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THE STATUS OF *ARS ETYMOLOGICA* IN VARRO AND ITS CICERONIAN ORIGINS

Abstract: This paper draws attention to an existing parallel between ling. 5.8, where Varro unfolds his well-known theory of *quattuor explanandi gradus* of etymology, and de orat. 2.30, where Cicero has his characters restate the main positions in the debate surrounding *ars rhetorica*. I argue that this parallel is an intentional quotation by which Varro wanted to signal his alignment with Cicero, who had promoted a new conception of *ars* which released it from the strict requirement of guaranteeing a secure path to knowledge. This new conception had been prepared by Philo of Larissa's innovations in Academic epistemology.

Keywords: Varro, *De lingua Latina*; Cicero, *De oratore*; etymology; rhetoric; philosophy; art; *ars*; *techne*

Varro's treatment of etymology in *De lingua Latina* is certainly not in want of attention from scholars. The structure of the etymological books (2–7), the principles guiding Varro in his analysis of the Latin words, the methods and the accuracy of his reconstructions, have been the subject of many valuable and important contributions. In this paper, I want to draw attention to a specific characterisation of etymology as a system or discipline (*ars*) which can be gleaned from a very problematic passage in book 5: I will argue that such characterisation owes a debt to a conception of *ars* that was formulated by Cicero within the epistemological frame of Philo's fourth Academy.

The opening paragraphs of book 5 of *De lingua Latina* function as a transition between the previous triad of books (2–4, now largely lost), where Varro dealt with the theory of etymology, and the ensuing section (books 5–7, which survive with some gaps), where Varro moves on from theory to practice and gives the etymology of a great number of Latin words. It is in this bridging section that Varro unfolds his well-known model of *quattuor explanandi gradus* ("four levels of explanation"), a schematic representation of different ways in which an etymologist can operate

(ling. 5.7–8;[1] in expansion the text as transmitted in the main manuscript[2] and its literal translation):

> (7) *Nunc singulorum verborum origines expediam, quorum quattuor explanandi gradus. Infimus* [*in*] *quo populus etiam venit. Quis enim non videt unde argentifodinae et viocurus? Secundus quo grammatica* [*d*]*escendit antiqua, quae ostendit quemadmodum quodque poeta finxerit verbum, quod confinxerit, quod declinarit. Hic Pacui: rudentum sibilus, hic: incurvicervicum pecus, hic: Chlamyde clupeat b*⟨*r*⟩*acchium.*[3] (8) *Tertius gradus, quo philosophia ascendens pervenit atque ea quae in consuetudine communi essent aperire coepit, ut a quo dictum esset oppidum, vicus, via. Quartus ubi est aditus et initia regis quo si non perveniam scientiam ad opinionem aucupabor. quod etiam in salute nostra nonnunquam facit cum* ⟨*a*⟩*egrotamus medicus.*
>
> (7) Now I shall explain the origin of each word; there are four levels of such explanation. The lowest level even the laymen can reach: for who does not see where *argentifodinae* ("silver mines") and *viocurus* ("overseer of the roads") come from? Then there is a second level, which the ancient grammatical tradition has attained, illustrating how a poet has created, forged, and derived each word: for example, Pacuvius' "*sibilus* ('swish') of the hawsers", "*incurvicervicum* ('bowed-necked') herd", or "he *clupeat* ('shields') his arm with the chlamys". (8) Then a third level, to which philosophy has ascended and laid the foundations to explain the origins of words of common usage, such as *oppidum* ("fortified town"), *vicus* ("village"), *via* ("road"). Then a fourth one, where lies the entrance and the origins of the king; and if I shall not arrive there, I shall hunt for knowledge in order to arrive to an opinion, which is also what our doctor, in matters of our health, does sometimes, if we are sick.

The passage is exceptionally problematic from a textual point of view and a lot of ink has been spilled on the various points of uncertainty across the four levels.[4] The first level seems to entail basic

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1) Apart from the debated portion of the text (in expansion), in this passage and the others quoted from Varro I give the text as established in de Melo's recent edition (2019). All translations are mine unless otherwise stated.

2) This is the Codex Laurentianus LI. 10 (F).

3) Pacuv. trag. frr. (respectively) 263, 238, 134 Schierl. *Chlamyde* is most editors' correction of the transmitted *clamide*.

4) Useful treatments of the *quattuor gradus* can be also found in Schröter 1960; Traglia's and Schröter's contributions in Cardauns 1963, and particularly the round-table discussion following Schröter's paper; Pfaffel 1981; Piras 1998. On the lack of balance and coherence in the series of the *quattuor gradus*, see Muller 1910, 171–74, Oko 1937, 164–67, and Piras 1998, 70.

solution of word compounds with a clear structure (e. g. *viocurus* < *via* + *curare*) and is accessible to any speaker. The second level involves the explanation of poetic coinages and, as such, is the field of competence of grammarians and editors (*quo grammatica escendit antiqua*).[5] The third level entails retracing the primitive version of a common word by reversing the phonetic changes it has undergone in the course of time and through the derivational process; this can be done by means of the operations outlined in ling. 5.6 (*demptio, additio, traiectio, commutatio* of letters and *productio, correptio, adiectio, detractio* of syllables) and of the "principles of etymology" established by the Stoics (*quo philosophia ascendens pervenit*).[6]

The majority of issues concentrate on the fourth level of the etymological analysis. The transmitted text literally translates to "The fourth [scil. level is] where lies the entrance and the origins of the king, and if I shall not arrive there, I shall hunt for knowledge in order to arrive to an opinion". This raises a multitude of questions, from how to understand the allusions (What "entrance" is Varro talking about? The "origins" of which "king", and in what sense?) to the logical coherence of the passage (How can one "hunt for knowledge to attain an opinion"?). Establishing the meaning of this segment has been a *vexata quaestio* virtually since the beginning of scholarship on Varro, and the discussion is inextricably linked to philological questions.

Although the main focus of this paper will be the second half of this pericope (*quo si non perveniam … aucupabor*), in order to understand the context, we have to start with the first: *quartus*

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5) The wording in the transmitted text, which pairs respectively *grammatica antiqua* with *descendere* and *philosophia* with *ascendere*, has sometimes been taken as indicating a difference in Varro's judgement of the two areas of expertise (which is what prompted several scholars to adopt Scioppius' emendation: [*d*]*escendit*): see e. g. Traglia 1963, 41 and Piras 1998, 74. Others have argued in favour of the transmitted text and of an alternative interpretation of the relation between the two verbs at issue, e. g. Deschamps 1990, 594.

6) Chapter 6 of Augustine's *De dialectica* is usually taken to be our main source on the Stoic "principles of etymology" (στοιχεῖα τῆς ἐτυμολογίας). These consist of a series of processes in word-formation governed by similarity, either phonetic (*similitudo rerum et sonorum*) or semantic (*similitudo rerum ipsarum*): the latter occurs either through contiguity (*per vicinitatem*) or contrariety (*per contrarium*).

ubi est aditus et initia regis. To begin with, scholars have debated whether to read *aditus* ("access, entrance"; "beginning") or *aditum* (an orthographic mistake for *adytum* "sanctuary"), the latter resulting from an interlinear correction in the manuscript.[7] Those who advocated for *aditus* sometimes also proposed to correct *et initia* to *ad initia* (obtaining "the access to the origins").[8] By contrast, the choice of *adytum* compelled many to interpret *initia* as meaning "initiations, mysteries". The most contentious part of the segment is *regis*: while some attempts – all rather unconvincing – have been made to emend the word,[9] many editors have accepted the mention of a *rex* and identified him either with a specific king (mainly Romulus or Latinus, both mentioned in § 9), or, proceeding from the interpretation of *adytum et initia* as "the sanctuary and the mysteries", with the figure of the *rex sacrorum*, the high-priest of the ancient Roman religion.[10]

The idea that the fourth *gradus* involved mysteries or some kind of esoteric tradition is flawed on many levels. It does not fit with the context (the description of different approaches to word-analysis), not only because the appeal to language as a vessel of occult meanings would make words instruments rather than the object of analysis, but also because the allusion to practices restricted to initiates and not supposed to be divulged would make no sense in a passage which aims to present Varro's readership with a clear and systematic account of etymological methods. Furthermore, while of course Varro's interest in religious practices

7) The horizontal stroke just above the final *-s* in *aditus*, seemingly correcting it to an *-m*, was first noted in Spengel's posthumous second edition (1885). See the objections to the acceptance of this correction by Schröter and Michel in Schröter 1963, 113, 116.

8) Müller 1833; Schröter 1963.

9) To mention just a few: Skutsch 1897, 96–97 and Walter 1918, 41 suggested, respectively, *initia re⟨li⟩gi⟨on⟩is* and *initia ⟨eg⟩regi⟨i⟩s*, consistently with their conviction that the difference between the third level and the fourth is the exceptional character of the expert figure in this king of etymology. Canal 1874, col. 344 and Vetter 1958, 272, proceeding from the idea of the 'mysteries', proposed, respectively, *initia ⟨Ce⟩reris* and *initia ⟨intima Samoth⟩reces*. For a discussion of these and other proposals, see Lazzerini 2017, 106–10.

10) In fact, the role of the *rex sacrorum* in antiquity had little to do with 'mysteries' as such (Schröter 1963, 94; Boyancé 1975, 108; Piras 1998, 66–67).

is well known,[11] there is no indication that religious or 'mystical' approaches informed the methodology of his study of language in *De lingua Latina*.[12] In fact, in the expositions of Varro's etymological and morphological theories, it is rational schematism that prevails, at times with imperfect results, but nonetheless consistently in service of the ultimate purpose of the treatise: to inform and educate the Roman reader about the facts of the Latin language. That is not to say that Varro denies that some things are difficult to know: on the contrary, he reiterates his awareness of this fact at many turns throughout the etymological books;[13] but the obscurity that often shrouds the origin of words is blamed on *vetustas*, the passage of time, not on the mystery of a sacred realm. The preoccupation with the transformative and obscuring force of time is pervasive in ling. 5–7 as it is in all of Varro's writings dedicated to uncovering truths about Rome's distant past, and the challenge of *vetustas* is a consistent Leitmotiv of Varro's work.

Therefore, it is more plausible that the fourth level of etymological analysis refers to etymologies of the words which have been altered the most by the passage of time, either disappearing from use or changing substantially in their phonological form.[14] Such a conclusion – which entails understanding *initia* as "origins" – is compatible with both the reading *aditus* (combined with the emendation *ad initia*) and with *adytum*; the latter, however, is only convincing if taken as an allusion, not to a "sanctuary" in a religious or mystical sense, but in the sense of "asylum", such as the one which, according to the historico-mythological accounts of the origins of Rome, Romulus had founded on the Capitoline hill to attract a multitude

11) He devoted sixteen books of *Antiquitates rerum divinarum* to Roman state religion, but also gave ample representation (especially in his Menippean satires) to the cult of Cybele and, to some extent, to those of Isis and Serapis (see Rolle 2017).

12) Scholars have occasionally pointed to the mention of Pythagoras in 5.11–13 as evidence that an allusion to mysteries in 5.7–8 is not out of place. But Pythagoras is evoked there as an authority for an ontological system based on binary oppositions, which, combined with a quadripartition whose source is disputed (see Dahlmann 1932, 16–17, 37–43 and Blank 2008, 59–61), Varro uses to anchor his series of etymologies to a rigorous structure and arrangement; the mention has no bearing on the question whether some words are accessible to be analysed or not.

13) Ling. 5.3–6; 7.1–4.

14) This is the thesis of Pfaffel 1981, 238, building up on Schröter 1963.

of people who would form the first core of Rome's citizenry.[15] On a palaeographical level, it is even possible that the manuscript originally read *asylum*.[16] Considering that the foundation of the asylum was reportedly Romulus' way to solve the problem of lack of manpower in his newly founded city, and that, therefore, to some extent it could be regarded as the founding act of the Roman people and its language,[17] its inclusion in a passage about the reconstruction of the origins of Latin words is appropriate and also fits well with the profile of Varro as an author very interested in Roman antiquities. The derivation of this hypothesis from a corrupted segment, admittedly, requires some concessions. However, whether one chooses to read (more straightforwardly) *aditus ad initia regis* or (more conjecturally) *adytum* (or *asylum*) *et initia regis*, the most plausible interpretation of the passage, considering its context and purpose, remains the same: that the fourth level of etymology is unique for chronological reasons, because it targets the oldest words of the Latin language, coined at the dawn of the Roman civilization.

And now to the second part of the sentence (*quo si non perveniam … aucupabor*), which is also troublesome. The claim to "hunt for firm knowledge in order to attain an opinion" appears illogical even at the level of common sense, before getting into the philosophical implications of the two concepts (on which see below). Scioppius (1605) first proposed replacing *ad* with *at* ("if I shall not arrive there [scil. to the fourth level], I shall however hunt for an opinion"), but this solution leaves *scientiam* with no syntactic function.[18] Spengel, author of the first modern edition of *De lingua*

15) Liv. 1.8.4–7; Flor. 1.9.

16) See also Lazzerini 2017, 115–24.

17) On the asylum and its significance in the debate on 'Romanness' in the late Republic, see Dench 2005.

18) Jahn 1867, 246–47 replaced the accusative with an instrumental ablative (*scientia*) and interpreted full knowledge as the means which would enable Varro to reach the fourth level (and if it fails, Varro would "at least hunt for an opinion"); however, the idea of knowledge as a means instead of an end remains unconvincing. The same objection applies to the suggestion of Brakman 1932, 1–2 to supply ⟨*per*⟩ before *scientiam*, supposedly lost by haplography after *perveniam*. Götz / Schöll 1910 printed *at opinionem* like Scioppius, but signalled a lacuna between *perveniam* and *scientiam* and conjectured a substantial integration: *si non perveniam* ⟨*ut rerum intimarum consequar*⟩ *scientiam*. Walter 1918, 484–85, who also adopted Scioppius' correction, took care of the problem by simply (and tacitly) deleting *scientiam*.

Latina (1826), moved *ad* before *scientiam* (*quo si non perveniam ⟨ad⟩ scientiam, [ad] opinionem aucupabor*), restoring the logic of the sentence. Later R. Kent (1938), combining Spengel's version and Scioppius' correction, printed *quo si non perveniam ⟨ad⟩ scientiam, at opinionem aucupabor* (in his own translation, emphasis mine, "if I shall not arrive to knowledge there, at any rate I shall cast about for a conjecture"); his text was accepted by J. Collart 1954 and de Melo 2019. The loss of *ad* by quasi-haplography with the following *at* is sensible enough, and the translation of *quo* as locative (meaning "place wherein", equivalent to *in quo*) rather than directional ("place whereto") avoids a problem of previous *constitutiones*, that is having *perveniam* take two directional complements (*quo* and *ad scientiam*).[19]

Surprisingly, very little weight has been given to the fact that there is a striking similarity between this segment of *De lingua Latina* (detectable even in its transmitted and problematic version) and a passage in Cicero's *De oratore* (2.30), where rhetoric is defined as a thing *quae ad scientiam non saepe perveniat, quae opiniones hominum et saepe errores aucupetur* ("a thing which does not often arrive to knowledge, and hunts for the opinions and often the delusions of men").[20] The similarity was signalled in Spengel's first edition (1826) in support of his change of position of *ad* (which, in fact, brings the two texts even closer together), and the same reference to de orat. 2.30 figured in the *apparatus critici* of his second edition (1885) and Götz / Schöll 1910. Nevertheless, in none of these editions is the reference explored as anything more than a *locus similis*, useful for syntactic and perhaps stylistic comparisons.[21] Even as

19) The use of *quo* as locative has parallels in Varro (rust. 1.48.1): see Pfaffel 1981, 232 n. 1.

20) The text in Cicero's passage poses no challenge. The words *quae ad scientiam non saepe perveniat* were bracketed by Ellendt 1840 "cum latine dici non possint, nisi de eo qui scientiae cupidus est", an emendation accepted by Kayser 1860 and Bake 1863. However, since Wilkins 1892 clarified that "*pervenire* is often enough used of things, both in its literal and in its applied meaning; hence there is no objection to the words, and they are really needed after 'actio opinionibus non scientia continetur'", this *constitutio textus* has not been contested.

21) At least for Götz / Schöll, there is strong indication that the similarity was not considered beyond a mere stylistic parallel, given that, unlike Spengel, they did not print a version of the text modelled on Cicero's passage, and instead conjectured an altogether different integration: see n. 18.

such, the parallel does not seem to have drawn much attention in Varronian scholarship. Yet the lexical and syntactic correspondence is so close, and the use of *aucupari* with reference to opinions so unusual (it only has parallels, precisely, in Cicero), that it seems unlikely that it indicates a mere stylistic influence, and it certainly does not reflect a common idiom.[22] One feels compelled to conclude that we are dealing with an intentional quotation; in light of this, Kent's version of the text (and subsequently Collart's and de Melo's) seems by far the best one.

Since this quotation is found in a key-passage in the illustration of Varro's etymological theory, it must have been chosen for a specific purpose. Let us investigate what this may be.

The phrase in De oratore 2.30

When we look at Cicero's passage in context, it is clear that the phrase *ad scientiam pervenire* vs. *opinionem aucupari* also occurs in a crucial passage. At the beginning of the second day of the dialogue, 'Antonius' is invited (2.26) to resume the discussion interrupted the previous day, about the qualities of the ideal orator. The first day had seen 'Antonius' in the role of the opponent of 'Crassus', who was manifestly relating Cicero's point of view: 'Antonius' had disputed 'Crassus" conception and very definition of the orator (1.80–81,209–218) and his view of the requirements of rhetoric as a discipline (§§ 219–255). Now, in book 2, 'Antonius' plays with his audience one last time before revealing his true mind (2.28–40, in what A. D. Leeman et al. 1985, 220 dubbed "die 'Bekehrung' des Antonius"). He offers a very negative connotation of rhetoric (§ 30):

> *'res mihi videtur esse' inquit* [scil. Antonius] *'facultate praeclara, arte mediocris; ars enim earum rerum est, quae sciuntur; oratoris autem omnis actio opinionibus, non scientia, continetur; nam et apud eos dicimus, qui nesciunt, et ea dicimus, quae nescimus ipsi; itaque et illi alias*

22) *Aucupari* in a metaphorical sense – where it loses its specific connotation of "to hunt birds" (from *auceps*), and retains a more general meaning of "hunting" – has of course many more occurrences (it is frequent, for example, in Plautus), but not with *opinio*. For the parallels in Cicero, see below.

> *aliud eisdem de rebus et sentiunt et iudicant et nos contrarias saepe causas dicimus, non modo ut Crassus contra me dicat aliquando aut ego contra Crassum, cum alterutri necesse sit falsum dicere, sed etiam ut uterque nostrum eadem de re alias aliud defendat, cum plus uno verum esse non possit. Ut igitur in eius modi re, quae mendacio nixa sit, quae ad scientiam non saepe perveniat, quae opiniones hominum et saepe errores aucupetur, ita dicam, si causam putatis esse, cur audiatis'.*
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> He continued, "It seems to me that oratory, as an ability, is a splendid thing, but as an art, it is no more than average. After all, an art deals with such things as are known, while the whole activity of the orator is based not on knowledge but on opinions. We speak before audiences that are ignorant, and we also say things about which we are ignorant ourselves. Accordingly, on the same issue they have now one view and judgment, then another, while we ourselves often plead opposite cases. I mean the latter not only in the sense that Crassus sometimes argues against me or I against him – and in that case, either of us must necessarily be saying something that is not true –, but also in the sense that, on the same issue, each of us supports now one opinion, then another – whereas not more than one can be true. Knowing, then, that this is a subject that relies on falsehood, that seldom reaches the level of real knowledge, that is out to take advantage of people's opinions and often their delusions, I shall speak about it – if you think you have a reason for listening".
>
> (transl. after J. M. May / J. Wisse 2001, emphasis mine)

This speech must be framed within the context of the long-lasting dispute which had pitted philosophers against rhetoricians since the fourth century BCE in the Greek world.[23] Plato had expressed eloquent criticism of rhetoric (particularly in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*) which amounted to three main objections, as summarised by C. Brittain 2001, 300:

> it is an irrational τριβή, a knack rather than a methodical or technical procedure; it has no knowledge of its subject matter (justice in the *Gorgias*), or of theorems actually required to speak persuasively (the dialectic and psychology of the *Phaedrus*); and it is a kind of flattery directed at pleasure rather than genuine benefit (*Gorgias*).

Later, on the seminal ground of Plato's objections, the Hellenistic philosophers developed a more systematic form of criticism against

23) On the subject, see Leeman et al. 1996, 95–101, Reinhardt 2000, and Brittain 2001.

rhetoricians which particularly targeted their claim that rhetoric was a τέχνη: in the mid-second century, the main pursuers of this line of attack were the Peripatetic Critolaos and the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon[24] (and, according to Brittain's thesis, of the Academic Charmadas as well).[25] The debate surrounding rhetoric as a τέχνη was certainly well known in Rome as well,[26] and Cicero has his characters relate it in the third book of *De oratore*. So, it is safe to assume that Cicero's readers were expected to recognise that, at that point in the dialogue, 'Antonius' was taking on the role of the archetypical opponent of rhetoric, as Plato had been.

The paradigmatic nature of 'Antonius" speech is underscored by his very choice of words: as the main editors and commentators of the text have observed, the statement that rhetoric is *mendacio nixa* echoes Plato's words in Phdr. 260e: [scil. ἡ ῥητορική] ψεύδεται καὶ οὐκ ἔστι τέχνη ἀλλ' ἄτεχνος τριβή ("[rhetoric] is deceptive and is not a rigorous discipline, but an unsystematic practice"). On the other hand, a second reprise of the same text has not been highlighted before: precisely the phrase that is the object of our study

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24) For Critolaos, rhetoric would be a κακοτεχνία (see S. E. Math. 2.68) and a mere τριβή (Quint. inst. 2.15.23). For Diogenes, it would be "unfit for free men" (vol. II p. 68 Sudhaus; see also pp. 99 and 283). A clear account of the "general lines of attack" pursued by the philosophers is offered by Brittain 2001, 299–300. The scholar countered (pp. 306–10) the traditional view that these philosophers' attacks had been motivated by the success of the theories promoted by the rhetorician Hermagoras of Temnos (fl. 150 BCE); instead, he argued that Hermagoras' success postdated the contributions of Diogenes and Critolaos, and that philosophers consequently had to adapt their line of attack to allow for some spaces which technical rhetoric could claim as its purview. In fact, 'Crassus" account in de orat. 1.45–47 shows that, by 110 BCE, the philosophers' stance had shifted to admit that *iudicia et contiunculae* should be recognised as the purview of orators.

25) Brittain 2001, 319–28 argued that (p. 319) "a determinate conception of rhetoric underlies Charmadas' argument in de orat. 1.84–93: rhetoric is a (non-technical) faculty of persuasion, which is attained by experience, and for the perfection of which philosophical training is a necessary condition". As such, Charmadas, too, would have denied that rhetoric qualified as a τέχνη, but still defended its validity and usefulness as a faculty.

26) It is commonly assumed that the famous philosophical embassy of Diogenes, Critolaos, and Carneades in 155 BCE fuelled the debate significantly, especially in the wake of Carneades' notorious public lectures on justice, when he reportedly argued on both the opposite sides of the subject. However, see Powell 2013 for a reappraisal of the historicity of this event.

(*quae ad scientiam non saepe perveniat, quae opiniones hominum et saepe errores aucupetur*) reads very similar to Phdr. 262c:

> ΣΩΚΡΑΤΗΣ – λόγων ἄρα τέχνην, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ὁ τὴν ἀλήθειαν μὴ εἰδώς, δόξας δὲ τεθηρευκώς, γελοίαν τινά, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ ἄτεχνον παρέξεται.
>
> SOCRATES – Then, my friend, he who does not know the truth, but chases after opinions, will, it seems, attain an art of words which is ridiculous and not rigorous at all.

"To know the truth" is not quite the same as "to arrive to / attain the truth", but the sense of the phrase within the whole sentence is close enough, and δόξας θηρεύειν is the exact equivalent of *opiniones aucupari*: I would argue that there are sufficient grounds to acknowledge a *locus parallelus*. For the sake of our overall interpretation of de orat. 2.28–40, this second reprise does not add anything of substance to the first one: even if it were disregarded, the passage would still remain a quintessential restatement of Plato's reasons to oppose rhetoric. Nevertheless, it is worth calling attention to this second correspondence with the Platonic text, especially since it involves the very Ciceronian turn of phrase that we are analysing.

The main editions and commentaries of *De oratore*, for this passage, refer the reader to other Ciceronian *loci* which exhibit a similar metaphorical use of the verb *aucupari*.[27] Some translate the verb as "to hunt / chase / strive after" (by far the most common meaning of *aucupari* in the other *loci*), while others[28] underline a different semantic shade of the word: "to lay traps", and, by transferred meaning, "to take advantage of". There is a case to be made to choose the former translation over the second. Firstly, for statistical reasons, because, of all the other passages where Cicero uses the word *aucupari*, it seems to me that only one lends itself to the meaning of "laying traps > taking advantage of" (Flacc. 92.2, with

27) Cicero often pairs the verb *aucupari* or the noun *aucupium* with "words" or other concepts related to speech (again in de orat. 2.256, but also in Caecin. 52.3, 65.10, 88.17; Cluent. 105.3; Sest. 119.6; Pis. 57.5; leg. 3.35.7), sometimes with "pleasure" or other states of being (orat. 63.5; 84.6; 197.5; fam. 5.12.6.6; Att. 6.8.4.5), and with various objects in S. Rosc. 22.8 (*tempus*); Verr. 1.1.9.4 (*haec omnia*); Flacc. 92.2 (*imbecillitatem*); de orat. 2.59.9 (*utilitatem*). Quite significant is the use in fin. 2.71.13, again with *opinio*, for which see below.

28) Courbaud 1922, Sutton / Rackham 1948, and May / Wisse 2001.

imbecillitatem), while "to hunt, chase after" suits all the other occurrences better. Secondly, one of these *loci* (fin. 2.71.13), where the meaning is unquestionably "to chase after", is particularly close to the *De oratore* passage: *praecipitisque quodam modo ut nostram stabilem conscientiam contemnamus, aliorum errantem opinionem aucupemur* ("and, in a way, you bid that we dismiss our own stable knowledge, and chase after the fallacious opinion of others"). Thirdly, if we recognise that Cicero's phrase reprises Plato, and therefore that his *aucupari* renders Plato's θηρεύειν, the translation "to hunt" seems preferable.

Aside from this lexical question, it is clear that 'Antonius' says those words in de orat. 2.30 to signal a direct connection with the attacks on rhetoric that had originated with Plato and had since been reiterated by various Hellenistic philosophers. It can be argued that the appeal to the philosopher's authority had more of a symbolic function than a practical one;[29] however, even if that is the case, it does not change the reality (in fact, it presupposes it) that the consensus at the time ultimately traced these objections to rhetoric back to Plato, and that 'Antonius', by restating them (and especially by echoing specific passages from the dialogues which were considered foundational to such objections), aimed to set himself in that specific trend.

Now, as it emerges from the paragraphs that follow these words (32–38), 'Antonius' does not actually endorse that anti-rhetoric stance at all: on the contrary, his position is revealed to be in complete agreement with that of 'Crassus' as he had stated it in book 1. Confronted with this discrepancy (§ 40), 'Antonius' gleefully admits to having previously played devil's advocate *ut, si te* [scil. *Crassum*] *refellissem, hos a te discipulos* [scil. *Catulum et Caesarem*] *abducerem* ("in order to refute you and allure these pupils away from you"). The reasons for 'Antonius" deception are not stated explicitly by Cicero, but can be drawn indirectly. Firstly,

29) May / Wisse 2001, 24–25 point out that, while Plato's aforementioned objections to the ῥητορικὴ τέχνη rested on two major grounds, one epistemological (it was not based on, and did not lead to, true knowledge, but opinions), and one ethical (it brought no good contribution to life), the ethical argument is barely touched on in Cicero: 'Scaevola' evokes the matter in 1.38, but this point is ignored in 'Crassus" following speech.

such an act appears to be consistent with what has been presented as a typical quirk of the character, namely the habit of putting up a show in front of his audience.[30] In addition, "Antonius' about-face, far from being a simple trick […], exactly fits (and illustrates) the technique of 'arguing both sides of an issue' (*in utramque partem dicere*), which was central to Cicero's conception of the ideal orator".[31]

So, 'Antonius' does not truly hold such a negative opinion of rhetoric. Nor does he uphold a 'strict' conception of *ars* such as the one enunciated in 2.30, which rests solely on full scientific knowledge:[32] both he and 'Crassus' are willing to concede that rhetoric is not an *ars* by those strict criteria. But, instead of embracing the radical anti-rhetoric position (deceptively echoed by 'Antonius' up until § 32), the two main characters of the dialogue converge on a 'looser' definition of *ars* which is a compromise between the two extreme stances:[33] a discipline can be held as an *ars* if its principles "have been observed and recorded by skilled and experienced people, and described through definitions, and clarified by division into classes and subclasses".[34] According to such a definition, 'Antonius' concludes in 2.32, rhetoric will be revealed to be, *si non plane artem, at quasi artem quandam* ("if not quite an art, at least something like an art"). This is likely to reflect Cicero's own position, who wavers between 'Crassus" idealisation of the perfect orator as not only an outstanding speaker, but also an accomplished philosopher, shrewd politician, and in short a master of all arts,

30) De orat. 2.4. See Leeman et al. 1985, 222.

31) May / Wisse 2001, 16. Because one of the two sides is ultimately refuted, 'Antonius" speech does not strictly qualify as an argument *in utramque partem* in a philosophical sense (which would result in suspension of judgment); it does, however, from a rhetorical point of view.

32) *Ars enim earum rerum est, quae sciuntur.* The same strict definition of *ars* is given in two other places: in 1.92 by 'Antonius' himself, who was reporting the words of the Academic philosopher Charmadas (*artem vero* [scil. *Charmadas*] *negabat esse ullam, nisi quae cognitis penitusque perspectis et in unum exitum spectantibus et numquam fallentibus rebus contineretur*), and in 1.108 by 'Crassus' (*si ars ita definitur …, ex rebus penitus perspectis planeque cognitis atque ab opinionis arbitrio seiunctis scientiaque comprehensis*). This definition visibly employs Stoic language and hinges on the Stoic notion of κατάληψις.

33) Leeman / Pinkster 1981, 193 stress that this, too, is "typically Ciceronian".

34) 'Crassus" words in 1.109 (transl. May / Wisse).

and 'Antonius" more concrete expectation that an orator is highly trained, but not all-knowing.[35]

It is worth clarifying that the definition of rhetoric, like the definition of *ars*, per se, are not the focal point of *De oratore*: on the contrary, both are dismissed as a mere *verbi controversia* (1.47,108), unimportant for the true object of the conversation, that is the qualities of the ideal orator, the training and knowledge he needs to acquire, the skills he must hone and practice, etc. However, the conciliatory definition that the characters eventually agree upon is relevant for our comparison with Varro's passage, as will be shown further below.

This intermediate position must have been inspired by Cicero's teacher, Philo of Larissa, who succeeded Clitomachus as head of the Academy in 110/109 BCE. In fact, Philo's predecessors in the Academy had held true to the path indicated by Plato and, at least until Philo's time, in agreement with the Stoics and the Peripatetics, they "drove the orator from the helm of State, and excluded him from all learning and from knowledge of the more important subjects, pushing him aside and confining him only to the courts and petty public meetings, like a slave put to a treadmill".[36] By contrast, Philo demonstrated a more accepting approach to rhetoric, and in fact, from de orat. 3.110[37] we learn that he had begun to teach forensic rhetoric in a technical form;[38] Philo's acceptance of rhetoric and its integration into his philosopher's practice must have involved a reappraisal of the definition of τέχνη itself.[39]

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35) See Görler 1974, 54–55, 61, who places 'Crassus', 'Antonius', and 'Sulpicius' on a hierarchy from the highest to the lowest level according to the "Stufenschema" that, he argues, underlies all the instances in which Cicero appears to take contradicting positions concerning a certain topic. I thank the reviewer of this paper for bringing Görler's analysis to my attention.

36) De orat. 1.45–47, transl. May / Wisse.

37) In 3.109, 'Crassus' had given the distinction (first established by Hermagoras) between θέσις and ὑπόθεσις; in § 110 he expands on how this distinction is used in rhetorical teaching (*etiam hac ⟨in⟩ instituendo divisione utuntur*), including by Philo (*nunc enim apud Philonem, quem in Academia* [*maxime*] *vigere audio*). See Brittain 2001, 328–42 for a survey and interpretation of the evidence for this claim.

38) According to Brittain (pp. 312–28), it is possible that Philo was teaching rhetoric even before the dramatic date of *De oratore* (91 BCE), but in the non-technical form established by Charmadas. See also Reinhardt 2000.

39) As illustrated by Brittain, this was necessary in order to fit with Philo's epistemological views – which, in the 90s, consisted in the acceptance of ἀκαταληψία

According to Cicero's 'looser' conception of *ars*, there is no need for rhetoric to provide a guaranteed path to knowledge for it to be considered a solid and creditable discipline and a worthy subject for an erudite conversation between honest and cultivated people. This, however, is precisely what the most tenacious opponents of rhetoric denied. Thus in de orat. 2.30, the statement that rhetoric is something *quae ad scientiam non saepe perveniat, quae opiniones hominum et saepe errores aucupetur* allows Cicero to give a nod to his readers and go along with a line of argument which he expects them to pick up on, being familiar with the famous debate on the status of rhetoric and the signature songs of its main contenders.

The phrase in De lingua Latina 5.8

So much, then, for the context and function of the phrase in Cicero's *De oratore*. What is its purpose in Varro, and how does it differ?

A first notable difference is that, in *De oratore*, the statement comes from a character who, at that point in the dialogue, is not delivering the author's own judgement, but expressing a position which is later refuted (as we have seen). By contrast, in *De lingua Latina*, the sentence is part of Varro's own statement of purpose; the question, then, is what point Varro intended to make by that phrase, and why he chose to use Cicero's words to do it.

It has been argued[40] that Varro's intention was to take a stance in the epistemological dispute on knowledge and opinion carried on within the Academy and, to that extent, to pit himself against Cicero: faced with a line of contention which downgraded belief (*opinio*) and only validated full and certain knowledge (*scientia*), Varro would have wanted to defend opinion as a sound foundation

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(the notion that nothing can be known, at least in the form of the Stoic κατάληψις), but the rejection of ἐποχή (suspension of judgment); "since the thesis of *acatalepsia* formed the basis of the Philonian / Metrodorian position to which Philo subscribed in this period, he could not have consistently taught a technical rhetoric with any other conception of its technicality: the epistemic status of his rhetorical theory could not exceed the 'probable'" (p. 331).

40) Boyancé 1975, 107; Pfaffel 1981, 232.

to form a judgement; his addition, that this is what "a medic sometimes does, in matters of our health, when we are ill", would have been meant to bolster this argument. However, such a hypothesis is ultimately untenable. First of all, while it would be a powerful move on Varro's part to refute Cicero by turning his own words against him, clearly, in the passage in *De oratore*, 'Antonius' is not expressing Cicero's view, but one which he opposed. We can only conclude that, on the contrary, Varro chose to echo Cicero's words to signal his agreement with Cicero's position. But the most important reason why this hypothesis is misguided is that the position which Varro was subscribing to had nothing to do with epistemology.

In *De oratore*, although 'Antonius' uses words deeply rooted in the core of theories of knowledge, he is not actually engaging with an epistemological question at all. The claim that rhetoric "is based on falsehood", that it "often does not reach ascertained knowledge", and rather "chases the opinions and often the mistakes of men" presupposes, for sure, a framework in which *opinio* is connected with mistakes and *scientia* is ranked higher on that account, but 'Antonius" contextual aim is not to defend such a notion, but to show that rhetoric cannot qualify as an *ars* based on those criteria. The focus is the nature and value of rhetoric, not the path to knowledge.

As for Varro, even though there are no places in his surviving works where he addresses the different philosophical positions on the path to knowledge, inferences on his views on the matter can be and have been drawn indirectly; in particular, it has been commonly assumed that he shared the tenets of his teacher Antiochus of Ascalon (all the more so given that the latter's account of the development of an epistemological theory from Plato and the *veteres* to the Stoics and the Old Academy, illustrated in Cic. ac. 1.15–42, is put in 'Varro's mouth). Indeed, a compelling temptation is to address the entire question of the purpose of Varro's use of Cicero's phrase in light of the role and relation of *scientia* and *opinio* in Antiochus. Yet, the interpretation of Antiochus' account in the *Academica* is very much disputed. D. Blank[41] presented Antiochus' theory of knowledge as the background for Varro's conception of

41) Blank 2008.

etymology as an epistemological tool, and checked his reconstruction against the *Cratylus* as the foundational text of Antiochus' own theory of etymology. While 'Socrates" (Plato's) conclusion in that dialogue had been that etymology is a useful tool to learn about the name-givers' conception of things,[42] but not of the things themselves,[43] Antiochus – who admitted that some things remain "hidden" or "unclear" (ac. 1.45) – would have claimed that etymology could be employed to acquire knowledge of those things that could not be reached with the senses and then be confirmed through κατάληψις (such as things belonging to a remote past). By contrast, T. Reinhardt[44] did not stress in Antiochus' account any preoccupation with building up a theory of etymology. He argued that his main concern was different (p. 31): "Antiochus was faced with the need to explain how one could see one intellectual movement from Plato and the *ueteres* through Aristotle and the Peripatos down to the Stoics"; this task was especially difficult in the field of epistemology, where (p. 42) "the gulf between a two-world view and the corresponding dismissal of perception on the one hand and Stoic materialism and the doctrine of the cataleptic impression on the other" seemed truly unbridgeable. Reinhardt showed that, in order to do that, Antiochus ascribed a particular conception of reason to the *veteres*, which he was able to derive from Plato's *Theaetetus*. So, according to Reinhardt's reconstruction, the *Cratylus* did not play much of a role in Antiochus' account in the *Academica*.

The matter, therefore, is complicated and makes an unsteady base for the task of mapping out the roles of *ad scientiam pervenire* and *opinionem aucupari* in a hypothetical framework of Varro's epistemology. However, ultimately it must be recognised that any such reconstruction would have little bearing on the question of the Ciceronian quotation in ling. 5.8: for, quite simply, there is really no reason why we should expect an epistemological argument at this point in *De lingua Latina*.

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42) Such a conclusion can be gleaned especially from Cra. 411c and 439c.

43) Knowledge of things has to come from the things themselves, which have an essence that is stable and does not depend on the humans' perception of them (386e; 387d–388e).

44) Reinhardt 2018. I am grateful to Prof. Reinhardt for further discussing this matter with me.

The appeal of words so philosophically meaningful like *scientia* and *opinio* is such that one risks losing sight of the reality that the first paragraphs of book 5 have nothing to do with the foundations of knowledge and different cognitive states: they simply deal with "that branch of learning which is called etymology" (ling. 5.1). In fact, the opening of the book is not at all dissimilar from what we would expect to read in the introduction of a present-day monograph. First, the author (i. e. Varro) outlines how his treatment of the topic will be arranged in the next three books and how this topic fits in the wider structure of the treatise (§ 1). Then he proceeds to make some methodological remarks: he clarifies how he has narrowed down the topic, by distinguishing between etymology and semantics (§ 2);[45] then he breaks down the difficulties that one faces when researching the subject (§ 3, subsequently expanded on in §§ 5–6);[46] finally he gives more details on the method he will be following in his specific task (in this case, the etymological reconstructions, § 4). We finally reach §§ 7–9 (the section central to this paper), which we could now just as well read, in modern terms, as an exposition of the *status quaestionis*: who has dealt with etymology before, what methods they have used, and what doctrinal results they have accomplished. As we have seen, these different approaches to etymology are presented in order of difficulty, and at the top level of the scale is the quotation at issue.

So, the terms *scientia* and *opinio* are brought into the picture here with reference to what one can expect to obtain at the fourth

45) This distinction is not reflected by present-day linguistics, as our etymology studies a word's form and its meaning jointly. Varro's etymologies in books 5–7, however, focus on the outward shape of words.

46) The challenges to etymological reconstructions amount to four. (1) Some words are no longer in use (*vetustas quosdam delevit*). (2) Of those still in use, some have been given inappropriately (*nec quae extat sine mendo omnis imposita*). (3) Of those still in use and given appropriately, some have undergone diachronic mutations (*nec quae recte est imposita, cuncta manet*), both in the form (*multa enim verba litteris commutatis sunt interpolata*) and in the meaning (*multa verba aliud nunc ostendunt, aliud ante significabant*). (4) Some words in the Latin lexicon have been borrowed from other idioms (*neque omnis origo est nostrae linguae e vernaculis verbis*). Some scholars (e. g. Schröter 1963, 86, de Melo 2019, 654.) distinguish the phonetic and the semantic changes as two separate reasons, thus bringing the list up to five elements.

level; but it seems to me that the significance of this statement encompasses the whole discipline of etymology, because it means that this branch of learning cannot guarantee the attainment of full knowledge of the things it investigates at all the stages and contexts of its application. The etymological methods can secure certain results when applied to self-explanatory compounds (like *argentifodinae* and *viocurus*); as we progress through the other *gradus*, and apply these methods to more challenging words, such as poetic creations (by nature rarefied and removed from everyday-speech) or ordinary words which have changed over time in their form or meaning, we can still expect reliable results, but must concede that errors might occur in the process; and when we examine the words which (if we interpret the fourth level as discussed above) are the oldest ones in the Latin lexicon, coined at too distant a time for us to firmly grasp them in our day, we necessarily enter the realm of the 'probable'. This does not mean that the results will be utterly haphazard, for Varro is convinced that the principles of the etymological analysis developed by the grammarians and the philosophers are sound and reliable (in fact, he himself applies them in books 5–7). However, he acknowledges that the ratio of certainty and speculation in a word's reconstruction will vary. Whether Varro is expressing concern about his own ability to arrive to knowledge at the fourth level, or stating that nobody could, is irrelevant: if the methods of etymology cannot promise that any person who is able to learn and apply them to analyse any word (including the most ancient and obscure ones) will reach conclusive results, then this limitation affects the entire doctrine. Therefore, just like in Cicero's passage, the focus is not on the path to knowledge, but on the status of a discipline, that is, whether such a limitation (which Cicero acknowledges for rhetoric and Varro for etymology) disqualifies it as a rigorous and worthwhile practice.

In de orat. 2.30, too, *scientia* and *opinio* were called into play to define what one can expect to obtain from rhetoric. There, on the acceptance of this point depended (at least in part) the speakers' agreement whether rhetoric qualified as an *ars* or not. We know that Varro had posed a similar question about etymology: as recalled above, these paragraphs in *De lingua Latina* come straight after the triad of books 2–4, which, as Varro says in 7.109, had been dedicated to the discussion "whether etymology is an *ars* and is useful":

> *Quare institutis sex libris, quemadmodum rebus latina nomina essent imposita ad usum nostrum; e quis tris scripsi Po. Septumio qui mihi fuit qu⟨a⟩estor, tris tibi, quorum hic est tertius, priores de disciplina verborum originis, posteriores de verborum originibus. In illis, qui ante sunt, in primo volumine est quae dicantur, cur* ἐτυμολογική *neque ars sit neque ea utilis sit, in secundo quae sint, cur et ars ea sit et ⟨ut⟩il[l]is sit, in tertio quae forma et[h]ymologiae.* (110) *In secundis tribus …*
>
> Therefore, I have arranged six books [2–7] on how Latin words were assigned to things for our use; of these, three books [2–4] I have written for Publius Septumius, who was quaestor to me, and three [5–7] for you [Cicero], of which this is the third. The earlier ones are about the doctrine of the origins of words, the later ones about the origins of words. In the first triad, the first volume [2] contains the arguments why etymology is neither an art nor useful, the second [3] the arguments why it is an art and is useful, the third [4] describes how the system of etymology works. (110) In the second triad …

This passage informs us that the discussion on etymology as an *ars* had been conducted *in utramque partem*. The same structure will be employed in books 8–10 for the dispute on analogy and anomaly, and there, in book 10, Varro reaches a conciliatory conclusion on the doctrine of analogy and proceeds to articulate its principles and governing *ratio*. If we trust Varro to have been true to his promise and have structured the two triads similarly, we should assume that, in book 4, he also reached a conciliatory conclusion on the question whether etymology is an *ars* or not (which is the focus of this triad's doctrinal quarrel).[47]

This, too, is similar to *De oratore* in that 'Antonius' and 'Crassus' also agreed on a definition of *ars*, and its applicability to rhetoric, which was a compromise. Perhaps, in book 4, Varro followed the lead of Cicero's characters[48] and concluded that etymology, too,

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47) See Ax 1995 on the connection between Varro's choice to resort to the scheme of *disputatio in utramque partem* and Cicero's use of the same technique in *De oratore*; Ax focused on the rhetorical scheme itself, but did not venture inferences on a specific Ciceronian influence on the content of the argumentation, as I am suggesting here.

48) One can only wish it were possible to ascertain that Varro – whom we can assume to have read *De oratore* – had well received Cicero's innovation of the conception of *ars*, and that evidence of his approval survived. Unfortunately, not even Cicero's letters can be of help, for the few mentions of Varro from November 55 (when *De oratore* was finished) are not related to that piece of work, and from June 45 on, when Varro's presence in the letters becomes pervasive, it is all about the writing of the *Academica* (and Cicero's impatience to receive the promised dedicated work).

is, "if not an *ars*, then at least something like an *ars*". It might be too risky to conjecture such a thesis for a book of which almost nothing has survived; however, such a conclusion would certainly provide a suitable foundation for what is claimed in 5.8 – that etymology may not always allow us to attain firm knowledge of the subject we are inquiring into, but it can still deliver a sensible, trustworthy enough opinion; and its inability to guarantee firm knowledge does not disqualify it as an *ars* altogether. 'Crassus' had advocated (1.109) for the acknowledgement of a discipline as an *ars* if it was founded and developed empirically, subsequently formalised according to a coherent theory and set of principles, and perfected through long-standing practice: the whole exposition in ling. 5.7–8 shows that etymology meets these very requirements. The foundation of etymology is empirical because every speaker is familiar with the idea that one can retrace the origin of a word if they understand the kind of process which has transformed it (as is shown in Varro's model by the examples of the first *gradus*); subsequently, philologists built on that foundation to recognise phonological patterns and develop principles; and the application of those principles was consolidated through practice by both philologists and philosophers. In this way, the whole exposition in ling. 5.7–8 demonstrates that etymology satisfies the criteria for the recognition of a discipline as an *ars*.

This reconstruction reaches the conclusion that Varro's conceptualisation of etymology as a discipline, his articulation of its principles, and his account of different methodological approaches to its tasks were informed by Cicero's treatment of rhetoric in *De oratore*, which, in turn, was informed by Philo, who had provided the doctrinal justification for the acceptance of opinion as valuable and useful even in the absence of full knowledge. The presence, in ling. 5.8, of a distinguishable phrase which figures in de orat. 2.30 (and which was itself a reprise of Plato's *Phaedrus*) bears testimony for us to the close link between Varro's and Cicero's texts. It is likely, however, that the quotation also served as a resumptive reference to a discussion in the lost books devoted to the dispute over the status of etymology as an *ars* (2–4), where – I suggest – Varro probably expanded on his alignment with Cicero's conclusions regarding the definition of an *ars* in more depth and more explicitly.

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