed in previous lectures.

And, looking for a word that corresponds, not to the knowledge useful for those who govern, I found one that is not well-established or recognized, since it has hardly been used but once, and then in a different form, by a Greek grammarian of the third or fourth centuries [...] a grammarian called Heraclitus who employs the adjective *alēthourgēs* for someone who speaks the truth. *Alēthourgēs* is the truthful. Consequently, forging the fictional word *alēthourgia*, alethurgy, from *alēthourgēs*, we could call “alethurgy” the manifestation of truth as a set of possible verbal or non-verbal procedures by which one brings to light what is laid down as true as opposed to false, hidden, inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten, and say that there is no exercise of power without something like an alethurgy.

Foucault is driven here to find a word that doesn’t correspond to a specific type of hegemonic truth, but rather for its manifestation in tandem with the exercise of power. He

1. See Veyne, “The Final Foucault and His Ethics,” 3: “Nietzsche’s philosophy [...] is not a philosophy of truth, but of speaking-truly.”
2. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:60. For a concise overview of this period see Chapter 8 of Elden, *Foucault’s Last Decade*.
3. See Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population; The Birth of Biopolitics*, esp. 17: “The possibility of limitation and the question of truth are both introduced into governmental reason through political economy.”
resorts to an exceedingly rare neologism – Liddell and Scott list exactly one occurrence in Greek literature – coined by Heraclitus in his work of Homeric rhetorical theory and allegorical criticism, the *Homerica Problems concerning What Homer Has Expressed Allegorically in Respect to the Gods*. Upon inspecting the specific fragment from which Foucault has borrowed his own “fictional word,” paradigmatically turning Heraclitus’s adjective into a corresponding noun, we find that the gloss itself places us already at a remove from classical Greek *alêtheia*:

> But let us now consider the epithets with which he honors Proteus also: “Here often comes an old man of the sea [halios], teller of truth [nêmertēs].” […] Proteus is properly called “teller of truth” [nêmertēs]; for what can be more productive of truth [alêthourgesteron] than the substance of which all things must be believed to have been born?5

According to Cole, the adjective *nêmertēs* here offers a specialized meaning of *alêthes*, a sense of unerringness or infallibility.6 Heraclitus, writing long after the disappearance of this word from everyday Greek, glosses it with the neologism *alêthourgos*, which “etymologically”7 means “productive of truth.” In other words, that which is not necessarily *alêthes* itself, but produces it. At the same time, Heraclitus’s gloss provides us an indication that Foucault is searching for a genealogy of truth that operates outside the framework of philosophical *alêtheia* within the field of rhetorics. Nevertheless, the series of oppositions that Foucault lists – “false, hidden, inexpressible, unforeseeable, or forgotten” – are reminiscent of the metaphysically charged term he attempts to avoid.

The coinage of alethurgy also appears at a decisive and precarious moment in Foucault’s own philosophical development, as he attempts to shift from the notion of knowledge–power to a development of the notion of government, the conduction of man’s conduct by means of truth,8 as well as the possibility of eventually completely dissociating power and truth:

> [C]an there really be a power that would do without the play of light and shadow, truth and error, true and false, hidden and manifest, visible and invisible? In other words, can there be an exercise of power without a ring of truth, with-

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5. Heracl. All. 67, trans. Russell and Konstan: Τίς γε μὴν ἐπιθέσοις καὶ τὸν Πρωτεά κεκόσμηκεν, ἢ δὲ σκοπῶπεν· “πωλεῖται τις δεῦρο γέρων νημερτής.” […] Νημερτής δ’ εὐλόγως ἔφηται· τί γάρ ταύτης τῆς οὕσίας ἀληθουργέστερον, ἐξ ἦς ἀπαντά γεγενησθαι νομιστέον;  
out an alethurgic circle that turns around it and accompanies it?9

And conversely, the dissociation of power and truth also would allow for an articulation of “non-necessity of power of any kind,” a philosophical–political position that would start from “the point that no power whatsoever is acceptable by right and absolutely and indefinitely acceptable.”10

Foucault starts this attempt to dissociate power from truth, and thus the dissociation of the notion of truth from any form of governmental techniques of subjectification by a reading of Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex, which allows him to set up a distinction between religious alethurgy or veridiction, which belongs to the realm of gods and oracles, and judicial veridiction, which is dependent on an identification between truth-telling and “having-seen-the-truth.”11 In other words, we are here firmly entrenched in the paradigm of truth–alētheia.

In fact, the way in which Foucault opens his series of lectures with an analysis of Sophocles’ tragedy in itself is an allegory for the way in which he will progress through the academic season of the Collège de France, through a “game of halves.” But unlike Oedipus, Foucault is not putting the halves together; he is undoing the tragedy of truth by constantly separating it from its “other halves”: separating power from truth, religious alethurgy from judicial alethurgy, the double subject, acts of confession from acts of faith, confession from aveu, and so on. It is this constant attempt to refine his terms that reminds us of that similar exercise of Aristotle in The Statesman, when he first developed the paradigm, and it is our suggestion that the “final” separation is precisely that between alēthēs and etumos.

But let us return to Foucault’s argument. As said, he starts a series of transformations in his line of thinking that will slowly move away from the paradigm alētheia–truth, while at the same time dissolving the bonds between power and truth. He does so by prying apart the “double subject,” the subject in relation to power and the subject through which truth is manifested. Developing the latter he puts forward an analysis of what he first calls “self-alethurgy,”12 the self-transformation of someone who doesn’t know into someone who knows, and later the “reflexive truth act” and one of its archetypes, the confession13:

a regime defined by the obligation of the individuals to have a continuous relationship to themselves of knowledge, their obligation to discover, deep within themselves, secrets that elude them, their obligation, finally, to manifest these secret and individual truths by acts that have specific, liberating effects that go well beyond the effects of knowledge.\textsuperscript{14}

In this description of the Christian confession one can discern the first overtones of the ideas that Foucault would develop until his death: modes of subjectification that are self-reflexive and independent of power, the care of the self, and the “liberating effects that go well beyond the effects of knowledge.”

The appearance of the mode of confession within the development of early Christianity, both in the context of baptism and penance, marks for Foucault the development of a completely novel regime of truth. Whereas Oedipus’s salvation is brought about through a seeking and eventual finding of himself, that is, subjectification through a process of identification, the Christian subject is produced through becoming “Completely Other.”\textsuperscript{15} At the same time, this means that this regime of truth is not so much concerned with “knowing oneself,” but rather with the “manifestation” of one’s sins before the group of believers, the confession as “act of truth.”\textsuperscript{16} It is precisely the combination of these two procedures that Foucault is interested in: the “passage of the self from the unknown to the known,” the “transit of self,”\textsuperscript{17} which he situates in Oedipus; and the “verbalization of” and “truth-telling about oneself” that he discusses in the context of Christianity:

[T]he appearance of these two procedures, first, the detailed verbalization of the sin by the subject who committed it and, second, the procedures of knowledge, discovery, and exploration of oneself, and the coupling of these two procedures, […] is an important phenomenon, [the] appearance [of which] in Christianity and, generally, in the Western world, marks, I believe, the beginning of an ultimately very lengthy process in which the subjectivity of Western man is developed.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{14} Foucault, \textit{On the Government of the Living}, 83.
\textsuperscript{15} Foucault, \textit{On the Government of the Living}, 161n.
\textsuperscript{17} Foucault, \textit{On the Government of the Living}, 225.
\textsuperscript{18} Foucault, \textit{On the Government of the Living}, 225. This combination is effected precisely in the monastic institution, an institution more recently investigated by Agamben in his inquiry into the notion of form-of-life. See Agamben, \textit{The Highest Poverty} for elaboration.
The Christian direction in the examination of conscience by the monastic institution could not be reduced to the procedures of the Greco-Roman philosophical and sophistical schools, where they were initially developed, as the latter focused specifically on the reviewing of actions, while the former placed the emphasis on the intense examination of thoughts, that is, anything that could distract from the continuous contemplation of God.19

According to Foucault, the emergence of monasticism in Christianity is linked to the question of salvation and perfection, and, more precisely, the endeavor to separate the two: to maintain salvation in non-perfection, to guarantee the effects salvation in a life threatened by sin. He suggests that monasticism proposes a solution for this separation that is the inverse of the institutions of baptism and penance, which are supposed to maintain the effects of salvation in a non-perfect life, namely “seeing whether and how one can develop […] a life of working at perfection, in a system in which Christ’s sacrifice has already been accomplished.”20 And in monasticism, we find, in spite of a Christian discourse that is directed against Platonic and Stoic philosophy, a recuperation of the Socratic ideal of a “philosophical life,” the examined life, the life of exetasis, as well as an organization akin to the philosophical school. The organization and aim of this examination, however, are radically different.

Foucault situates the novelty of the monastic institution in the fact that it couples – for the first time in Western history, and with lasting influence – the examination, manifestation, and verbalization of the self, as in the institutions of penance and confession, with a very strict notion of guidance and direction: to hide nothing and to obey in everything. This form of obedience is, in contrast with the forms of direction in Greco-Roman philosophical schools, is non-provisional, not founded on competence, and non-instrumental. “One obeys in order to become obedient,”21 and in fact, direction itself becomes a form of obedience. Thus, the development of alethurgic techniques that Foucault traces from Sophocles to the birth of monasticism, forms the matrix of more contemporary confessional platforms such as Facebook and the accompanying obedience guaranteed by massive data mining and surveillance.

**Parrhēsia and Rhetoric**

In his course for the 1981–1982 academic year, entitled *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault uncouples the question of self-knowledge further from questions of power and obedience, and with that shift we also find the disappearance of the notion of alethurgy and thus *alētheia*. Instead, we encounter the increasing dominance of the term *parrhēsia*, linked closely with the sense of *epimeleia heautou*, the “care of the self” that would become the subheading of the third volume of *The History of Sexuality*. Again I will give a rather schematic and abbreviated overview of this lecture series, focusing on the precise conditions of appearance of the specific regimes of truth, and especially *parrhēsia* as manifested in the domain of philosophy.

According to Foucault, the care of the self, even though flourishing as an important philosophical concept during antiquity and the Hellenistic period, fell out of fashion, giving way to a mere notion of “knowledge of the self,” the development of which Foucault had sketched in the previous year in relation to alethurgy. Whereas knowledge of the self is acknowledged by the well-known injunction *gnōthi seauton*, the *epimeleia heautou* “designates precisely the set of conditions of spirituality, the set of transformations of the self, that are the necessary conditions for having access to the truth.”

Throughout Antiquity this philosophical theme of access to the truth and spiritual question of the different transformations of the self that are necessary for such an access were linked together, showing, however, signs of deterioration. Leading up to what Foucault calls “the Cartesian moment,” the separation of the care of the self from the question of self-knowledge is situated in the work of, again, Aristotle, “no doubt the only philosopher in Antiquity for whom the question of spirituality was least important.”

Foucault’s attempt throughout these lectures is somehow to recover and recuperate the care of the self as a philosophical theme.

In turn, it will be our claim that the loss of the care of the self as explicit philosophical theme cannot be seen separate from the loss of the rhetorical techniques of *exetasis* and *eteē* as self-truth and the philosophical domination of truth as *alētheia*. Because the

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23. In Foucault’s late oeuvre, *parrhēsia* is worked out in many different directions, only one of which is pursued in the rest of this chapter. For other angles see the extensive readings of *parrhēsia* in relation to tragedy, the cynics, and Christianity in the Collège de France materials, the article “Parrhēsia,” and his lecture series held at Berkeley in the Fall of 1983, collected in *Fearless Speech*.


25. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 17.
loss of the care of the self goes hand in hand with the loss of the notion of philosophy as being able to be “true” itself, the obliteration of what Foucault calls the “spiritual” aspect of philosophy in the “Cartesian moment” finds its apotheosis in Badiou’s statement that there is no philosophical truth.

We may find a correlation between the theme of the care of the self and self-truth in the Apology, which is the first text Foucault analyzes. As we have mentioned before in our discussion of the precise nature of exetasis, the Apology provides a matrix for Socrates’ life of philosophizing that entails self-examination and the examination of others, and the necessity to pass on this knowledge to a next generation:

Athenians, I am grateful to you and love you, but I shall obey the god rather than you, and be sure that I will not stop practicing philosophy [philosophōn] so long as I have breath and am able to, [exhorting] you and telling whoever I meet what they should do, as I’m accustom to saying: “Dear friend, you are an Athenian, [...] yet you are not ashamed for devoting all your care [epimel-oumenos] to increasing your wealth, reputation and honors while not caring [epimelēi] for or even considering [phrontizeis] your reason [phrōnēseōs], truth [alētheias] and the constant improvement of your soul?26

Socrates’ philosophical life as examined life is here clearly linked with the exhortation to care for the truth of oneself.27 In fact, it seems that the knowledge of oneself, one’s reason and truth is in fact subordinated to the care of the self, as suggested by Foucault: “The rule ‘know yourself’ appears and is formulated within and at the forefront of this care.”28 And this care, I would add, is in turn a correlative of the examined life of Socrates.29

26. Pl. Apol. 29d–e, trans. from Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 5–6, modified: ‘ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες Αθηναίοι, ἀσπάζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ, πείσομαι δὲ μάλλον τῷ θεῷ ἢ ὑμῖν, καὶ ἔωσπερ ἂν ἔμπνευς καὶ οἴκος τε ὦ, οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι φιλοσοφῶν καὶ ὑμὶν παρακελεύομένος τε καὶ ἐνθειοκυόμενος ὅτω ἂν ἄει ἐντυγχάνω ὑμῶν, λέγων οἰάπερ εἴθα, ὅτι ἢ ἄριστε ἁρόν, Αθηναίος ὦ, [...] χρημάτων μὲν οὐκ αἰσχύνη ἐπιμελούμενος ὑμῶν τῇ ὁποῖᾳ ἔσται ὡς πλείσθα, καὶ δόξης καὶ τιμῆς, φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ὑμῶν ἵνα ἔσται οὐκ ἐπιμελῇ οὐδὲ φροντίζεις;
27. As argued in Chapter 1, by the time of the first Socratic dialogues etumos had already been largely replaced by alēthēs.
28. Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 5.
29. Remarkably, Fowler’s translation interpolates the truth even where Socrates does not speak of it: “I shall never give up philosophy or stop exhorting you and pointing out the truth to any one...” The truth in question is obviously the one provided by philosophy, and its supposed erasure perhaps an after-effect of the disappearance of eteē.
A second important moment in Foucault’s analysis of the care of the self is his discussion of *parrhēsia*, specifically in opposition to rhetorical techniques. As I have argued above, Aristotle erased *exetasis*, the last vestige of self-truth in Platonic philosophy, from his rhetorical vocabulary, an erasure that we can now perhaps better situate in the general obviation of the care of the self in Aristotelian thought and hence the large remainder of Western philosophy. It is under the effect of this erasure of the *eidos exetastikon*, then, that Foucault signals the “enormous division” between rhetoric and philosophy and situates the development the “norrhetorical rhetoric”30 and the “freedom of form”31 of *parrhēsia*.

We should be careful not to conflate on the one hand this speaking of the truth and on the other the investigative mode of rhetoric, aiming at bringing out the truth of a person, the true connection between his words and deeds. However, they operate within the same field circumscribed by Foucault as the care of the self and both aim at what is elsewhere called “true discourse.” It should moreover be remarked that precisely in the case of *parrhēsia* Foucault has recourse to *etymos*: “[E]tymologically, *parrhēsia* is the activity that consists in saying ever'ything: *pan réma*.32 It is both an *ēthos* and *tekhnē* that are “indispensable for conveying true discourse to the person who needs it to constitute himself as a subject of sovereignty over himself and as a subject of veridiction on his own account.”33

Let us inspect the precise points of differentiation between *parrhēsia* and the “technical adversary” of rhetoric,34 that is, the post-Aristotelian rhetorical tradition from which the *eidos exetastikon* has disappeared. In order to set up this differentiation, Foucault has recourse to Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*,35 in the chapter dealing with the question whether rhetoric is an “art” (ars, *tekhnē*). He states the following regarding rhetoric’s relation to truth:

> I will admit that rhetoric sometimes substitutes falsehood for truth, but I will not allow that it does so because its opinions are false, since there is all the

30. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 368.
34. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 373.
35. In fact, Quintilian references Anaximenes’ *eidos exetastikon*, which he translates with *species exquirendi*, together with a Greek gloss, indicating the rarity of the term (Quint. Inst. 3 4.9).
difference between holding a certain opinion oneself and persuading someone else to adopt an opinion.36

The difference set up by Quintilian between on the one hand an opinion that one holds for oneself, and the act of persuading someone, is rearticulated as follows by Foucault: “Rhetoric is indeed a tekhnē and consequently it really does refer to the truth, but the truth as known by the person speaking and not the truth contained in what he says.”37

This opposition between two different types of truth is a clear echo of the much older opposition between alēthēs and etumos, the former relating to a truth of a correspondence that can be witnessed and narrated, captured by the logos, and the latter a truth in and of itself, a truth that is known without necessary reference to context or circumstance.

Parrhēsia then, in which “there can only be truth,” “the naked transmission […] of truth itself,” can therefore perhaps be recast as that mode of philosophical discourse in which alētheia and etēē collapse and are bound together, as seems to be suggested by the following:

\[
[P]arrēsia \text{ is always a sort of formulation of the truth at two levels. A first level is that of the statement of the truth itself (at this point, as in the performative, one says the thing, and that’s that). The second level of the parrhesiastic act, the parrhesiastic enunciation is the affirmation that in fact one genuinely thinks, judges, and considers the truth one is saying to be genuinely true.} \text{38}
\]

And elsewhere:

Civic or political parrēsia is connected to a different parrēsia, although each calls for the other. It is this other parrēsia that must be able to introduce the alētheia logos into the individual’s soul.39

Within the opposition we have set up, the first level would correspond to alētheia and the second one to etēē. Although we should not discount the after-effects of Plato’s near obliteration of etumos as adjective for “true,” the double truth of parrhēsia would also account for the fact that Foucault, whose careful etymological attention to the terminol-

37. Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 382.
38. Foucault, The Government of the Self and Others, 64.
ogy he employs we should not doubt, seems to conflate the two types of truth whenever talking about “true discourse,” the object of *parrhēsia*.40

Furthermore, in contrast with rhetoric, Foucault claims that *parrhēsia* is “not an art.” And instead of being dictated by the “tactical situation,”41 the context and content of the act of persuasion, *parrhēsia*

is not so much defined by the content itself –[…] the truth – but that it is a specific, particular practice of true discourse defined by rules of prudence, skill, and the conditions that require one to say the truth at this moment, in this form, under these conditions, and to this individual inasmuch, and only inasmuch as he is capable of receiving it, and receiving it best, at this moment in time.42

Thus the basis of *parrhēsia*, Foucault contends, is the adequation between the subject who speaks and the subject who conducts himself,43 and it is precisely this adequation that the *eidos exetastikon* scrutinizes: the “investigation [exetasis] is the exposure of choices or acts or words that contradict each other or the rest of the person’s life, and the investigator must examine whether somehow the speech that he is investigating or the actions of the person being investigated or his choices contradict each other.”44

Also recall that Anaximenes considered the *eidos exetastikon* a mode of investigation that moved freely between the other modes, circulating among them and enforcing them, and that the same is true for *parrhēsia*, “a theme that runs from one system to another, from one doctrine to another.”45 This is not to suggest that the practice of *parrhēsia* is in any way derivative of the *eidos exetastikon*. I am merely pointing out the paradigmatic relation between the two, their circulatory aspect and reference to a notion of truth that is at a remove from the traditional notion of *alētheia*. In their relation to rhetoric they in fact occupy two different poles; whereas the *eidos exetastikon* is included in any of the other species of rhetoric, *parrhēsia* “takes rhetoric up obliquely and only uses it if it needs to.”46

40. See for example Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 334: “*alētheia* […] true discourse” and *The History of Sexuality*, 2:235: “These speeches are more respectful of love, but that does not make them any more *etymoi*…”
41. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 383.
42. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 384.
46. Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 386.
**Parrēsia and the Reality of Being**

In the lecture series given the following year, we finally witness a reincorporation of parrēsia into philosophical discourse, addressing the truth of philosophy itself. And it is in these lectures, entitled *The Government of the Self and Others*, that we can locate the knot that ties together Democritean etēē, Socratic exetasis, eidos exetastikon, paradeigma, and parrēsia.

Foucault locates the site where the philosopher appears as parrēsiastēs, as the one who “tells all,” in the visits of Plato to the city state of Syracuse and his engagements with two consecutive tyrants, Dionysius the Elder and Dionysius the Younger, as well as his friend Dion.47 In his discussion of this interaction between politics and philosophy, Foucault slowly converges on the idea that it is in fact philosophy itself that is the foremost example of parrēsia, that parrēsia touches upon the truth of philosophy itself: “all of Platonic philosophy could be seen from the perspective of the problem of truth-telling.”48

This emphasis on truth-telling, however, opens the question of grounding this truth, the still pertinent question of the differentiation between mere rhetoric and philosophy. This question of the grounding of the truth of philosophy is formulated by Foucault in terms of the “reality of philosophy.” He situates this question of reality in Plato’s *Seventh Letter*,49 in which Plato ponders whether he should take up an engagement as advisor of Dionysius the Younger at the invitation of his friend Dion:

> Wherefore as I pondered the matter and was in doubt whether I should make the journey and take his advice, or what, I ultimately inclined to the view that if we were ever to attempt to realize [apotelein egkheirēsoi] our theories concerning laws and government, now was the time to undertake it; for should I succeed in convincing one single person sufficiently I should have brought to pass all manner of good. Holding this view and in this spirit of adventure it was that I set out from home,—not in the spirit which some have supposed, but dreading self-reproach most of all, lest haply I should seem to myself to be utterly and absolutely nothing more than a mere voice [logos...atekhnōs] and

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49. The authenticity of the Seventh Letter remains a matter of contestation. Foucault states considers Letters VI, VII and VIII genuine, or “from circles very close to Plato himself” (ibid., 210). Stylometric analyses seem to indicate Speusippus, Plato’s nephew and successor as head of the Academy, as the author of the Seventh Letter (Morton & Winspear, “The Computer and Plato’s ‘Seventh Letter’”), whereas others claim authenticity based on its rhetorics (Lewis, “The Rhetoric of Philosophical Politics in Plato’s ‘Seventh Letter’,”24).
etumos logos

never to undertake willingly any action [ergou].

Foucault here interprets Plato’s desire not to be a mere discourse (logos) that is artless (atekhnōs), but also a work (ergou) that can be taken in hand (ekheirēsoi) and brought to an end (apotelein), as requested by letter’s addressees. It is precisely this work that Foucault identifies as action, reality. This reality is intimately bound up with the truth of philosophy:

I think this question about philosophy’s reality is not a question of what reality is for philosophy. [...] To question oneself about the reality of philosophy [...] is to question oneself about what the will to tell the truth is in its very reality, what this activity of telling the truth is, what this completely particular and singular act of veridiction called philosophy is. [...] What is the reality of this philosophical truth-telling, what makes it more than just a futile discourse that tells the truth or says something untrue?

Philosophy will turn out to be implicated precisely in those practices of the care of the self that Foucault has treated over the last few years, the way in which the self is governed, in the way that speaking the truth is self-forming. He then arrives at the following remarkable definition:

[T]he reality of philosophy is to be found in its practices, which are the practices of self on self and, at the same time, those practices of knowledge by which all the modes of knowledge, though which one rises and descends and which one rubs against each other, finally bring one face to face with the reality of Being itself.

50. Pl. L. 7.328b–c: ὅθεν μοι σκοπουμένῳ καὶ διστάζοντι πότερον εἴη πορευτέον καὶ ὑπακουστέον ἢ πῶς, ὃς ἐρρέψει δεῖν, εἴ ποτε τις τὰ διανοηθέντα πειράτεον καὶ νῦν πειρατέον ἐκεῖνα μόνον ἀκανθάμενος πάντα ἐξειργασμένος ἐσοίμην ἀγαθά. ταύτη μὲν δὴ τῇ διανοίᾳ τε καὶ τόλμῃ ἀπῆρα οἰκοθεν, οὐχ ὃ τινες ἐδόξαζον, ἀλλ’ αἰσχυνόμενος μὲν ἐμαυτὸν τὸ μέγιστον, μὴ δόξαιμί ποτε ἐμαυτῷ παντάπασι λόγος μόνον ἀτεχνῶς εἶναι τίς, ἔργου δὲ οὐδένος ἢ ποτε ἐκὼν άναθάψασθαι.


54. Cf. Foucault, Fearless Speech, 24: “Philosophical parrhesia is thus associated with the theme of the care of oneself (epimeleia heautou).”

55. Foucault, The Government of the Self and Others, 255.
This formulation is a tour de force that recasts and reconnects the philosophical concepts of reality, truth, and Being in a mode that has not been demonstrated since Democritus precisely in his concept of \textit{eteē}: reality, truth, Being. But in contrast with Democritus, this \textit{eteē} is not inaccessible to our knowledge; it can be tested, as Plato suggests in his \textit{Eighth Letter}: “That this exhortation of mine is true \([\textit{alēthē}]\) you will learn by actual experience \([\textit{ergōi}]\) if you make trial of what I am now saying concerning laws; for in all matters experience is held to be the truest test \([\textit{basanos alēthestatē}]\).”56 Lived reality is here considered the test of philosophy in the sense that it allows for the matching of discourse with work, of proclaimed truth with lived truth, of \textit{alētheia} with \textit{eteē}.57 It is a test that always carries with it the risk of failure and therefore requires the courage of the \textit{parrhēsiastēs}58: “The reality, the test by which and through which philosophical veridication will demonstrate its reality is the fact that it addresses itself, can address itself, and has the courage to address itself to whoever it is who exercises power.”59

The conception of reality (\textit{eteē}) is not the only manner in which the test (\textit{basanos}) connects to the domain of \textit{parrhēsia}. In his reading of the \textit{Apology},60 Foucault suggests that for the \textit{parrhēsiastēs}, the one who constantly submits himself to the reality test by speaking truth to power, his own soul becomes the touchstone (\textit{basanos}) against which all other people are examined through \textit{exetasis}.61 So the procedure of examination (\textit{exetasis}) and that which the examined soul is tested against, \textit{eteē}, i.e., reality, the coincidence of word and deed, collapse, circulating in and out of each other in the etymological discourse of \textit{parrhēsia}.

The link between the \textit{parrhēsia}, \textit{exetasis}, and \textit{epimeleia} \textit{heautou},62 is further worked out in a reading of Plato’s dialogue \textit{Laches}. Foucault distinguishes three moments in which these three themes are worked out. First, the theme of \textit{parrhēsia} appears right

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58. For a thorough consideration of the effects of testing and basanos see Ronell, \textit{The Test Drive}, who also addresses \textit{parrhēsia} at 284.
60. Foucault considers \textit{elegkhos} to be a part of the broader conception of \textit{exetasis}, see also our discussion in Example 4.
62. Of these three terms only \textit{exetasis} is never subjected to etymological inspection. Whereas \textit{parrhēsia} (Foucault, “Parrēsia,” 222; id., \textit{Fearless Speech}, 12) and \textit{epimeleia} (Foucault, \textit{The Courage of Truth}, 117–19) are repeatedly sent back to their apparent origins, \textit{exetasis} remains curiously without genealogy, perhaps because it would point right back toward etymology itself.
at the beginning of the dialogue, when Melesius and Lysimachus conclude a pact of parrhēsia with Nicias and Laches:

[Lysimachus:] [...] we [sc. Lysimachus and Melesius] think we should speak our minds freely [parrhēsiazesthai] to friends like you [sc. Nicais and Laches]. Some people, of course, pour ridicule on such appeals, and when consulted [sumbouleusētai] for their advice will not say what they think, but something different, making the inquirer’s [sumbouleuomenou] wishes their aim, and speaking against their own judgement. But you, we consider, not merely have the necessary discernment but will give us the benefit of it in telling us just what is in your minds [haplō an eipein] and hence we have enlisted your counsel [sumboulēn] on the question which we are about to lay before you.63

The entire dialogue, in which also Socrates will participate, is thus based on an understanding of mutual frankness and free-speaking (parrhēsiazesthai) and “speaking simply” (haplōs eipein), that is, without rhetorical effect.64 This parrhēsia is invoked in order to create a space that addresses the reason for the convocation, a truthful council (sumboulēn) requested by the inquirers (sumbouleuomenou) from those who are consulted (sumbouleusētai) on the question of the care for children of Lysimachus and Laches: “we are going to speak quite freely [parrhēsiasometha] to you [...] we point the moral of it all to these young people, telling them that if they are careless of themselves [amelēsousin] and will not take our advice they will win no reputation.”65 As Foucault indicates, the themes of parrhēsia and epimeleia are therefore closely linked from the beginning of the dialogue. The truth is spoken precisely in order to ensure the proper care of their children.66

The second theme that is picked up is that of exetasis, the investigative procedure through which the truth is sought out. This mode of testing makes its entrance in the dialogue at the moment that Socrates is called upon to break through an impasse in the conversation, and is once again accompanied by affirmations that Socrates can inter-

64. Cf. Foucault, Fearless Speech, 91.
rogate the participants in his costumary way. “I invite you,” Laches says, “to teach and refute [eleghein] me as much as you please […]. So say whatever you like [leg’ oun hoti soi philon].”\(^6^7\) So Socrates’ method is once again described as elegkos, as well as basanos:

[Nicias:] You [sc. Lysimachus] strike me as not being aware that, whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and has any talk with him face to face, is bound to be drawn round and round by him in the course of the argument [...] and cannot stop until he is led into giving an account of himself, of the manner in which he now spends his days, and of the kind of life he has lived [bion bebiōken] hitherto; and when once he has been led into that, Socrates will never let him go until he has thoroughly and properly put all his ways to the test [basanisēi], [...] So to me there is nothing unusual, or unpleasant either, in being tried and tested [basanizesthai] by Socrates; in fact, I knew pretty well all the time that our argument would not be about the boys if Socrates were present, but about ourselves. Let me therefore repeat that there is no objection on my part to holding a debate with Socrates after the fashion that he likes [hopōs houtos boulētai].\(^6^8\)

Socrates’ praxis of exetasis, here referred to by refutation (eleghein) and testing (basanisēi, basanizesthai)\(^6^9\) is something that takes place within the context of parrhēsia, the truth is feretted out in a context in which Socrates can say whatever he likes (leg’ oun hoti soi philon) and in that way that he wants to (hopōs houtos boulētai).\(^7^0\) Foucault also explicitly points out that this passage relates the question of life to parrhēsia as that which is put to the test in it: “When the life (bios) of the person speaking is in harmony with his discourse, when there is a symphony between someone’s discourse and what he is, then I accept the discourse [...] and am philologos (a friend of discourse).”\(^7^1\) Being a friend

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68. Pl. Lach. 187e-188c, trans. Lamb: οὗ μοι δοκεῖς εἰδέναι ὅτι ὃς ἂν ἐγγύτατα Σωκράτους ἥν περικαταλαμβάνει καὶ πλησιάζῃ διαλεγόμενος, ἀνάγκη αὐτῷ, [...] μὴ παύσῃς ὑπὸ τούτου περιαγόμενον τὸ λόγῳ, πρὶν ἂν ἔμπεσῃ εἰς τὸ διδόναι περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγου, ὃντια τρόπον νῦν τε ἐκ καὶ ὅντια τὸν παρεληλυθότα βίον βεβίωκεν: ἐπειδὰν δὲ ἐμπέσῃ, ὅτι οὐ πρότερον αὐτὸν ἀφήσει Σωκράτης, πρὶν ἂν βασανίσῃ ταῦτα εὖ τε καὶ καλῶς ἄπαντα [...] ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν οὐδὲν ἀθέτεις οὖδ᾽ ἀλλὰ ἀθέτες ὑπὸ Ἀριστοτέλους βασανίσθηναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάλαι σχεδὸν τι ἡπιστάμην ὅτι οὐ περὶ τῶν μερικῶν ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ἐσορθοῖ Σωκράτους παρόντος, ἀλλὰ περὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν. ὃπερ οὖν λέγω, τὸ μὲν ἐμὸν οὐδὲν κωλύει Σωκράτει συνισταρίζειν ὅπως οὕτως βούλεται.

69. Although Nancy Luxon suggests that “basanos simply recalls individuals to themselves” (“Ethics and Subjectivity,” 389), we fail to see how this is done “simply” and question whether the “self” the “individual” returns to is not profoundly affected by the act of basanos itself.

70. Foucault, The Courage of Truth, 145.

of discourse, being a philologist, is thus predicated upon the harmony of discourse and being, of word and deed, of, in other words, eteē. Perhaps this also clarifies why it was, for all those centuries, philology, and not philosophy that sheltered the etymological art, and that a specific, philologically inclined filiation of philosophers started to attend to it ever since Nietzsche rediscovered Democritus.

After an opening of the dialogue under the sign of parrhēsia, then, proceeding through Socrates’ exetasis, Nicias and Laches conclude by yielding the education of their children to Socrates: “if Socrates will consent to take charge [epimeleisthai] of these young people, I will seek for no one else.” This closes the circle of the dialogue and at the same time circumscribes the semantic field in which eteē is operative, albeit in the background.

The Truth of Philosophy
The issue that Foucault now raises is that if there is indeed such a thing as philosophical veridiction, a discourse of truth-telling that is particular to philosophy as opposed to rhetoric, how we are to evaluate such a discourse, or to develop the ontology of philosophy as a discourse of truth?72

Once again, we find ourselves confronted with Socrates’ Apology. This time, Socrates’ defense against the accusations leveled against him, his parrhēsia, will give us some decisive pointers as to the nature of the philosophical discourse of truth, the way in which it is practiced, the rules of its game of veridiction, and the way it operates as a fiction.73

Right from the beginning, Socrates contrasts himself with his accusers, who spoke “persuasively,” yet without uttering “hardly a word of truth.”74 He, on the other hand, intends to speak “the whole truth,” speaking as a “foreigner” (xenōs) that is unskilled, uninformed about the arts of rhetoric as practiced in court (atekhnōs)75:

Now they, as I say, have said little or nothing true; but you shall hear from me nothing but the truth [pasan tēn alētheian]. Not, however, men of Athens, speeches finely tricked out [kekosmēmenous] with words and phrases, as theirs are, nor carefully arranged [kekalliepēmenous], but you will hear things said at random with the words that happen to occur to me [epitukhousin]. For I trust [pisteuō] that what I say is just [dikaia]; and let none of you expect anything

73. Foucault, The Government of the Self and Others, 310.
Socrates’ philosophical discourse of the “whole truth” is thus characterized by three criteria: first, it is not “finely tricked out,” set up, or embellished (kekosmenous). They are not words and speeches that are made beautiful in advance (kekalliepēmenous), rather, they are “artless” and spoken simply, as if by a foreigner to rhetoric; second, his discourse is made of things as they occur to him (epitukhousin), words that happen to him, spoken in the most direct and simple manner; and third, he trusts (pisteuō) that what he says is just (dikaia). There is an inner conviction that his words ring true, that the spontaneous and artless manner of speaking words and phrases conveys his thoughts in the most direct and truthful way. Such is Foucault’s analysis of this fragment. He asks, “why will philosophical discourse, inasmuch as it conforms to these three criteria, be a discourse of truth?”

Rather unexpectedly in the development of his March 2, 1983, lecture, but not so curious from the perspective of the different aspects of etumos, eteē, and exetasis that we have inspected throughout this thesis, Foucault makes a fundamental statement on the conception of truth in philosophy, namely, that philosophy’s discourse of truth, its veridiction, should be identified as logos etumos.

The editorial apparatus directs us to two instances of this phrase in the Phaedrus, which Foucault himself elsewhere explicitly refers to in the second volume of The History of Sexuality. In fact, the Phaedrus citation is a poetic fragment from the lyric poet Stesichorus, who lived in the period between Homer and Hesiod and the first tragedies of Aeschylus, in other words, in the period in which the distinction between etumos and alēthēs was still operative in the Greek language: “That saying is not true [ouk est’ etumos logos]; thou didst not go within the well-oared ships, nor didst thou come to the walls of Troy.”

The same phrase is picked up by Socrates a bit later, when he disqualifies...
Lysias’s speech as “not true”: “And I must say that this saying is not true [ουκ ἔστι᾽ ἔτυμος λόγος], which teaches that when a lover is at hand the non-lover should be more favored, because the lover is insane, and the other sane.”

The implication is obviously that Socrates’ speech, that is, the discourse of the philosopher, is a “true saying” (ἔτυμος λόγος). In his discussion of this fragment, Foucault argued that Lysias’s discourse on love, which is not “true discourse,” can be compared to the different discourses on love in the Symposium: “These speeches are more respectful of love, but that does not make them any more ἐτυμοὶ than those of Lysias.” They should therefore be contrasted with the words of Diotima, narrated by Socrates as “discourses ἐτυμοὶ.” This true discourse of philosophy on the subject of love corresponds to the matrix of philosophical παρρῆσια we have encountered before: “The Symposium and the Phaedrus indicate a transition from an erotics structured in terms of ‘courtship’ practice and recognition of the other’s freedom, to an erotics centered on an asceticism of the subject and a common access to truth.” However, they indicate not only that, they also indicate that Foucault’s own practice should be considered as a practice of ἔτυμος λόγος, in which “every veridiction [is] considered a practice,” “all truth [is] understood in terms of a game of veridiction,” and “every ontology [is] analyzed as a fiction.” In other words, Foucault’s own practice thus becomes recursively defined as producing ἔτυμος λόγος, as “alethurgy,” through the self-referential logic of ἔτυμος, that which is true founded upon the belief that it just and true. And this philosophizing, this production of true discourse, in turn, is an expression of the care of the self, of “a work of the self on the self,” as Veyne comments on the last months of Foucault’s life.

81. Pl. Phdr. 244a: λεκτέος δὲ ὦδε, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι᾽ ἔτυμος λόγος δς ἃν παρόντος ἐραστοῦ τῷ μὴ ἐρωταί ὑπὸ δὲν χαρίζεσθαι, διότι δὴ ὃ μὲν μαίνεται, ὃ δὲ σωφρονεῖ.
85. Foucault, The History of Sexuality, 2:244.
86. Foucault, The Government of the Self and Others, 310.
87. This conception of ἔτυμος λόγος as “true discourse” curiously remains unmentioned in Prado’s otherwise extensive study Searle and Foucault on Truth, which focuses solely on the paradigm of ἀλήθεια. It could possibly be accommodated under what he calls “experiential use of truth,” brought about by inquiry or from test or trial (93).
88. Foucault, The Government of the Self and Others, 98n.
Foucault develops the notion of *etumos logos* even further. I cite the pertinent section extensively, as it is a unique moment in contemporary philosophy, namely the moment in which *etumos* is rehabilitated as conception of truth in philosophical discourse:

I think at this point we should refer to the conception of *logos etumos*, which is found in Plato but goes way beyond the framework of Platonic philosophy and is a sort of general form of the Greek conception of language. This *logos etumos*, this authentic *logos* refer to the idea that language, that words and phrases in their very reality have an original relationship with truth. Language, words, and phrases bring with them what is essential (*ousia*), the truth of the reality to which they refer. [...] *Etumos* language, I was going to say etymological language, language which is without embellishment, apparatus, construction or reconstruction, language in the naked state, is the language closest to truth and the language in which truth is expressed. [...] The philosophical mode of being of language is characterized by the *logos etumos* as the meeting point between the *alētheia* which is expressed in it and the *pistis* (the faith, belief) of the person who states it. Whereas the mode of being of rhetorical language is to be constructed according to rules and techniques (according to a *tekhnē*) and addressed to the other’s soul, philosophical language will be without these devices, without these *tekhnai*. It will be *etumos* and as such it will tell the truth of reality and at the same time express the soul of the person who utters it, what his soul thinks.90

In this citation Foucault articulates precisely the differentiation between philosophy as *etumos logos* and rhetoric.91 *Etumos logos*, although found in the Platonic corpus, only appears, as we saw, in the form of a citation from older sources and in fact heralds from a period of epic poetry and pre-Socratic philosophy, already disappearing in the tragic works of Aeschylus. In his definition of *etumos logos*, ostensibly without much evidence from these pre-Socratic sources, Foucault nevertheless touches upon a set of qualifications that cannot but strike us as familiar. *Etumos logos* is “authentic” insofar as words and phrases that are *etumoi* “have an original relationship with truth,” namely “the truth of the reality to which they refer.”

Foucault even slips from “*etumos language*” to “etymological language,” not only reaffirming the oft repeated “etymological meaning” of *parrhēsia* in the previous lectures, but also, and perhaps unintentionally, referring to a genealogy of a regime of truth as *eteē* that claimed precisely that, namely that etymology brings out the “truth” of words. It is nonetheless a truth that is arrived at *xenōs*, as a stranger or in a strange way, for

91. See also Rojas, *Michel Foucault*, 240–62.
in Plato the *etumos logos* always arrives through citation, be it through Stesichorus or through an anonymous Spartan.

*Etumos logos* characterizes “the philosophical mode of being of language,” in which the truth expressed by it (*alētheia*) is buttressed by a belief, a faith (*pistis*) that this truth is just, that it not only accords with the words, but also with the deeds of the philosopher who utters them.92 Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that philosophy indeed always speaks in the mode of *etumos logos*. “How is it that there is so little truth in truth [d’où vient que la vérité soit si peu vraie]?”93 The *etumos logos* of philosophy constantly needs to be examined, to be tested and retested, a procedure that Foucault discusses in his reading of the *Phaedrus*.

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**Etumos Tekhnē in the Phaedrus: A Third Paradigm**

The contrast between philosophical and rhetorical discourse, between discourse that is constantly attached to the truth and discourse that does not care about the truth or even prides itself in having a non-truth appear as a truth and vice versa, is picked up for consideration in a section of the *Phaedrus*, where Plutarch’s *Sayings of the Spartans* is cited in reference to the “genuine art” that guarantees the constant link between truth and true discourse.

[Socrates:] I agree – if, that is, the arguments [*logoi*] that come forward to speak for oratory should give testimony that it is in art [*tekhnē*]. Now I seem, as it were, to hear some arguments advancing to give their evidence that it tells lies, that it is not an art at all, but an artless [*atekhnos*] routine. “Without a grip on truth [*alētheias*],” says the Spartan, “there can be no genuine art [*etumos tekhnē*] of speaking [*legein*], either now or in the future.”

[Phaedrus:] Socrates, we need these arguments [*logōn*]. Bring the witnesses here and let’s find out what they have to say and how they’ll say [*legousin*] it.

[Socrates:] Come here, then, noble brood [*gennaia*], and convince Phaedrus, father of such fine children [*kallipaida*], that if he doesn’t give enough attention to philosophy, he will never become a competent speaker on any subject.94

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According to Foucault, a real or genuine art of discourse without truth as its constant and direct function is impossible. An *etumos tekhnē* that produces *etumos logos* is supposed to work in continuous consideration of *alētheia*. But in its Aristotelian formulation, i.e., without the *eidos exetastikon*, the art of rhetoric cannot do such a thing, precisely because it is able to present falsehoods as truths and truths as falsehoods, as was previously shown in Lysias’s speech that Phaedrus presented to Socrates. Thus the true discourse that is able to uphold this all-encompassing condition is precisely philosophical discourse, and not rhetoric, which is a craft “devoid of art” (*atekhnos*) in this respect.95

Throughout the presentation of this analysis of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Foucault implicitly references another well-known reading, namely the one by Derrida in his text “Plato’s Pharmacy”: “Let us leave to one side as irrelevant the oft’ repeated classical opposition between the shoddy goods of logographers’ written discourse and the good, living *logos,*”96 he writes. And: “the expulsion and disqualification of rhetoric was not at all the eulogy of a logocentrism that would make speech the form peculiar to philosophy,”97 thus continuing a philosophical antagonism that hails back to Derrida’s critique of *Madness and Civilization.*98

According to Derrida, the question of logography raised by the *Phaedrus* refers to writing, specifically the valuation of writing as bad in contrast with the “living *logos*” of speech. For Foucault, however, it is not a question of writing versus speech but a question of rhetoric versus philosophy, of what Derrida refers to in passing as “the opposition between persuasion [*peithō*] and truth [*alētheia*].”99

And as with Foucault, an important part of Derrida’s argument hinges on the interpretation of *Phaedrus* 260e–61a, as it allows for the establishment of the crucial line between the living logos and the line of fatherhood and filiation, of offspring and fertility, in contrast with the dead and infertile letter of writing. And just as Foucault ignores the more engendering aspects of Socrates’ discourse, Derrida’s etymologically finetuned machinery surprisingly glosses over that unique phrase for “genuine art,” *etumos tekhnē*, which gives Foucault pause.

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98. See Derrida, “Cogito and the History of Madness” and Foucault’s response “My Body, This Paper, This Fire.”
In a way, we could say that Derrida seems to operate in what Foucault has called elsewhere the “Cartesian moment,” in which knowledge alone gives access to the truth without any change in the subject of knowledge.\textsuperscript{100} This seems to be confirmed by Derrida’s explicit reference to the Delphikon gramma “know thyself,”\textsuperscript{101} and the absence of a consideration of the “care of the self” that is employed by Foucault to investigate a mode of philosophizing that would not remain stuck in the paradigm of the Cartesian moment, an investigation that led him precisely to the consideration of the \textit{etumos logos}. Moreover, this appears to be corroborated by an opposition that Derrida sets up throughout his essay, “a pattern that will dominate all of Western philosophy, good writing (natural, living, knowledgeable, intelligible, internal, speaking) […] opposed to bad writing (a moribund, ignorant, external, mute, artifice for the senses).”\textsuperscript{102}

But things are not that simple, as I would argue that Derrida does not merely aim to offset the living \textit{logos} with writing, good against bad writing, as Foucault claims. Rather Derrida suggests that this distinction ought to be deconstructed by proving that the \textit{logos} is always already structured as writing, which he refers elsewhere to as “arche-writing.” And while Foucault recovers a notion of philosophical activity that precedes the classical opposition between philosophy and rhetoric by recourse through \textit{parrhēsia}, care of the self, and \textit{etumos logos}, Derrida assembles a number of terms that seem to undermine the oppositional logic between living \textit{logos} and writing, that turn the paternal \textit{logos} “up-side down.”\textsuperscript{103} In other words, instead of working on projects that are in conflict with each other, it seems to me that Derrida’s and Foucault’s approaches to the \textit{Phaedrus} are complementary and commensurable.

A key moment in establishing such a “third irreducible to the dualisms of classical ontology,”\textsuperscript{104} is precisely through what Derrida suggests to be a reference of Plato to Democritus, “a certain bastardy [i.e., something that escapes the lines of filiation and fatherhood structuring the \textit{logos}] whose notion (\textit{nothos}) was probably not unknown to Democritus.”\textsuperscript{105}

and moreover, a third kind [\textit{triton genos}] – that of Space [\textit{khōras}] – which always is, admitting not of destruction and providing a seat for all that has birth, itself graspable by some bastard reasoning [\textit{logismōi tini nothōi}] with the aid

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{100} Foucault, \textit{The Hermeneutics of the Subject}, 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{101} Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 149.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 163.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 163. See also Derrida, “Khōra.”
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” 159.
\end{itemize}
of the insensitivity, hardly to be trusted, the very thing we look to when we dream [oneiropoloumen] and affirm that it’s necessary somehow for everything that is to be in some region and occupy some space, and that what is neither on earth nor somewhere in heaven is nothing. Under influence of this dreaminess [oneirōxeōs], we become incapable of waking up and making all these very distinctions (and other that are brother to them) – even in reference to the unsleeping [ahupnon] and truly [alēthōs] subsisting nature – and of speaking the truth [talēthes legein].

One wonders what notion of Democritus he had in mind here that would correspond to Plato’s khōra. Louise Burchill argues that khōra should be read as the “ontologization” of Democritean rhusmos. But the only explicit reference to Democritus in connection with rhysmos/rhythm that I have been able to track down, is in the “Double Session” on Mallarmé, which seems to be unconnected to the above remark regarding khōra. It would be my suggestion that what Plato here calls khōra, which can only be grasped through “some bastard reasoning” and cannot be destroyed, standing at the genesis of all that is, in fact carries the overtones of Democritus’s notion of etee, of which, as I have argued before, Plato cleaned his entire discourse up to the point that even the mention of the derivative adjective etumos is only made by foreigners.

Our first clue is here precisely that khōra is “the very thing we look to when we dream [oneiropoloumen],” and because of this “dreaminess [oneirōxeōs] […] “we become incapable of waking up and making all these very distinctions (and other that are brother to them) – even in reference to the unsleeping [ahupnon] and truly [alēthōs] subsisting nature – and of speaking the truth [talēthes legein].” The opposition between on the one hand truth, speaking the truth (alēthōs, talēthes legein), and not being asleep (ahupnon) and on the other the dream state (oneiropoloumen, oneirōxeōs) recalls our earlier investigation of the difference between truths in dreams and prophecies (etumos) and truth


107. Burchill, “In-Between ‘Spacing’ and ‘Chôra’ in Derrida,” 44.

that can be verified through eyewitness accounts (alēthēs). Khōra is the truth we see in our dreams; that is, ἐτεῆ.109

The second clue is that khōra is discussed as “third kind [triton genos],” after the form (eidos) and the sensible (aisthēton). In his article on the development of the concept of the paradigm, whose significance we have already addressed in terms of making paronymy, derivation, inflection, and eventually etymology thinkable, Fujisawa suggests that khōra as “third kind” is precisely the missing link that allows the completion of Plato’s theory of the paradigm; khōra would be the background and context against which sensible object partake in eternal forms.110 It is thus an example of the etymological background against which words partake in concepts.

And third, John Sallis convincingly argues in Chorology that the “third kind” should be identified first of all with the element fire.111 Apart from the fact that in Democritus the soul is composed of fire atoms, which facilitate the creation of meaning through words, and would thus be the atoms Foucault would certainly like us to take care of, the image of fire throughout our discourse as precisely that which Plato desires to consume Democritus’s books (perhaps as final ironic gesture) cannot but enter our mind – not speaking of the fire next which Descartes sits, pondering whether he knows anything at all...112

These clues may be supported by the fact that, as we have learned from Ademollo in Example 3, Democritus’s atomism is clearly present within the Cratylus right in the middle of a long etymological discussion. Yet Plato resists this bastardly notion, this illegally conceived philosophical offspring, precisely because it makes us incapable of distinguishing “unsleeping and truly subsisting nature” and “speaking the truth,” that is, yet again, alētheia. In other words, for Plato ἐτεῆ is precisely that which prevents us from speaking the truth, a position of which both Derrida and Foucault now appear to be critical, albeit through widely diverging, and seemingly antithetical, analyses.

So we should perhaps reject Foucault’s critique of Derrida and instead acknowledge that both their interpretations of Phaedrus 260e–61a aim at recasting philosophical practice. The aim of Derrida’s deconstruction of the opposition speech/writing or good/bad

110. Fujisawa, “‘Εχεῖν, Μετέχειν, and Idioms of ‘Paradigmatism’ in Plato’s Theory of Forms,” 53.
111. Sallis, Chorology, 100–109.
112. Note, again, the title of Foucault’s response to Derrida: “My Body, This Paper, This Fire.”
writing is facilitated by reference to precisely the ἔτεη that Foucault teases out by displacing the Delphic inscription with the care of the self. And perhaps we can wage the claim that the generalized or arché-writing that Derrida arrives at is the flipside of the philosopher’s speech as παρρησιαστής. Whereas for the latter “truth must be a constant and permanent function of the discourse,” the former is conditioned on the “disappearance of truth as presence [sc. ἀλήθεια], the withdrawal of the present origin of presence, [which] is the condition of all (manifestation of) truth,”113 what Derrida previously diagnosed as ἴθα, thus Democritus’s ἔτεη.

Hinging on the allusions in the Timaeus and the Cratylus, and picking up Derrida’s nod toward Democritus, we may thus assume a certain commensurability, if not uncomfortable proximity, between Platonic ἴθα and Democritean ἔτεη, which in turn is connected through a complex genealogy with the late work of Foucault on truth-speaking. At the same time, both Foucault’s and Derrida’s philosophical work suggest a departure from ἀλήθεια and its classical metaphysical support structures as sole philosophical term for truth. But confronting this “other” truth also means to investigate, as we did for the ancients, the relation between etymology and philosophy with the moderns.

Conclusion

Etics

For and Against the Etymon

Already in our inspection of Plato’s *Cratylus* we found that a mockery or rejection of etymological discourse is an inherent part of the Platonic philosophical project, as the result of a profound ambivalence toward the etymon. But we can trace one of the first open critiques of etymology to the text *Against the Grammarians* by the Sceptic Sextus Empiricus, in which he attacks the etymological analysis of words to determine their Hellenic “purity,” a practice in which the Stoics excelled, based on the supposition of an “original” meaning, an *Ursprache*, which would ground all language. According to Origen in *Contra Celsum*, the Stoics held that “the first words [*phōnōn*] [were] imitations of things, agreeably to which the names were formed, and in conformity with which they introduce certain principles [*stoikheia*] of etymology.”¹ And Augustine, in his *De Dialectica*:

The Stoics affirm, whom Cicero ridicules in this matter […], that there is no word whose origin cannot be explained with certainty. And since it was easy to press them in this matter, if you were to say that it is uncertain by which words you might interpret the origin of some word, they would answer you back that you should seek the origin until you arrive at the point at which the thing coincides harmoniously in some similarity with the sound of the word, as when we say *tinnitum aeris* (clinking of brass), the *hinnitum* (whinny) of a horse, the *balatum* (bleating) of sheep, the *clangor* (blare) of a trumpet, the *stridor* (grinding) of chains. […] They thought this to be somewhat like a *cunabula verborum* (cradle of words), where the sense of the thing concorded with the sound of the word, and that the license of naming proceeded from there to the similarity of the things among themselves.²

This usage of etymology is still current today and forms the questionable backbone of all discourses that concern themselves with the purity of purification of (national) languages. In rejecting these techniques of etymological evaluation, however, Sextus makes an argument against etymology that will resonate into the twentieth century, namely by pointing at its seemingly infinite recursivity:

Yet one special objection must be made: as far the word which is judged by etymology to be good Greek is concerned, either all its predecessors must have roots \([\text{etuma}]\) or it must go back to certain words said by nature. If it is derived entirely from roots \([\text{etumôn}]\), then in this respect there will be an infinite regress, the etymology will be without a beginning \([\text{anarkhos}]\), and we shall not know whether the ultimate word in the series of derivatives if good Greek, since we shall be ignorant of what sort of word it was first derived from.4

Sextus’s claim for the anarchy and endless regress of etymological arguments in finding the authentic roots \((\text{etuma})\) of words resonates strongly with the work of French twentieth-century literary scholar Jean Paulhan, who has been a major influence on Badiou’s anti-etymological position, and therefore, by extension, on a core aspect of his philosophical system.

Paulhan’s \textit{La preuve par l’étymologie} sets out to debunk any type of etymologizing, any fundamentally mimetic, onomatopoeic, or otherwise “natural” aspect of human language. Methodically, he works through the entire Cratylean catalogue, but eventually is caught up in the problematic distinction between “good” and “bad” etymologies. The latter ones are “folk” etymologies, onomatopeia, frivolous word games, and punning that can always be refuted by a number of counterexamples. The former, however, give us insight into the history and development of human language. But linguistics and comparative philology are direct inheritors of the Cratylean etymological tradition, and form therefore in themselves only a shaky basis for the rebuttal of the more extravagant excesses of etymology, at best. As Michael Syrotinski suggests:

The epistemological aporia we are confronted with is thus the following: how

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3. See, for example, Lewis, \textit{The Turkish Language Reform}.
can we know true from false etymology, when the very terms which allow us to make such a determination are themselves indissociable from this very history, and philosophical genealogy? Underlying this playfulness, then, is a very serious question. Regardless of whether such etymologies are mistaken or not, they have had actual historical effects [...]. It leaves us with a more radical undecidability, in which it becomes impossible to tell whether a particular etymological genealogy (say, of logos) is a historical fact, or simply a series of linguistic puns, or accidents of language.5

Take for example the following line of argument in Paulhan. In his discussion of the role of onomatopoeia in language, he claims that they only form a rather small and limited group in any language, and that their behavior, usage, and origin should not be generalized to the entirety of a vocabulary. At the same time, he claims that many words that we think of as somewhat onomatopoeic, are in fact the result of regular linguistic developments:

Oui, des mots comme glas, fouet, rire, aboi, galop, cingler nous semblent imiter un bruit naturel. Mais ce n’est pas là une vertu originelle; ils l’ont tout récemment acquise. Les mots primitifs étaient: classicum, fagus, ridere, abbaiere, wlaHlaupan, sigla, qui n’évoquent pas le moindre bruit.6

Thus it seems that the “infinite regress” that Sextus warns us of does not only threaten the etymologist. It equally affects any counterargument against etymological reasoning. For, to argue that glas, fouet, rire, are not “real” onomatopoeia, Paulhan needs to take recourse to mots primitifs, Latin and Germanic ancestors of these French words that supposedly would not be onomatopoeic. But then, the argument would have to continue forever, for what if maybe the “primitive words” before Latin and Germanic, the Indo-European etyma would turn out to be onomatopoeia, whose sound imitation was only temporarily obscured but nowadays again fully revealed in the French language?

Paulhan correctly points out that linguistic science as it developed from the late nineteenth century onward did not want to be reminded of its more speculative predecessors. Indeed, Antoine Meillet, the renowned scholar of Indo-European proposed to reject without exception any mémoire to the French Academy of Sciences that dealt with etymology? This rejection of “bad” etymology is immediately compensated with a search for another “original” language, in this case Indo-European, the publication of

5. Syrotinski, “From Etymology (Etumos Logos) to Translation,” 27.
6. Paulhan, La preuve par l’étymologie, 41–42.
7. Paulhan, La preuve par l’étymologie, 45–46.
a *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, and can also be seen reflected in Meillet’s firm belief in the anarchic, universal, and “perfect” language of Esperanto: “Toute discussion théoretique est vaine: l’Esperanto fonctionne.”

Our question thus becomes why etymology seems to be irresistible? Why does it seem to be the case that etymology can only be refuted or rejected by more etymology, even if buttressed by scientifically certified modes of reasoning, sound laws, paleographical evidence, and so on? Paulhan concludes that the only thing that remains of etymology after its thorough “refutation” is precisely its literary, rhetorical role:

\[\text{[L]’étymologie littéraire […] n’est qu’un procédé, une forme de discours, à la vérité particulièrement avantageuse et plaisante. […] En sorte que pour la mieux connaître et la juger exactement, il faudrait la rapprocher d’autres tours et couleurs de rhétorique, telles que l’antithèse ou l’ellipse.}\]

Etymology fails to pass the scientific standards set by Sextus and Paulhan, while moreover annoyingly reasserting itself each time its efficacy is suppressed or denied. And therefore, once again, we see a repetition of the Platonic gesture that relegates any reference to *etymos logos* to the domain of rhetoric, as something that ought to be foreign to any “serious” type of discourse: “[E]tymological proof […] is always literary, no matter how learned it may appear.” But nevertheless, its lure remains. Why does etymology, and with it the very notion of *etumos*, continue to assert itself throughout the history of philosophy? In his reading of Paulhan, Kevin Newmark suggests that “etymological fictions […] possess an undeniable force that both linguistics and philosophy, far from effectively contesting, actually require for carrying out their own programs.” Even worse, it is a “trap.”

But the question remains: how can we account for the persistence of “etymology” throughout twentieth-century philosophy? Should we really ascribe this to some type of rhetorical fatal attraction, as Paulhan and Newmark suggest? It would in fact be rather difficult to point out any philosopher that has naively fallen into this trap of etymological argumentation such as taken apart by Paulhan. In fact, it seems that in his scathing critique of etymology (besides a footnote on Heidegger his main target is Alain) he directs himself at something we can only describe as a rather simplistic view on etymol-
ogy and the way it continues to function within philosophical discourse. Even if it were just an inflection of the pun, the work of Freud had by the time Paulhan wrote his text already contributed more than enough to make any naive approach to it impossible.

So in the following sections I would like to develop a more diverse set of responses to the challenges posed by etymology to philosophical discourse, of which Paulhan’s is indeed one of the oldest. The first two approaches both take place within what Foucault has called the “Cartesian Moment” and are the result of the persistent conflation of etumos and alēthēs ever since Plato, and both attempt, in their own way, to gain control over the literary pull of etymology; either by complicating or foreclosing its procedures. This issue that has come back in full force ever since Nietzsche reinjected the philological or “genealogical” method, a method that has its very origins in those puns and empty speculations that Socrates formulated in the Cratylus, into philosophical discourse, rejected the repression of Democritus, and showed an invigorated interest in the philosopher as the speaker of truths: etumos logos, etēē, and exetasis first reconvene in the work of Nietzsche, and any reference in later philosophical texts to etymology – whether approving or disapproving – ought to be read in light of that constellation. The third response, which follows from Nietzsche to Foucault, circumvents this dilemma by unearthing and reaffirming the distinction between alēthēs and etumos and attempts to render this distinction, no matter how complicated, productive.

The first response can be characterized by an attempt, following Paulhan, to completely evacuate etymology from philosophy, as exemplified by the work of Badiou. I have already sketched out a brief outline of this evacuation in contradistinction with the work of Foucault, but I will develop this evacuation in more detail, including its corrolaries, namely the relegation of any production of alētheia outside the realm of philosophical discourse, the denial of the philosophical subject, and the rejection of the existence of events of thought. Because of the rejection of etymology, philosophy is positioned in constant tension with rhetoric or sophistry, with the constant risk of philosophy falling into its “trap.”

The second response can be traced back to Heidegger, which recaptures the Proclean distinction between “philological” etymology and “philosophical” etymegory and forces the latter to such an extent that it becomes irreducible to any etymology, either by coining neologisms that have no “natural” genealogy, or through typographical interventions that break the etymological lineage, which is thoroughly phonologocentric. The forcing of such irreducibility may be called a philosophical “event” owing to the singular eruption of a word which completely restructures philosophical language.
In spite of the fact that Heidegger’s philosophical work is often rejected as being etymologically driven, it seems to me that he makes a very conscious attempt to overcome precisely the facile “wordplay” that Paulhan equates with any type of etymological awareness. In fact, his sensibility to the abyss that is opened the moment that the truth or authenticity of words is at stake, has led at key points in his thinking to the creation of etymologically irreducible terms, precisely to complicate a “natural” lineage. As I will indicate, in Heidegger’s work this invention is limited to the ontological domain, the domain of Seinsvergessenheit, whereas in the work of Derrida we can distinguish a generalization of this methodology to the entire field of philosophical speculation. Because of the introduction of etymological accessibility (no matter how delirious), we find that in the latter’s work also the concept of truth as alētheia is thoroughly problematized.

The third response is the one developed, in nuce, by Michel Foucault. It extends an invitation to reject any conflation between etymology and alētheia, recover a mode of philosophizing that precedes the Cartesian Moment, and affirm that the reason etymology “continues everywhere unabated” is at the core of the philosophical enterprise, inevitable: the experience of language. That is, a response toward the development of an etics.

The Destitution of Eteē

As I have shown in the previous chapter, we can distinguish an attempt in Foucault’s later work to once again separate out the different regimes of eteē and alētheia, to recuperate a philosophical distinction repressed, or at least obscured, since Plato. Even though Foucault at several points in his research indeed discusses etumos logos and etumos tekhnē, his own etymological analyses that are often called upon to do some of the groundwork do not touch upon these terms. And although The Courage of Truth presents us with an extended discussion of the different meanings of alētheia, in the classical sense, etumos remains beyond the horizon of investigation. From the perspective of bringing out eteē as a different regime of philosophical truth Foucault’s work thus appears to be incomplete.

It is in the work of Alain Badiou that the separation between eteē and alētheia is fully accomplished, albeit for completely different aims. Whereas Foucault tries to articulate the double subject of philosophy and its double truth in order to reemphasize the importance of the connection between philosophical discourse and the care of the self, Badiou’s intentions are the opposite: eteē needs to be cut out from philosophy so

that philosophy itself will no longer have any alethurgical capacity. Thus the claim that “philosophy knows no truth” should be interpreted precisely as a Platonic dictum, in the sense that it completes Plato’s attempts to eradicate Democritus’s groundbreaking work on etē from philosophical history. Badiou’s philosophy is the consummation of that project, as he himself often acknowledges.

We can thus pitch Foucault’s later work on the care of the self, which is on the “other side” of metaphysics, against Badiou’s work to rebuild the metaphysical edifice. For Foucault there is some truth to be located in philosophy (etumos logos or tekhnē), which is connected to the philosophical double subject, “events of thought,” and the alliance between philological and genealogical investigations and philosophy, whereas for Badiou philosophy itself produces no truth whatsoever. Hence the philosophical subject is absent, and etymology and philology are banished from philosophical practice as mere “historicism.” Investigating the work of Badiou on the relation between the absence of a philosophical subject, events of thought, and truth in philosophy on the one hand, and a hatred of etymology on the other should thus yield us valuable insight into the how the exactly inverse relation functions in Foucault’s late work. At the same time, establishing the intimate and necessary relation between a hatred of etymology and the abrogation of philosophical truth allows us to think through some of the consequences of Badiou’s philosophical project.

Badiou’s 1992 essay “The (Re)turn of Philosophy Itself” may give us the initial coordinates for our investigation of the status of philosophy within his work. The essay proceeds through a series of theses, which can easily be placed in the immediate context of Foucault’s final lectures as the general philosophical environment that Badiou rails against. The opening thesis speaks of a “paralysis” and “malaise in philosophy,” intimately related on the one hand to its attempts to suture itself to other “activities” such as “art, poetry, science, political action, psychoanalysis,” and so on, and on the other becoming “its own museum.” To this double bind, Badiou proposes two radical solutions. First, philosophy must radically break with its own historicity and thus its “pessimistic

15. Together with John Van Houdt, I worked on some of the ideas presented below in the essay “Circulating Philosophy: A Note on Two Apparent Misquotations in Alain Badiou’s Logic of Worlds.”
relation [...] to its glorious metaphysical past,” and then it must distinguish itself from other “activities” by abrogating the “production of truth.”

We can directly intuit how a philosophical break with its own historicity runs utterly contrary to Foucault’s work, which insistently tries to situate the development of certain philosophical techniques within their historical context through the deployment of philological techniques, textual analysis, and etymological backtracking. Badiou is very explicit when he proposes to “tear philosophy away from this genealogical imperative,” and enter into “an autonomous legitimating of discourse.” In this sense, Badiou’s own imperative is closely linked with what Foucault has previously referred to as the “Cartesian moment, [...] when the philosopher [...] can recognize the truth and have access to it in himself and solely through his activity of knowing, without anything else being demanded of him and without him having to change or alter his being as subject.” Badiou’s “Cartesian apotheosis” reaches the full consequence of this moment by completely denying any philosophical subjectivity that could be “changed” or “altered,” while at the same displacing such a change to philosophy itself: “[P]hilosophy in its history is but a desubstantialization of Truth, which is also the self-liberation of its act.”

It would be difficult, if not to say insincere, to lump Foucault in the “anti-philosophical” category of the sophist propped up by Badiou as a counterpoint to his figure of the philosopher. Foucault neither delivers himself to “language games,” nor is arguing for a “pure ‘showing’ of something subtracted from the clutches of language.” If anything, Foucault remains intensely concerned with the figure of the philosopher as guardian of the etumos logos, as we have seen, time and again distinguishing these practices from the sophistical techniques of the rhetoricians. Foucault’s and Badiou’s approaches, however, appear to be complementary. Whereas Foucault distinguishes the rhetor/sophist from the philosopher by recapturing the notion of etêê as other truth, Badiou denies philosophy the production of truths: “The philosophical category of Truth is by itself void. It operates but presents nothing. Philosophy is not a production of truth, but an operation from truths, an operation which disposes the ‘there is’ and epochal compossibility of truths.”

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17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 124.
19. Ibid., 115.
Thus Foucault and Badiou seem to agree that the philosophical production of \textit{alētheia} is a dead end when viewed from the perspective of an attempt to \textit{reinvigorate} philosophy. The essential difference between the two, then, lies in the fact that Foucault affirms the possibility of connecting philosophical subjectivity and events of thought to \textit{etumos logos} instead, whereas Badiou’s affirmation of the Platonic denial of “another truth,” leaves him no choice but to excise subjectivity and event from philosophizing itself: “Within its heart, there is a lack, a hole.”\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 126.} According to Badiou:

The key to this turnabout is that philosophy is worked from within by the chronic temptation of taking the operation of the empty category of Truth as identical to the multiple procedures of the production of truths. [...] The disaster of philosophical thought is topical when philosophy is presented as being not a seizing of truths, but a \textit{situation of truth}.\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 128–29.}

Again we have to ask: is Foucault’s rehabilitation of \textit{etumos logos} indeed giving in to such as “chronic temptation,” or is it rather an attempt to ground philosophical practice on a form of life that is irreducible to any of the truth procedures or activities distinguished by Badiou? Does Foucault give up “on the multiple of truths, the heterogeneity of their procedures”?\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 129.} Rather than giving up on their multitude, he explicitly affirms the heterogeneity of their procedures and his final lecture series at the Collège de France can be read as exactly an exploration of that heterogeneity, albeit within practices of the self of which philosophy itself is a part. Does Foucault insist on a single “locus of Truth”? Again we can respond that he does anything but that. In fact, instead of insistently emphasizing the primacy of truth as \textit{alētheia}, which is always implicit in Badiou’s usage of the term, he suggests the investigation of those other modes of producing true discourse once known as \textit{etumos logos}. Again, this discourse is anything but essentializing or “sacralizing” truth, radically opening up the “multiplicity of the names of Truth.”\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 130.} And would anyone who has engaged the radically open, curious, and meticulous thinking of Foucault refer to it as “an obscure and tyrannical commandment”?\footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 130.}

In other words, in his otherwise immensely significant project to reground truth in philosophy Badiou seems to have been overcome by a certain type of “Platonic blindness” that is not completely without philosophical consequence. For it is a direct inheritance

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 126.}
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\item \footnote{Badiou, \textit{Manifesto for Philosophy}, 130.}
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of Plato’s violent desire to burn all of Democritus’s books. It is a blindness that is the
traumatic effect of the terror that such a statement inflicts. Perhaps – may we phrase it
such? – Badiou’s philosophy has been traumatized by Plato’s hatred for Democritus, and
ejecting truth from philosophy a psychotic gesture.

Correlative to a complete rejection of the possibility of truth in philosophy is Ba-
diou’s complete rejection of etymology. Badiou follows here the lead of Paulhan,29 but by
giving it an interesting, rather nationalistic twist.

France has always scorned what Paulhan called “proof by etymology” [...] In spite of the most vehement imported attempts, nothing has ever been able to
bend philosophy in France to this German hard labour which opens up words,
traces them back to their indo-European roots, enjoins them to speak Being and Community.30

“Etymological” German – of Nietzsche and Heidegger – is here contrasted with the “non-
etymological” French in a nationalist reflex that we already find in Saussure. As Eiland
suggests, “the German usually claims greater sensitivity to roots in his words than the
Frenchman or Englishman [...]. Saussure has observed that [...] in French, [...] ‘feeling
for roots scarcely exists.’”31 We find ourselves again in the ironic situation that precise-
ly the ability to distinguish between languages, as languages that are coherent wholes
connected to coherent nation-states with clearly defined boundaries – an ability that
Badiou relies on when he speaks of “French” – is again only a possibility under the as-
sumption of all kinds of historical-linguistical precepts that derive, genealogically, from
the very type of etymological thinking that he aims to dislodge.

29. Syrotinski, “From Etymology (Etumos Logos) to Translation,” 26; “Translating the
Subject à la française,” 32.
Logos) to Translation,” 26. It seems as if, in this paean on the French tongue, Ba-
diou claims it as the perfect language for his own philosophy: “Son champ sé-
mantique est étroit, l’abstraction lui est naturelle. Aussi bien, ni l’empirisme ni
même la phénoménologie ne lui conviennent. C’est une langue de la décision, du
principe et de la conséquence. Et ce n’est pas non plus une langue de l’hésitation,
du repentir, de la lente remontée interrogative vers le point obscur et saturé des
origines. Au vrai, c’est une langue que la question impatiente, et qui se hâte vers
l’affirmation, la solution, l’analyse terminée” (468). It is unfortunately beyond
the purview of this thesis to flesh out the enormous consequences of these state-
ments for the analysis of Badiou’s philosophical work.
31. Eiland, “Heidegger’s Etymological Web,” 42. Similar claims are made in Wandrusz-
ka, “Etymologie und Philosophie.”
In fact, Badiou’s reference to Paulhan’s critique of the “proof by etymology” is a little too facile. Although Paulhan points out, in *La preuve par l’étymologie*, that “etymology” is a recursive term that “is its own advertisement,” it can also not be easily dismissed. In fact, its resistance – in spite of all the scientific linguistics evidence – has been remarkable. This resistance has nothing to do with any rational or scientific argument, but rather with the fact that etymology is *literary* in nature and as “rhetorical ploy” has proved inevitable even for the most rigorously non-literary philosopher, abdicating “writing well,” and so on. No matter whether French or German, philosophy always already falls prey to etymology, and the only way in which to excise its influence is to abdicate philosophy’s access to truth altogether – precisely the sacrifice made by Badiou.

The ambivalent position of philosophy, constantly pushing back against a rhetorical strategy that is already at work whenever words even appear to be in relation, is picked up by Blanchot in response to Paulhan’s work, which is, “remarkable, even astonishing, for its tenacious refusal either to legitimate or to dismiss the philosophical relation of concealment and disclosure, of forgetting and remembering that Heidegger finds at play in the word *aletheia*.” The truth of philosophies that affirm etymology as constituent part of philosophical discourse, is the product that very same discourse. Like etymology’s definition, it is recursive:

A writer who, like Heidegger, goes back to the root of certain words which are said to be fundamental, and receives from this root an impulse to develop variations upon certain thoughts and words, makes the idea that there is in the

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34. For example, in the way Kant gave up “writing well” for the sake of philosophy. See Ronell, *Stupidity*, 284–85.
35. Badiou is, in fact, a philosophical counterpart of the “terrorist literature” discussed by Paulhan in *Les Fleurs des Tarbes*, and it is in this literary context that also his analysis of etymology can be squarely placed. Etymology is to philosophy what “rhetorics” and “an excessive concern with language” is to literature – and nothing, Paulhan claims, but an “optical illusion.” Perhaps, we can speak of “terrorist philosophy” when philosophy attempts to exclude any usage of etymology – and thus its own truth. See Syrotinski, *Defying Gravity*, ch. 3 “Blanchot reading Paulhan,” esp. 81ff.
36. Newmark, “On Parole,” 83, and “The real interest of this text, and one that Blanchot’s reading of Heidegger pursues and amplifies, is the way in which it underscores that proof by etymology – the search for and validation of the “true’ meaning of words by means of nonscientific procedures of knowledge production – continues everywhere unabated despite the demonstrated inadequacy of its premises as well as its conclusions” (95).
root a strength that works and that incites to work, “true.”

**Etymological Irreducibility**

Of any twentieth-century philosopher, the work of Martin Heidegger has most often been criticized and attacked for being “etymologizing,” in spite of the arguments that Heidegger himself brought to bear against etymology itself. Besides Paulhan’s claims that we have touched upon above, Arthur Adkins finds that “the whole fantastic fabric of the *Introduction to Metaphysics* is manufactured by embroidering etymologies,” and Mario Wandruszka rhetorically asks “whether perhaps the seductive ease of the etymological motivation in German is not responsible for the fact that in Heidegger the progress of thought is determined to a great extent by the *figura etymologica* (or *pseudo etymologica*), whose verbal magic becomes all the more inescapable the more consistently it is applied.”

As I have tried to sketch out in the previous examples, the relation between philosophy and etymology, and especially the etymology of etymology, the fractured and interrupted lineage of *eteē*, *exetasis*, and *etumos*, is not simply that of a self-contained and coherent discourse and a figure that could be easily separated from such a rhetorically pristine body. Partially incorporated and partially expelled, etymology and its derivatives haunt philosophy because they continue to remind us “that there is language.” At the same time, Heidegger himself is keen on removing any type of “etymology” from his own work, attempting to excise precisely the “word-mysticism” that others accuse him of. Gadamer suggests that we should perhaps downplay the importance of the etymologies in Heidegger, which would not be “proofs but achievements preparatory to conceptual analysis” because they “are abstractions achieved not by language but by linguistic science.” But the entire problem is rather that Heidegger himself already rejects any of the etymologies achieved by “linguistic science,” and aims somehow beyond them.

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41. For an extensive meditation on this fact, see Fynsk, *Language and Relation*.
42. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 103–4. He adds in a footnote: “This obvious point must be made against those who seek to criticize the truth of Heidegger’s statements because of his etymological manner of proceeding” (162, n. 4).
But what does it mean to reject Heidegger’s work as “etymologizing”? Such a rejection certainly does not increase our understanding of how etymology – in whichever form – works in Heidegger’s thinking. For Heidegger seems to treat etymology as a way out of metaphysical dualism and transcendentalism, to precisely uncover that which is hidden behind the unhiddenness of alētheia, as a point of access to a different, “pre-philosophical” kind of understanding:

In citing such [etymological] evidence we must avoid uninhibited word-mysticism. Nevertheless, the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the force of the most elemental words in which Dasein expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from levelling them off to that unintelligibility which functions in turn as a source of pseudo-problems.43

The “force of the most elemental words” that Heidegger here emphatically refers to resonates with Newmark’s earlier comment about the “force” of etymological fictions, and has a lineage that reaches back to the distinction between gramma and stoikheion. Yet remarkably, Heidegger never interrogates the etymology of etymological force itself. Blanchot is very well aware of this when he suggests that “[e]tymology, or a mode of thought authorized by, or elaborated through etymological considerations, opens a realm of questions which it seems, however, to neglect, as if prejudices we are unwilling or unable to recognize were what attracted us to etymology.”44 One of those “prejudices,” is precisely the Platonic favoring of alētheia over etumos and the latter’s suppression at the moment that Plato erected the great edifice of metaphysics. Etymology therefore seems to be an important tool in Heidegger’s project of the Destruktion of occidental metaphysics. As Joseph Kockelmans suggests:

It seems to me that perhaps one should admit that Heidegger indeed engages in some form of etymology. Yet this is extremely seldom a scientific, historical, or linguistic etymology, although he never denied the latter’s correctness and importance. His own work in “etymology” is strictly philosophical in character, and is concerned with an effort to let “basic” philosophical words once again be themselves […]. Heidegger’s etymology is thus concerned with promoting the happening of the truth. […] His effort is, indeed, concerned with the “true” meaning of these words; yet this “true” meaning is never claimed to be the primitive or historically first meaning of those words.45

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44. Blanchot, The Writing of the Disaster, 93.
In this passage Kockelmans makes a clear differentiation between on the one hand the “happening of the truth,” i.e., alētheia, and the “true’ meaning of these words” which cannot be constructed as historically or temporally primary – etumos. However, the absence of such primacy also implies that the sheer force of etymology’s “infinite regress” cannot possibly be at the same time the foundation of a new kind of thinking; as one of the most effective tools, an “anti-methodological method,”46 to overcome metaphysics, it is intrinsically bound up with it. Etymology is prodigious in its production of unsettling associations and for that very reason can never be thought separately from that which it unsettles. This implies that in order for Heidegger to make a next step, he needs to ditch etymology itself and formulate (or, perhaps, “invent”) terms that problematize etymology itself. They problematize etymology in the sense that they disrupt the genealogical reason that allows us to return to any “origin.”

Recall that we already encountered one of Heidegger’s techniques aimed at etymological irreducibility, namely the introduction of the hyphen in a-lētheia. To repeat Caputo, “[t]he hyphen breaks up its nominal unity, prevents it from belonging to a particular, epochal, historical language (just as does crossing out of Sein, or the attempt to respell Sein as Seyn).”47 We will proceed with an analysis of the conditions of appearance of these latter preceded by a fourth term that I would like to add to a-lētheia, Sein, and Seyn, namely, kzomil.

1. Kzomil. “Kzomil” is a word that makes a singular, and rather mysterious, appearance in Heidegger’s oeuvre, namely in his Introduction to Metaphysics, in which, according to Derrida, “Heidegger renounces the project of and the word ontology.”48 We find ourselves here at the starting point of a philosophical development that later, as we have seen, gave rise to the word a-lētheia. But in order to get himself started, Heidegger needs to offset the entire history of Being against a word that is utterly meaningless.

“[T]o be” [Sein], when written and seen, is different at once from “kzomil.” This written mark is also a sequence of letters, of course, but one by which we are unable to think anything. There is no such thing as an empty word – only one that is worn out, yet remains full. The word “Being” retains its naming force. The slogan, “Away from this empty word ‘Being,’ towards the particular beings!” is not only an overhasty but a highly questionable slogan.49

48. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 22.
Why is Sein here offset with this kzmil, “the word by which we are unable to think anything”? Heidegger, who otherwise is able to access the minute details and inflections of words, up to and including the word Sein, deriving it in multiple ways throughout the Introduction, here establishes something of the differend of Sein. Kzmil is a truly empty word in the sense that it doesn’t give anything to thought, yet “there is no such thing as an empty word,” leaving aside the problematic question of how to translate it from German to English – is the difference between kzmil and Sein different from the difference between kzmil and Being?

What could have pushed Heidegger to suggest this so-called empty word that nevertheless by and large seems to follow the syllabic structure of German (contrary to for example “okzmli” or “zkmiol”)? In order to find out we need to backtrack slightly to Heidegger’s initial investigation of the word Being. In the chapter preceding the one in which he coins kzmil to offset Being as “meaningful,” he tries in vain to ground the meaning of Being in etymological or grammatical considerations. Heidegger starts out the chapter “On the Grammar and Etymology of the Word ‘Being’” with the conditional statement that “[i]f for us Being is just an empty word and an evanescent meaning, then we must at least try to grasp fully this last remnant of a connection.” What follows is an aporetic consideration of the determination of Sein as a grammatical form, into the realm of the etymology of the different stems of the Indo-European words for “to be.” He concludes:

1. The grammatical examination of the form of the word had this result: in the infinitive, the word’s definite modes of meaning are no longer in effect; they are blurred. [...] 2. The etymological examination of the meaning of the word had this result: what we today, and for a long time previously, have called by the name “Being” is, as regards its meaning, a blending that levels off three different stem meanings [...]. This blurring and blending go hand in hand. The combination of these two processes provides a sufficient explanation for the fact from which we set out: that the word “to be” is empty and its meaning is evanescent.51

Having failed to ground the meaning of Being in any etymological or grammatical categories, Heidegger exclaims “away from the empty schema of this word ‘Being’!” And escaping this emptiness he invents the word kzmil, which “when written and seen, is

52. Heidegger, Introduction to Metaphysics, 80.
different at once”\(^{53}\) from Being. In other words, in order to escape the emptiness pervading grammatical and etymological categories, Heidegger coins a word that has precisely no etymology, and which therefore can only be “written and seen” but definitely not understood or inscribed in the history of Being. Thus, he saves Being from utter incomprension, because it is different from _kzomil_. And even though its grammar and etymology remain unhelpful to us, it is at least not irreducible within these categories. “There is no such thing as an empty word. […] The word ‘Being’ retains its naming force.”\(^{54}\) Indeed, the fate of language as a whole depends on the meaning of Being that is guaranteed by _kzomil_: “Suppose that there were no indeterminate meaning Being, and that we did not understand what this meaning signifies. Then what? Would there just be one noun and verb less in our language? No. Then there would be no language at all.”\(^{55}\)

### 2. Seyn

As a consequence of the _Destruktion_ of ontologie initiated in the _Introduction to Metaphysics_, Heidegger employs the eighteenth-century orthography _Seyn\(^\text{56}\)_ in his _Contributions to Philosophy_. Although this spelling appears previously in his oeuvre, for example in his lectures on Hölderlin, it is in the _Contributions_ that he treats it at length. The orthography _Seyn_ is used in order to “indicate that being [_Sein_] is no longer thought metaphysically.”\(^{57}\) The Translator’s Foreword to the English tradition should already make us aware of the fact that Heidegger has made significant progress in moving beyond the grammatical and etymological, or even logical tout court, examination of Being, in that the translators spend a significant amount of pages on what they call “families of words that gather around one central word – families that are recognizable in their phenomenological kinship.”\(^{58}\) What is curious and remains unaddressed in the remainder of the foreword, is their consistent use of “phenomenological” instead of “etymological” whenever they speak of such kinships,\(^{59}\) which a less generous reader may call a series of very elaborate puns. Whether puns or familial kinships, the novelty of Heidegger’s argument in the _Contributions_ is perhaps precisely the unarticulated repression of the etymological by the phenomenological (or, perhaps, the etymegori-

\(^{53}\) Heidegger, _Introduction to Metaphysics_, 83. My emphasis.

\(^{54}\) Heidegger, _Introduction to Metaphysics_, 83.

\(^{55}\) Heidegger, _Introduction to Metaphysics_, 86.

\(^{56}\) _Seyn_ has been translated in English as “beyng,” “Be-ing” (Heidegger, _Contributions to Philosophy_, 3 et passim) or even as simply “Being” (Young, _Heidegger’s Later Philosophy_, 13 et passim).

\(^{57}\) Heidegger, _Contributions to Philosophy_, 307.

\(^{58}\) Heidegger, _Contributions to Philosophy_, xix.

\(^{59}\) Heidegger, _Contributions to Philosophy_, xix et passim.
cal). Whereas in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, and later on in the *Parmenides* lectures Heidegger explicitly targets etymology, any mention of it is curiously absent in his most etymological work, spilling over even into the Translator’s Foreword.

The transition from *Sein* to *Seyn* accompanies a shift from philosophy as metaphysics to “thinking,” which in its turn proposes a completely different sense of truth:

The thinking of be-ing (*Seyn*), completely other than any conformity to the objective, must belong to what is to be thought itself, because be-ing (*Seyn*) does not tolerate its own truth as an addendum and something proposed but rather “is” itself the essential sway (*Wesen*) of truth.\(^6^0\)

The quotation marks around “is” here function in the same way the crosswise erasure does in his *Letter on Nihilism* (see below). For Heidegger *Seyn* “‘is’ the essential sway (*Wesen*) of truth” even though this type of predication is no longer valid as it pertains fully to the philosophical, i.e., metaphysical tradition. Instead the relation between *Seyn* and truth ought to be considered fully outside or beyond not only mere predication, but outside the realm of grammaticality itself. That the only outside of grammar in language available to Heidegger is a heeding to *etumos* again remains conspicuously unarticulated:

The question of being (*Sein*) now becomes the question of the truth of be-ing (*Seyn*). […] The question of truth “of” be-ing reveals itself as the question of the be-ing “of” truth. (The genitive here is an ur-own (*ur-eigener*) one and can never be grasped by the heretofore “grammatical” genitive.)\(^6^1\)

Linguistics, etymology, grammar, and, finally, philosophy are all thrown out in pursuit of a more originary thought. *Seyn* thus stands for the realization that philosophy itself – in spite of its millennia of disavowment – may still be too much tethered to etymology. *Seyn* shortcuts philosophy itself, by artificially introducing a Greek letter (the *upsilon*) into a German word. Functioning not unlike a magical term, it signals both a “crossing from the metaphysical to the future question of being”\(^6^2\) and a return that has been made impossible precisely because of the movement of language: derivation, inclination, analogy, and all the other shifts in speaking and writing that have made the originary Greek thought inaccessible to Heidegger – and to us.

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60. Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 298.
3. **Sein**. The third, and perhaps most lasting (in terms of its philosophical afterlife) is the “cross-wise erasure” of **Sein** in Heidegger’s letter to Ernst Jünger form 1955, published as “On the Question of Being.” It extends the graphical intervention of the hyphen in a-\(\text{lētheia}\) across the entire word, in an attempt to signify the same return as the orthographical variation of **Seyn**, as phenomenology trumping etymology. But contrary to the the orthographical in(ter)vention of **Seyn**, there is nothing “Greek” about **Sein**, which much more than the former emphasizes the violent aspect of any return – if possible at all – to a more originary understanding of Being.

The letter itself fully concerns itself with “the line,” a figure from Ernst Jünger’s text to which Heidegger is responding, entitled “Across the Line,” which deals with the question of nihilism:

> As meridian, the zero line has its zone. The realm of consummate nihilism constitutes the border between two world eras. The line that designates this realm is the critical line. By this line will be decided whether the movement of nihilism comes to an end in a nihilistic nothing, or whether it is the transition to the realm of a “new turning of being.”

This line, and the question concerning it, is inextricably linked with language, because “crossing it,” as Heidegger suggests Jünger has done, would imply a change of language, a language of “consummate nihilism” that cannot be thought independently from crossing the line itself. Thus a “transition to the realm of a ‘new turning of being’” implies a shift in language, or perhaps even a complete shift away from language altogether. In other words, not only metaphysics and ontotheological philosophy are implied in a movement toward nihilism, language itself – for Heidegger – is what drives us there. In this sense, Heidegger’s attempts to arrive at etymologically irreducible terms – terms that are no longer philosophical – are also explicitly aimed to be no longer linguistic.

Yet the attempt to say something de linea in a dialogue with you by letter confronts a peculiar difficulty. The reason for this difficulty lies in the fact that in your “crossing” over the line […] you speak the same language. The position of nihilism is, it seems, already relinquished in a certain way by crossing over the line, but its language has remained. I here mean language not as a mere means of expression that can be taken off and exchanged like a garment, without that

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63. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s preface to Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, xivff. For typographical reasons, the crosswise erasure is here displayed as a strike-through.

which has come to language being touched by it.\textsuperscript{65}

In the environs of the line, and the attempt to cross it, language itself changes. In fact, it seems to change rather in the direction of a certain Cratylean figure, where indeed language is no longer a “garment” that can be “taken off” and “exchanged,” but rather something that “touches” that which has come to it. In spite of Heidegger’s remarks against “word mysticism” or scientific etymology alike, Jünger’s line somehow drives him to become explicit about the Cratylean, and therefore etymological, position that underlies his search for “elementary words” – a search that he claims Jünger fails to undertake.

The turn of being suggested by Jünger resonates with Heidegger’s own concern for a turn or return, but states that such a turn cannot leave the “language” of being unaffected. Any turn through nihilism, through the full consummation of the history of metaphysics, cannot but leave language itself affected – and it is at this point that we encounter the infamous “crosswise erasure.”

If a turning belongs to “being,” and indeed in such a way that the latter resides in the former, then “being” dissolves in the turning. The latter now becomes that which is worthy of question, that in terms of which we henceforth think being, which has returned and been taken up into its essence. Accordingly, a thoughtful look ahead into this realm [of nihilism] can write “being” only in the following way: \textit{being}.\textsuperscript{66}

Heidegger’s graphical solution, as that which can be expressed “by letter” is in response to an etymological exigency, to have language “touch” that which it expresses. His innovation, however, appears to break completely with any type of etymological derivation, crosses a word from the page and renders it unspeakable, albeit it not unreadable. This sudden emergency of reading as the privileged site of access to being will not go unnoticed by Derrida, who in a certain sense generalizes Heidegger’s method. Note also that the quote marks around “being” already anticipate and prefigure the crossing out of \textit{being}, which appears without them. Both are part of a decidedly “non-Greek” and therefore “non-metaphysical” armature of writing, and therefore essentially etymologically irreducible.

Heidegger’s invention of the crosswise erasure as \textit{philosophical} strategy thus appears to be a definitive escape from the “word mysticism” he abhors (and which others

\textsuperscript{65} Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” 298.
\textsuperscript{66} Heidegger, “On the Question of Being,” 310.
continue to accuse him of) as well as any other etymological temptations. Nevertheless, that such a “line” appears precisely in an article that responds to and concerns such a line – that Jünger’s line would materialize as a hieroglyph in the German alphabet – is itself an etymological effect, as a presentation in writing of that which is represented, as a direct connection between language and reality. By chopping off one head of the etymological hydra, he only created another one.

**Generalized Etymological Irreducibility**

Already in Heidegger’s *Destruktion* of ontotheology, the lines of argument no longer follow deductive or inductive modes of reasoning, but rather create paradigmatic processions from one term to the other, eliminating or blurring out one categorial difference after another. Derrida’s deconstruction forms the logical conclusion to this philosophical development even though it actively undermines both the logocentrism and teleology implicit in “logical conclusion.”

What is common to deconstructive technique is a reliance on what I would like to term “etymological irreducibility.” Because original meaning has always already been disrupted, the terminological apparatus itself needs to heed to this disruption by making any historicization impossible. It was Heidegger, again, who pioneered this approach in his return to Greek philosophy. Apart from the typographical intervention of the hyphen in *a-lētheia* that we discussed in the first chapter we may point to the crosswise erasure of *Sein* in his letter to Ernst Jünger on nihilism, the artificial archaism and Greek intrusion of writing *Seyn*, and the curious appearance of the nonsense word *kzomil* in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*. The point of these inventions is to introduce words that are etymologically irreducible (hence the problems they cause in terms of translatability); they break their link with the past through non-linguistic, i.e., typographical means such as hyphens, strikethroughs, or archaic orthography, or are simply completely novel coinages that are supposed to “have no meaning at all.”

In a direct appropriation of the techniques pioneered in Heidegger, Derrida has subsequently coined the etymologically irreducible word *différance*, which appears in close connection with a recapitulation of Heidegger’s *Sein*, with the erasure generalized across its paradigm. Derrida is therefore the philosopher who generalizes Heidegger’s various attempts to arrive at etymological irreducibility, be it through the hyphen, the exchange of a letter, or erasure. All other verbal inventions that appear in Derrida’s oe-
vre, such as *phallogocentrism* and *hospitality*, ought to be viewed in relation to this primary insight.

Different from Heidegger, however, Derrida acknowledges that all these strategies do not simply facilitate a “return to thinking” or a possible overcoming of ontotheology or the metaphysics of presence. Rather, they are an intrinsic part of philosophy, in the sense that, as he sets out to prove in *Of Grammatology*, the relation between writing and speech is always already one of contamination and broken symmetry. What Derrida’s terms bring to the fore is rather that etymology is always already at work in any text and is irreducible to familiar metaphysical categories. Thus, the philosophical “work” done by *différance* can in fact be accomplished by *any other word* – hence the exuberant qualities of Derrida’s prose.

Curiously, but not unsurprisingly, these initially irreducible terms spawn a tradition of their own. In the same way that Derrida already expanded the crosswise erasure from *Being* to third person singular active present indicative “*is*” and the noun “*thing*,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her preface, already extends it to “*trace*.” And more recently, Badiou suggested the neologism *inexistence* in the tradition of *différance*. In these cases, paradoxically, terminology building on initially irreducible linguistic or typographical interventions becomes eminently reproducible. Their obvious genealogy has led many detractors of deconstruction to believe that we are dealing here with nothing more than a philosophical “gimmick.” However, the radicality of the initial gesture of posing *Sein* or *différance* should not be underestimated.

One could say that Heidegger’s project of employing etymological irreducibility as a strategy in a deconstruction of metaphysics reaches a certain maturity and self-consciousness in Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. Derrida’s reading of the *Phaedrus*, as briefly discussed in the previous example, is a close analogue of his thinking in this work, which ventures to deconstruct one of the bases of metaphysics that has remained untouched in Heidegger, namely the duality speech/writing or *phōnē/grammē* and the predetermination of the *logos* as first and foremost grounded in voice, *phōnē*. This, in turn, determines any notion of truth as *alētheia*, including its (re)interpretation by Heidegger. The

69. Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 545. This suggestion in an endnote by Badiou has the power to undermine the entirety of his anti-etymological position and therefore the foundations under his claim that philosophy knows no truth. For the conditions under which he proposes this neologism – even if in jest or as hommage – are precisely those that he tries vehemently to exclude from philosophical discourse. Any deconstruction of his work should take this endnote as a point of departure.
deconstruction of the phōnê/grammê distinction is therefore instrumental in Derrida’s project to include Heidegger himself in the deconstruction of metaphysics the latter heralded.

All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even the one beyond the metaphysical onto-theology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense it is understood [...]. Within this logos, the original and essential link to the phonè has never been broken.\(^\text{70}\)

In order to go even beyond Heidegger’s “beyond” the metaphysical or onto-theological domain we find in *Of Grammatology* a generalization of the strategies of etymological irreducibility pioneered by Heidegger. Because etymological irreducibility, in its erasure/overcoming of the etumon and therefore in the erasure/overcoming of the opposition or even non-opposition of phōnê/grammê at which it stands at the basis, creates the possibility for deconstructing the metaphysics of presence that Derrida aims at. The precise moment this happens in *Of Grammatology* is, in fact, the very first time Heidegger’s *kreuzweise Durchstreichung* appears: not on *Sein*, but on “thing”:

The formal essence of the signified is presence, and the privilege of its proximity to the logos as phonè is the privilege of presence. This is the inevitable response as soon as one asks: “what is the sign?,” that is to say, when one submits the sign to the question of essence, to the “ti esti.” [...] One cannot get around that response, except by challenging the very form of the question and beginning to think that the sign is that ill-named thing, the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: “what is...?”\(^\text{71}\)

As is clear from this citation, not only the inflected form of being has been crossed out, but also the word “thing,” signaling the fact that any answer to that question “what is?” presupposes the entire onto-theological problematics of *Sein/Sein/Seyn* opened by Heidegger that Derrida recaptures under the name “philosophies of presence” and the fundamental idea of the logos as presence.

In all of this Nietzsche is never far away. As Derrida suggests nearly immediately after the first cross-outs, Nietzsche “contributed a great deal to the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the logos and the related concept of truth or the primary signified, in whatever sense that is understood.”\(^\text{72}\) We are now in

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the position to understand the meaning of this assessment and the reason for its proximity to the generalization of etymological irreducibility expressed in the crossing out of “thing.” For it was Nietzsche who first completely shook up philosophy by infusing it with Democritean materialism and philological techniques, both vectors of etsē.73

Throughout the dense pages of the section “Writing before the Letter,” Derrida offers a close interpretation of Heidegger’s moves to escape onto-theological reason by relying on the linguistic procedures that sustain it. He recalls Heidegger’s reliance on the “third person singular of the present indicative” and the “infinitive” and concludes that “Western metaphysics, as the limitation of the sense of being within the field of presence, is produced as the domination of a linguistic form.”74 This problem is precisely what lies at the appearance of etsē in the Introduction to Metaphysics, the crosswise erasure of Sein in “On the Question of Being,” and, we would suggest, the later spelling of Seyn.

That deletion is the final writing of an epoch. Under its strokes the presence of a transcendent signified is effaced while still remaining legible [...], is destroyed while making visible the very idea of the sign. In as much as it delimits onto-theology, the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism, this last writing is also the first writing.75

It is precisely in response to this last and first writing that Derrida coins the most influential and resonant term from Of Grammatology, which in a sense generalizes the “thing” through a strategy similar to Heidegger’s coining of Seyn, namely différance. The appearance of this term is in direct response to Heidegger’s attempts at employing etymological irreducibility in his deconstruction of onto-theology, and is its “logical” conclusion:

To come to recognize [...] in a truly unheard of sense, a determined signifying trace, is to affirm that within the decisive concept of ontico-ontological difference, all is not to be thought at one go; entity and being, ontic and ontological, “ontico-ontological,” are in an original style, derivative with regard to difference; and with respect to what I shall later call differance, an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring.76

73. It would be possible to trace the Democritean influence even further, from his neologism den to Lacan’s object a, and, perhaps, Derrida’s différance and Badiou’s inexistance (which might link the former to the latter). See Dolar, “The Atom and the Void – from Democritus to Lacan” for a first sketch.
74. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 23.
75. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 23.
76. Derrida, Of Grammatology, 23.
As may be clear from Derrida’s emphasis on the fact that differance is “derivative” from difference, we are here squarely in the realm of etymology, at the point, already signaled in the Cratylus, where the difference between writing and speaking, sound and letter are constantly deferred. He refers to the e/a exchange as a “trick of writing,” recall ing how Socrates suggested that adding, subtracting or exchanging letters keep names generally intact. This “trick” is correlated with the crosswise erasure of Sein, which “is” the only “form” of the copula that would be appropriate to it: “[i]f differance is (and I also cross out the “is”) what makes possible the presentation of the being-present, it is never presented as such.” 77

At the same time, “[t]he necessity of passing through that erased determination, the necessity of that trick of writing is irreducible.” 78 It is irreducible to the logos of onto-theology, in the way that eteē always has been, while at the same time recognizing that the deconstruction of onto-theology, the metaphysics of presence, and logocentrism through the introduction of differance “falls prey to its own work,” 79 in the sense that its non-self-identity undermines its “own” productivity. This is also made explicit by Spivak, who rightly points out that Derrida’s “sous rature” is different from Heidegger’s: “Heidegger’s Being might point at an inarticulable presence. Derrida’s trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.” 80 Again, this self-undermining characteristic of differance, which is generally present in Derrida’s deconstructive terminology, 81 should not surprise us, considering its inheritance of Heidegger’s attempt to escape “naive” wordplay; serious wordplay, on the contrary, takes the infinite regress such play implies seriously, and thus insistently undermines its own seriousness. This fundamental irony is often lost on deconstruction’s many distractors.

Toward an Etics
We are now in the position to formulate a few concluding remarks, based on our preliminary investigation, or notes toward a possible investigation to come, of the etymology of etymology. This investigation, as we have ventured to show, has many starts and perhaps even more loose ends. It is a trajectory marred by repression, erasure, forgett-
ting, and near-miss encounters. Even so, the stakes are remarkably high, as already expressed by Derrida:

> It is for us, Westerners, the culture of common sense, marked by a powerful scientifico-philosophic tradition, metaphysics, technics, the opposition of subject/object, and precisely a certain organization of the throw [jet]. Through many differentiated relays, this culture goes back to at least Plato, and the repression of Democritus perhaps leaves the trace there of a large symptom.\(^\text{82}\)

This dissertation has perhaps in that sense presented a symptomatology of Democritus’s repression, of the repression of eteē and its various derivations. Our first example showed how in the classical period the adjective etumos became incorporated into the semantic realm of alēthēs, even before Plato vowed to repress the entire Democritean heritage. This repression, both internal and external to philosophy, has had debilitating effects on Heidegger’s attempt to arrive at an “originary meaning” of truth. We then explored the precise way in which Democritus had developed his concept of eteē, and how his rediscovery left a profound influence on the work of Nietzsche, partially stimulating the incorporation and further development of philological and genealogical methods in his philosophy, which are later picked up by Foucault. Third, we attempted a first and very preliminary sketch of how etymology was born out of the Platonic discourse of the Cratylus, aiming at nothing but ridiculing etumos. In part, we owe the philological heritage we have today to a profound misunderstanding of Plato’s joke – with the laughing philosopher being the last to laugh (and infecting Nietzsche, on the way). Our fourth example briefly surveyed the rhetorical technique of exetasis, present in early Socratic dialogues but later all but fully erased from Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy – but it is precisely the technique of exetasis, although never mentioned by name, that appears in Foucault’s later work in search for the care of the self.

We may perhaps conclude – in strokes that are too broad and need much more research than can be accommodated by a dissertation – that in Democritus, Socrates, Nietzsche, Patočka, Derrida, and Foucault, we can distinguish the traces of a genealogy of etymological thinking that is accompanied by a great concern for ethics. In fact, these seem to us to be the philosophers which have made this connection the most explicit. In their work, we find the traces of etumos combined with a care for philosophy through the care of philosophers for themselves. Even the Cratylus appears to bear such traces: “the ‘care of the soul’ begins with a confrontation with an unsettling, ironizing voice. In

\(^{82}\) Derrida, “My Chances / Mes chances,” 370.
the *Cratylus*, this is the voice of language itself.” The life of thinkers and the thought they think are inextricably linked and the affirmation of this inextricability is what has been called etēē. Eteē is nothing but another word for the truth of philosophy. Every true philosophical text, therefore, is imminently aware of its own being-language, or as Giorgio Agamben – who in many ways continued Foucault’s project on governmentality and care of the self – put it, “[e]very great philosophical text is the gag that displays language itself, being-in-language itself, as a giant memory lapse, as an incurable speech defect.”

In fact, this relation between etēē as the truth of philosophy – its defining truth, and the only truth whose exteriority is incessantly confirmed by the way in which philosophy interiorizes it – is perhaps approached most closely in Agamben’s work. In his preface to *Infancy and History*, Agamben speaks of an *experimentum linguae*, in its “true [sc. etumos] meaning” an experience in language of language. Thus, an *experimentum linguae*, an experiment of and in language is always already etymological. Or perhaps conversely, all etymology is always already an *experimentum linguae*, “in which the limits of language are to be found not outside language, in the direction of its referent, but in an experience of language as such, in its pure self-reference.”

Although our reading of Derrida should have made us attentive to the questioning of this “pureness,” later echoed by a “perfectly empty dimension” and “the pure exteriority of language” Agamben’s early description of the *experimentum linguae* gives us two important anchor points, one obliquely referring backward to our discussions of khōra as the void through which sophia “dashes,” the other one forward to Maurice Blanchot:

> To carry out the *experimentum linguae*, however, is to venture into a perfectly empty dimension (the *leerer Raum* of the Kantian concept-limit) in which one can encounter only the pure exteriority of language, that “étalelement du langage dans son être brut.”

When Blanchot in *The Writing of the Disaster* states that traditionally, etymology “fixes the attention upon the word as the seminal cell of language, and thus reverts to the an-

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83. Rosenstock, “Father and Sons,” 396.
84. Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 156.
cient prejudice according to which language would be essentially made of names: a nomenclature,”89 we may perhaps propose in turn an etymology of sentences. When he refers to etumos logos and tekhnē Foucault’s enterprise is in no way intent to recover, like Heidegger, the hidden meaning of single words, but rather how different practices – both acts and speech acts – can lead to a “true life.” Such an etymology of sentences – in which we ought to hear both the grammatical and the juridical unit – can no longer be operative solely on the level of the phoneme or grapheme; it permeates paragraphs, sections, and entire texts. It constantly operates inside philosophical discourse, endlessly knotting together thinker and thought, philosophy and life.

“What then,” Agamben asks at the end of his preface to Infancy and History, “is the correct expression of the existence of language? The only possible answer to this question is: human life as ethos, as ethical way.”90 It will have been our modest proposal that we don’t speak here of ethics, but of etics.

90. Agamben, Infancy and History, 11.


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