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"Lovers of Wisdom"
Etymology in the Service of Philosophy and Christianity in Peter Abelard's Writings

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My contribution investigates how Peter Abelard considers and uses etymology in his writings. I will start with some general considerations about the notion of etymology in the early Middle Ages, while the following two parts will concern Peter Abelard's reflections on, and use of, etymologies in his logical and theological works respectively.

1 Etymology in the Early Medieval Tradition

According to Isidore of Seville, etymology gives the "origin of the words," and is found "when one reaches, through interpretation, the force of the word or of the name":

> Etymologia est origo vocabulorum, cum vis verbi vel nominis per interpretationem colligitur.[1]

In fact, during the Middle Ages *etymologia* did not have the modern sense of "the historical study of word forms"; medieval etymology was—as Vivien Law has said—"usually pursued on a synchronic rather than a diachronic basis."[2]

With its proximity to other practices like *interpretatio* (in the strict sense of translation), *derivatio*, *definitio*, *descriptio,* and *expositio* (of words), we could say that in general the aim of *etymologia* in the Middle Ages was to find "revealing connections with other similar-sounding

[1] Isid. *Ethym.* I, XXIX.
[2] Law 1997, p. 264.

words."[1] This is in fact how, in the twelfth century, Petrus Helias described etymology in his *Summa super Priscianum*:

> Ethimologia ergo est expositio alicuius vocabuli per aliud vocabulum sive unum sive plura magis nota, secundum rei proprietatem et litterarum similitudinem, ut "lapis" quasi "ledens pedem", "fenestra" quasi "ferens nos extra". Hic enim et rei proprietas attenditur et litterarum similitudo observatur.
>
> Est vero ethimologia compositum nomen ab *ethimo* quod interpretatur "verum" et *logos*, quod interpretatur "sermo", ut dicatur "ethimologia" quasi "veriloquium", quoniam qui ethimologizat "veram", id est primam vocabuli originem assignat. Differt autem ab interpretatione que est translatio de una loquela in aliam. Ethimologia vero fit sepius in eadem loquela.[2]

> Etymology is thus an exposition of a certain word through another word or words that are better known, <and is> based on a property of the thing and a similarity in the letters, e.g., "*lapis*" as "*ledens pedem*," "*fenestra*" as "*ferens nos extra*." Here, both the property of the thing and the similarity in the letters are considered.
>
> In fact, "*ethimologia*" is a noun composed of "*ethimo*," which translates as "*verum*" and "*logos*," which translates as "*sermo*." So it may be said that "etymology" is almost a "true speech," since someone who etymologizes identifies the true origin of the word, that is, its first origin. It differs from interpretation, which consists in transferring from one language to another; etymology, on the other hand, is mostly carried out within the same language.[3]

[1] *Ibid*. About etymology in the Middle Ages, see Buridant 1998a, Cinato 2011, and the previous literature mentioned in these two studies.

[2] Petrus Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. Reilly, p. 70.86–96. The passage has been re-edited and translated into French in Rosier-Catach 1998b, p. 221 as well as quoted in Cinato 2011, pp. 286–87. Petrus also clearly distinguishes *ethimologia* from derivation—*ethimologia* aiming to find the property of things, *derivatio* aiming to describe the relation between words. Cf. Rosier-Catach 1998a, pp. 115–16.

[3] When I do not give the name of the translator at the end of a quotation, the translation is mine.

The logical and rhetorical traditions also describe a *locus ex etymologia*, since we can look for etymologies to use them as premises to draw conclusions.[1] This *locus* is also called *ex notatione*, because *notatio* is the name preferred by Cicero for the Greek *etymologia*. In Cicero's *Topica*, for example, the *locus* from etymology is described as follows:

> Tum notatio, cum ex verbi vi argumentum aliquod elicitur hoc modo: Cum lex assiduo vindicem assiduum esse iubeat, locupletem iubet locupleti (id est enim assiduus, ut ait L. Aelius, appellatus ab aere dando).[2]
>
> Then, etymology; this is when an argument is drawn from the force of a word in this way: Since the law decrees that only an *assiduus* should stand for an *assiduus*, it decrees that only a wealthy man should stand surely for a wealthy man (for the *assiduus*, as Aelius says, is so called from *the paying of money* (trans. Reinhardt, p. 121; modified).

Boethius, commenting on this text, defines *notatio* as "a certain interpretation of a name," and distinguishes it from definition: a definition declares, unfolds, and spreads out (*declarat, expedit et diffundit*) what is confusingly signified by the name.[3] Furthermore, this *locus* is called *ex notatione*, writes Boethius, since every noun "is a mark and sign of" the thing (*nomen omnem rem notat atque significat*):

> Tertius eorum qui in ipso sunt locus a notatione est constitutus. Notatio vero est quaedam nominis interpretatio. Nomen vero semper in ipso est. Ut enim diffinitio id quod in nomine involutum est declarat, expedit atque diffundit, ita etiam nomen id quod a diffinitione dicitur evolute, involute confuseque designat. Quod si definitio in ipso est, nomen quoque in ipso esse de quo agitur, non potest dubitari. Ex notatione autem locus vocatus est, quia nomen omnem rem notat atque significat.[4]

[1] See Buridant 1998b, pp. 27–43.

[2] Cic. *Top*. 10.

[3] About the notion of *definitio* or *diffinitio* in the Middle Ages and its relation to etymology, see Buridant 1990.

[4] Boeth. *In Ciceronis Topica*, PL 64, col. 1062C.

> The Topic *from designation* is established as the third of those Topics that are in the thing at issue. Designation is a sort of explanation of a name, and a name is always in the thing at issue. As a definition disentangles and spreads out what a name proclaims in an involuted way, so the name designates in an involuted and undifferentiated way what the definition expresses discursively. And so, if a definition is in the thing at issue, a name undoubtedly is also. The Topic is called "*from designation*" because a name designates and signifies all of a thing (trans. Stump, p. 46).

The strict relation between *etymologia* / *notatio* and *interpretatio* must be stressed and clarified, since in medieval texts we can find *interpretatio* treated either as a genus with *etymologia* as one of its species, or as a synonym of *etymologia*, or as a kind of description of a name based on translation from another language (this is the way in which Petrus Helias uses it in the text quoted earlier, last lines) or on the composition of the word.

In any event, later in his *Topica*, Cicero writes about the kind of argumentation called *ex notatione*, which, as we have seen, derives its conclusion from the "force of the name" (*ex vi nominis*). The text clearly shows that the *vis nominis* of which Cicero and Isidore write concerns the word itself in its phonetic form (*vis nominis, verbum ipsum*), and not the thing to which the name refers to nor what falls in its "division":

> Multa etiam ex notatione sumuntur. Ea est autem cum ex vi nominis argumentum elicitur; quam Graeci ἐτυμολογίαν appellant, id est verbum ex verbo veriloquium; nos autem novitatem verbi non satis apti fugientes genus hoc notationem appellamus quia sunt verba rerum notae. Itaque hoc quidem Aristoteles σύμβολον appellat, quod Latine est nota. Sed cum intellegitur quid significetur, minus laborandum est de nomine. Multa igitur in disputando notatione eliciuntur ex verbo, ut cum quaeritur postliminium quid sit—non dico quae sint postlimini; nam id caderet in divisionem, quae talis est: Postliminio redeunt haec: homo, navis, mulus

> clitellarius, equus, equa quae frenos recipere solet—; sed cum ipsius postlimini vis quaeritur et verbum ipsum notatur.[1]
>
> Many arguments are also derived from denotation [*notatio*]. This is when an argument is elicited from the force of a word. The Greeks call this etymology, that is, in word for word translation, *veriloquium* (saying of truth). But I shrink from the novelty of a word which is not particularly suitable and prefer to call this type denotatio [*notatio*], because words are the notes of things. Therefore Aristotle calls the same thing σύμβολον, which in Latin is *nota*. But when it is understood what is meant, there is less need to worry about the name. In a discussion many arguments are elicited from words through (the analysis of the) denotation [*notatio*], e.g. when the question is what *postliminium* (resumption of rights) is—(I do not say is covered by *postliminium*, for this would fall under division, which is of the form: "These things return in virtue of *postliminium*: a man, a ship, a pack-mule, a stallion, a mare accustomed to the bit")—but when the force of the word itself *postliminium*, is the issue and when the word itself is etymologically explained (trans. Reinhardt, p. 133; modified).

Boethius, in his commentary on this passage, explains that the *argumentum ex notatione* is based on the interpretation of the name, i.e., ἐτυμολογία in Greek. Literally translated, ἐτυμολογία should be *veriloquium*, but since this name has not been adopted in Latin, Cicero calls etymology *notatio*. In other words, here Cicero and Boethius are discussing the etymology of the word "ἐτυμολογία" itself (the same *explicatio* is also given by Petrus Helias, in the text quoted earlier):

> Post enumerationem partium recto ordine de notatione perpendit. Notatio igitur est quoties ex nota aliqua rei, quae dubia est, capitur argumentum. Nota vero est quae rem quamque designat. Quo fit ut omne nomen nota sit, idcirco quod notam facit rem de qua praedicatur, id Aristoteles σύμβολον nominavit. Ex notatione autem sumitur argumentum quoties aliquid ex notatione, id est nominis interpretatione, colligitur. Interpretatio vero nominis ἐτυμολογία Graece, Latine veriloquium nuncupatur; ἔτυμον enim

[1] Cic. *Top.*, 35–36. Cf. Buridant 1998, p. 16.

> verum significat, λογός orationem. Sed quia id veriloquium minus in usu Latini sermonis habebatur, interpretatione nominis notationem Tullius appellat.[1]
>
> Cicero considers designation in the right order, after the enumeration of parts. Designation occurs when an argument is taken from a sign of the thing that is in doubt. A sign is that which designates any thing. Hence, every name is a sign because it makes known the thing of which it is predicated. (Aristotle named this "*symbolon.*") And an argument is taken from designation when something is inferred from the explanation of a name. An explication of a name is called "*etymologia*" in Greek and "*veriloquium*" in Latin, for the Greek "*etymon*" signifies "*verum*" and "*logos*" signifies "*oratio*". But because "*veriloquium*" is less commonly used in ordinary Latin discourse, Cicero calls the explanation of a name "*designation*" (trans. Stump, pp. 108–9).

Thus, according to these descriptions, when we use etymology to draw a conclusion, we produce an *argumentum ex etymologia* or *ex notatione*.[2] Note that, while etymology concerns primarily the words in their phonetic form, conclusions drawn from etymology often concern the things signified by the words, and this shift is at the centre of Abelard's discussions about etymology in his logical writings.[3]

In fact, as Jean Jolivet remarked in his fundamental book *Arts du langage et théologie chez Abélard*, published first in 1969 and then again, in an augmented version, in 1982, etymology plays an important role in Abelard's writings.[4] First, Abelard repeats several times, in different formulations, the basic assumption that underlies Isidore's use of

[1] Boeth. *In Ciceronis Topica*, PL 64, col. 1111B–C. Cf. Mart. Cap. *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* V, 483, ed. Willis, p. 168.9–12: "a nota vel etymologia … sumimus argumentum sic: 'si consul est, qui consulit rei publicae, quid aliud Tullius fecit, cum affecit supplicio coniuratos?' quo in loco originem vobabuli tantum oportet attendere."

[2] On etymology as an instrument of knowledge about things, see Buridant 1998b, p. 22.

[3] About the difference between a notion of *etymologia* concerning just words and another concerning also things, see Buridant 1998b, pp. 18–20.

[4] Cf. Jolivet 1982, pp. 72–74. Cf. also Bloch 1983, who, concerning Peter Abelard, substantially depends on what Jolivet writes.

etymologies in his *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX* (which Abelard quotes very often): that is, the idea that names reflect the natures of things, so that by knowing the origins of names it is possible to know the things themselves, or at least something about them. As has often been remarked, in the *Logica nostrorum petitione sociorum*—which, even if apparently not written directly by Abelard, seems to reflect his thought—we read the forceful formula *voces sunt aemulae rerum*.[1] Furthermore, in the *Glosses on Porphyry* of his *Logica Ingredientibus*, within the discussion of the definition of *differentia* and of the fact that not every *differentia* produces a species with its own name, Abelard writes incidentally of the nature of things (*natura rerum*) as something "according to which" names can be imposed (*natura rerum secundum quam <nomina> imponi possunt*):

> Videtur insuper non omni differentiae haec definitio [scil. DIFFERENTIA EST QUA ABUNDAT SPECIES A GENERE] conuenire, cum frequenter specierum nomina deficiant, pro quibus frequenter differentias poni in *Diuisione* Boethius dicit. At uero nos non <ad> actum impositionis nominum respicimus sed magis ad naturam rerum, secundum quam imponi possunt.[2]
>
> It seems, moreover, that this definition [i.e., there is a difference when a species leans out from a genus] does not apply to all differences, since the names of species are often lacking, and instead of them, Boethius says in *De divisione*, <the names of> differences are often used. But we are not interested in the act of imposing names, but in the nature of things, according to which names can be imposed.

To a certain extent, therefore, Abelard seems to participate in the "grammatical Platonism" which, according to a famous article by Jolivet from 1966, unites Isidore of Seville, Fridugisus of Tours, and Gottshalk of Orbais in the Early Middle Ages, and, in the twelfth century, Thierry of

[1] Abael. *Logica nostrorum petitione sociorum*, ed. Geyer, p. 537.7. Cf. Jolivet 1982, p. 72, and Marenbon 2013, pp. 33–37.

[2] Abael. *Glossae super Porphyrium LI*, ed. Geyer, p. 75.9–14. Cf. Boethius, *De divisione*, ed. Magee, p. 16.6–9.

Chartres: these authors share the conviction that, since names have been given based on the natures of the things, by knowing the origin of a name, we can reach a certain knowledge of the thing signified by it.[1]

2 Etymology in Abelard's Logical Works

If we then look at how Peter Abelard effectively uses etymology, we find first that he quite often relies on etymologies in his reflections, both logical and theological. E.g., he offers the following etymologies in his logical writings: *adverbium* from *adiectivum verbi*,[2] *vox a vocando*,[3] *homo dicitur ab humo*,[4] or *Brito dictus est quasi brutus*.[5]

These are only few among the many etymologies that are spread throughout Abelard's writings, most of which can be found in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* or in the grammatical tradition. The etymology of *vox* from *vocando*, e.g., is given by Priscian in the section of his *Institutiones Grammaticae* about the *vox* (I, 6). The derivation of *homo* from *humus* can be found in Isidore's *Ethymologiae* (I, xxix, 3; XI, I, 4), as can the derivation of *Brito* from *brutus* (IX, ii, 102). It seems, therefore, that Abelard has considerable confidence in the heuristic power of etymology and takes the tradition originated by Isidore of Seville into great consideration.

Yet Abelard is neither deluded nor naïve about the heuristic potential of etymology, as Jolivet also noticed.[6] Abelard knows and writes that

[1] Cf. Jolivet 1966 and Buridant 1998b, pp. 47–48.

[2] *Glossae super Peri Hermeneias LI*, X, 10, ed. Jacobi and Strub, p. 310.75. But Abelard also presents as "etymologies" two descriptions based in fact on translation: that of *hypoteticum* from *conditionale* (*Glosse super Peri Hermeneias LI*, V, 100, ed. Jacobi and Strub, p. 178.727) and that of *topice* from *localis* (*Glossae super Topica LI*, ed. Dal Pra 1969, p. 213.22, cf. Martin 2004).

[3] Abael., *Dialectica*, ed. de Rijk, p. 128.4.

[4] *Glosse super Porphyrium, Logica Nostrorum Petitione sociorum*, ed. Geyer, p. 549.3; and compare *Glosse super Peri Hermeneias LI*, III, 62, ed. Jacobi and Strub, pp. 112–13, about which see later in this article. Cf. Martin 2011, p. 35.

[5] Abael., *Dialectica*, ed. de Rijk, p. 128.29–32.

[6] Cf. Jolivet 1982, pp. 72–74.

although a name is given "according to a property of the thing" (see above), it does not completely express the nature of the thing.

Furthermore, if names have been imposed "according to some property" of the things, they have not been imposed "in order to signify exactly that property." Thus, there is a great difference between definition and signification on the one hand, and etymology and interpretation on the other hand, and Peter Abelard stresses this difference.

Knowing the derivations of their names will clearly not be sufficient, according to Abelard, to instruct us about the nature of the signified things. An example of this is the case of the name *Brito*, "Breton." *Brito,* Abelard remarks in his *Dialectica*, derives from *brutus*, "brute," since those who imposed this name thought that most Bretons were stupid. But this is not to say that *all* Bretons, and *only* Bretons, are stupid:

> Licet … non omnes uel soli sint stolidi, hic tamen qui nomen "*Britonis*" composuit secundum affinitatem nominis "*bruti*", in intentione habuit quod maxima pars Britonum fatua esset, atque hinc hoc nomen illi affine in sono protulit.[1]

> Although … <the Bretons> are not all foolish and not only they <may be foolish>, nevertheless he who composed the name "Breton" because of the affinity with the name "brute" inwardly believed that most Bretons were fatuous and therefore invented this name, similar to that in sound.

Later in his *Dialectica*, in the section on *loci,* Abelard describes the limits of the explanatory capacity or heuristic force of etymology in a more detailed way. He is discussing the *locus ab interpretatione*, and he describes a different sort of *interpretatio*, using here *interpretatio* in a broader sense which includes, as different kinds of it, definition and *etymologia*. While definition is an interpretation that opens the meaning of a word by demonstrating the substantial properties of a *res*, etymology is based more on the composition of the name as such than on the substance of the thing. And sometimes, as in the case of the etymology of proper

[1] Abael. *Dialectica*, ed. de Rijk, p. 128.29–32.

names, etymology does not capture at all the properties of the thing itself, and consequently the argumentations which are based on it do not contain any necessity or probability:

> Regule vero ab interpretatione nominis, secundum id quod ipsa interpretatio modo substantiam rei continet, modo vero quibusdam accidentibus subiectum depingit, modo necessitatem modo probabilitatem proponunt. Est autem substantialis interpretatio ut si "*anthropos*" grecum nomen, quod est "*homo*", latina diffinitione aperiemus, hac scilicet: *"animal rationale mortale*", vel si aliquod grecum nomen latina descriptione. Est enim interpretatio secundum id quod ignotum aperit vocabulum cuius nullam adhuc significationem tenebamus, diffinitio vero vel descriptio secundum id quod <rem> iam quodammodo cognitam alicui manifestius secundum eius proprietates demonstrat. Si vero interpretatio etymologiam fecerit, ut videlicet magis secundum nominis compositionem quam secundum rei substantiam fiat, veluti cum hoc proprium nomen "*Bartolomeus*", "*filium regis*" interpretamur; secundum id scilicet quod "*Bar*" grece "*filius*" latine dicitur, "*tolomeus*" autem "*rex*", huiusmodi interpretatio, quia solius nominis compositionem sequitur nec rei potius proprietatem exprimit, nullam probabilitatem exigit.[1]
>
> The rules that depend on the interpretation of a name, according to the fact that the same interpretation sometimes entails the substance of the thing and sometimes adds some accidents to the subject, sometimes produce necessity and sometimes probability. We have a substantial interpretation when, e.g., we disclose the Greek name "*anthropos*," which means "human," by the Latin definition, "*animal rationale mortale*," or in the case of any Greek name of which we give a Latin description. Interpretation in fact occurs when we uncover <the meaning> of a word of which we knew no meaning until that moment. Definition or description, on the other hand, occurs when one demonstrates to someone else more clearly, through its properties, something already known to some extent. If, however, the interpretation has produced an etymology, so that it is based more on the composition of the name than on the substance of the thing, as when we interpret the Greek name "*Bartholomaeus*" as "son of

[1] Abael. *Dialectica*, pp. 338.35–339.16.

> the king," since the word "*bar*" means "*filius*" [son] in Latin, and "*tolomaeus*" "*rex*" [king]: this kind of interpretation, since it is based only on the composition of the name and does not express a property of the thing, produces no probability.

Again, in the *Dialectica*, treatise V, book II, in the chapter on *interpretatio* within the treatise on divisions and definitions, Abelard is even more explicit: in contrast to a definition of the thing (*definitio rei*), an interpretation as *definitio nominis* concerns more the name than the thing, whether it gives its etymology, points out its composition in parts, or explains it through translation into another language. For example, the definition of the name *philosophus* is *amator sapientiae*, reflecting the composition of this name.

An interpretation can express some property of the substance, but it does not fully capture its salient features as the definition does. While definition and defined are interchangeable, an interpretation always says something less than the reality it interprets, or, put another way, the reality exceeds the interpretation of the name and cannot be fully grasped by it. In the case of the interpretation of the name "philosopher" (*philosophus*) as "lover of wisdom" (*sapientiae amator*), the difference consists in the fact that we do not in fact call all those who love wisdom "philosophers" (*philosophi*) but, among them, only those who have "learnt the art":

> Diffinitionem autem aliam nominis esse dixit,[1] aliam rei. Eam autem que nominis est, interpretationem vocavit; interpretatio vero *ea* dicitur *diffinitio per quam ignotum alterius lingue vocabulum exponitur*, veluti cum "*philósophos*", quod grecum est, latina expositio nobis sic resolvit: *id est* "*amator sapientie*"; nam "*phílos*" am<at>oris designativum dicunt, "*sophía*" vero sapientie. …
>
> Sunt etiam qui interpretationem eiusdem lingue cum nomine ipso fieri concedunt, cum videlicet ipsum secundum partium compositionem exponitur; ut cum "*sacerdos*", quod ex "*sacro*" et "*dante*" compositum dicitur, "*dans*, id est *ministrans*, *sacrum*" interpretatur. Sed has quidem non

[1] The editor, L. M. De Rijk, writes in a footnote: "Quis ubi?".

inveni interpretationes appellari, sed forte etymologie vocis ipsius sonum maxime consequuntur, sive sint orationes, ut supraposita, sive dictiones, ut Britones quasi-brutones dicti sunt, eoquod bruti et irrationabiles ex insipientia videantur.

Attende autem quod cum interpretatio sive etymologia maxime nomen aperiant, rei quoque subiecte faciunt notitiam; alioquin vocabulum non aperirent; sed maxime rei demonstrationem diffinitio facit, que non solum ipsam substantiam tradit, verum etiam ipsam quibusdam suis proprietatibus depingit. Aliter enim diffinitio quam diffinitum vocabulum rem ipsam manifestat; illud enim involute, hec autem explicite ipsam designat … Illa autem [*scil*. interpretatio] interpretatum sepissime excedit; neque enim omnes qui sapientiam amant, philosophos dicimus, sed qui iam artis doctrinam perceperunt; "*philosophum*" tunc "*amatorem sapientie*" interpretamur, iuxta hoc quidem quod vocis compositio sonusque ipse innuere videtur. Unde merito hec [i.e., interpretatio or etymologia] nominis, illa autem [i.e., diffinitio stricto sensu] rei diffinitio dicitur.[1]

He also said that there is a definition of the name and a definition of the thing. He called the definition of the name "interpretation." In fact, one calls "interpretation" that definition by which one explains an unknown word of another language, as when the word "*philosophos*," which is Greek, is clarified by the Latin exposition: "*id est* '*amator sapientiae*' "; for they say that "*philos*" indicates the lover, and "*sophia*" wisdom. …

Some then hold that there is also an interpretation of a name within the same language, and that would be when that name is explained according to the composition of its parts; as when "*sacerdos*," which is said to be

[1] Abael. *Dialectica*, pp. 582.26–584.12. Slightly similar remarks, even if with a different judgment about *philosophia*, can be read in Petrus Helias' *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. Reilly, p. 105.5–14: " 'Sillaba est comprehensio litterarum consequens sub uno accentu et uno spiritu prolata'. Vide ergo quod ista descriptio data est per huius nominis quod est 'sillaba' interpretationem. *Sillabin* namque interpretatur 'comprehendere', unde sillaba dicitur quasi 'comprehensio'. Hec ergo descriptio largior est quam ipsum descriptum, quoniam ethimologia, sive interpretatio, quandoque excedit, ut quod 'homo' ab 'humo' dicitur. Multo namque plura de humo habent esse. Quandoque vero exceditur, ut interpretatio huius nominis quod est 'sillaba'. Sunt enim sillabe quarum est nulla comprehensio litterarum. Quandoque iterum parificatur ut quoniam philosophia dicitur amor sapientiae."

> composed of "*sacro*" and "*dante*," is interpreted as "*dans, i.e. ministrans, sacrum*." In fact, I have not found <in the texts> that these are called interpretations, but they are perhaps etymologies of the same word, <which> depend mostly on its sound: whether they are phrases, like the one mentioned above, or whether they are words, as when the Bretons are said to be almost brutish on account of the fact that they seem coarse and irrational in their insipience.
>
> But pay attention to the fact that, although interpretation or etymology explain the name more than anything else, they make the subject known too: otherwise they would not explain the word. But most of all it is the definition that provides a demonstration of the thing, since it not only conveys the substance itself, but also adds some of its properties to it. For the definition and the defined word make the same thing manifest in different ways, the one in an involute way, the other in an explicit way. … <Interpretation,> on the other hand, very often goes beyond the interpreted; for not all those who love wisdom do we call philosophers, but only those who have already learnt the arts; we then interpret "*philosophus*" <as> "*amator sapientiae*" because of what the composition of the word and the sound itself seem to suggest. Therefore, this [scil. "*amator sapientiae*"] is rightly said to be the definition of the name, that [scil. "*qui iam artis doctrinam perceperunt*"] a definition of the thing.

Similarly, in the *Glosses on De interpretatione* of the *Logica Ingredientibus*, III, 61–62, within the discussion of *voces infinitae* like *non-homo* or *non-res*, Abelard gives the etymology of *homo* from *humus* as an example of the fact that the meaning of words—which is given by the definition and is the cause of the imposition of the name itself—is different from what the name is given from. Indeed, Abelard writes that human beings bear the name *homo* because they are made from *humus* and not because they are what they are, i.e., "rational mortal animals." And many possible "reasons for the imposition" of a name are not actually marked in it (*non notantur in ipso*):

> Boethius autem in primo Categoricorum huiusmodi uoces infinitas appellari ideo dicit, quia infinita significant, his uerbis: "Et quoniam non homo haec uox" etc. usque illuc: "Et quoniam sunt." At uero Boethius

> magis ad causam translationis huius nominis quod est *infinitum* respexit quam ad uim significationis eius et ad proprietatem ex qua ipsum conuenit uocibus. Non enim secundum hoc datum est uocibus quod infinita significant, sed quod infinite, id est remotiue, ut diximus. Alioquin *res* que omnia continet, esset infinitum. Sed licet non sit datum uocibus ad notandum eas secundum hoc quod innumerabilia continet, ille tamen qui transtulit hoc nomen *infinitum* ad uoces significandas, hoc attendit, quod infinita ad innumerabilia se habent, et propter hoc sed non ad hoc notandum nomen hoc quod est *infinitum* uocibus dedit. Nam homo sic nominatus est, quia ex humo factus est, non secundum hoc quod est animal rationale mortale. Multae itaque sunt causae impositionis nominis quae non notantur in ipso.[1]
>
> But Boethius, in the <commentary to the> first book of the *Categories*, says that these words are called "*infinitae*" because they signify infinite things, and he does so using these words: "And since the word 'non-homo' " etc., up to "and since they are." But indeed Boethius has considered more the cause of the transfer of the name "*infinitus*" than the force of its signification and the property by which it applies to words. For it was not given to <some> words because they signify infinite things, but because they signify them in an infinite manner, that is, by removing <something>, as we have said. Otherwise the name "*res*," which contains all things, would be infinite. But although it was not given to signify them according to the fact that they contain innumerable things, he who transferred the name "*infinitum*" to signify words did pay attention to the fact that infinite <words> refer to an innumerable quantity of things, and because of this, but not to signify this, he gave some words this name "*infinitum*." For man [*homo*] is so called because he was made from humus, not because he is a rational mortal animal. And many are the causes of the imposition of a name that are not noted in the name itself.

We can find a similar distinction between definition and etymology in the grammatical tradition as well. Petrus Helias, in his commentary on Priscian, writes of definition and division as pertaining to philosophers,

[1] Abael. *Glossae super Peri Hermeneias LI*, III, 61–62; ed. Jacobi and Strub, pp. 112.484–113.487.

while etymology would pertain to grammarians.[1] The same distinction is also present in the *Glosulae super Priscianum Maiorem* linked to the school of William of Champeaux, according to which the definition of things pertains to philosophers, while etymology, concerning only words, pertains to grammarians: "Est autem philosophorum diffinitiones rerum grammaticorum uero uocum ethimologias formare."[2]

Similar remarks about the limits of etymological argumentations can be found also in rhetoric. Quintilianus, for example, in his *Institutio oratoria*, gives the example of the word *tyrannicida*, explaining that not all those who kill a tyrant are properly called "tyrannicides":

> Saepissime autem quid sit proprium cuiusque quaeretur, ut, si per *etumologian* dicatur: "tyrannicidae proprium est tyrannum occidere", negemus: non enim si traditum sibi eum carnifex occiderit tyrannicida dicatur; nec si inprudens uel inuitus.[3]

[1] Cf. text quoted by Rosier 1998b, p. 221: "VOX AUTEM DICTA EST VEL A VOCANDO. Praemissa vocis diffinitione et divisione secundum philosophos, ipse ex parte sua vocis aetymologiam ponit quam grammaticorum est." Cf. also *Glosulae in Priscianum*, quoted in Rosier 1993, p. 130.

[2] M 2rb; K 1vb (this part of the *Glosulae* is the beginning of the section on "voice" [*vox*] and has been edited in Grondeux and Rosier-Catach 2011a; these passages in particular are at pp. 285, 299, 305). Cf. also "Premissa uocis diffinitione et diuisione secundum philosophos, ipse ex parte sua uocis ethimologiam ponit, quae grammaticorum est" (M 3vb); "Data diffinitione quod est philosophi, subdit ethimologiam huius uocis quae est 'nomen', quod est grammatici." (M 20 rb) Where M = Metz, Bibl. mun. 1224 (*Glosulae* on ff. 1ra–110rb), K = Cologne, Dombibl. B. 201 (*Glosulae* on ff. 1ra–74rb). An edition of the *Glosulae* is being prepared by Anne Grondeux with the collaboration of M. Fredborg, E. Lorenzetti, I. Rosier-Catach, and C. Tarlazzi, and it can be consulted on https://htldb.huma-num.fr/gpma/home.html. For the complete list of manuscripts containing the *Glosulae in Priscianum* see this website and Grondeux and Rosier-Catach 2011b, p. 108. About etymology in the twelfth-century grammatical tradition, see Cinato 2011 and its bibliography. In particular Hunt 1952 is still very useful, as is the more recent Buridant 1998a, specially with Buridant 1998b, Jeudy 1998, Rosier–Catach 1998a, and Rosier 1998b. I am grateful to Anne Grondeux and Irène Rosier-Catach for their help while I was consulting the *Glosulae* and for other precious suggestions they gave me.

[3] Quintil. *Institutio oratoria* V, 10, LIX.

> We have, however, often to consider what is a *property* of some given object; for example, if it should be asserted, on the ground of etymology, that the peculiar *property* of a tyrannicide is to kill tyrants, we should deny it: for an executioner is not *ipso facto* a tyrannicide, if he executes a tyrant who has been delivered to him for the purpose, nor again is he a tyrannicide who kills a tyrant unwittingly or against his will (trans. Butler).

Thus, as we have seen, Abelard shows in his logical writings the same ambivalent attitude towards etymology which he can find in the tradition of the *trivium*: on the one hand a positive consideration of its explanatory strength, and on the other hand a clear consciousness of the limits of its use in argumentation.

Nevertheless, Abelard uses *etymologia* and *interpretatio* quite often in his reasonings, frequently without a clear distinction between these two names. I have already mentioned some occurrences of etymologies in his logical writings, but it is probably in Abelard's theological writings that we find the most extensive use of etymology and *interpretatio*.[1]

3 Etymology in the Demonstration of the Convergence of Philosophy, Logic, Christianity, and Monasticism

Here I would like to concentrate on Abelard's systematic use of etymology to sustain one of the most fundamental, and controversial, points of his philosophico-theological thought: the thesis about the convergence and possible identity between philosophy, logic, Christianity, and monasticism. In other words, it seems to me that Abelard uses the ancient instrument of etymology to strengthen an idea which is central in his theology: the idea of considering the pagan tradition of philosophy, and especially logic, as having a value to some extent close to divine revelation.[2]

[1] In his *Sermo XI*, for example, we find the etymology of *latro* from *latendo*, which can be found in Isidore's *Etymologies* (X, 159). Cf. Abael. *Sermones*, ed. Engels and Vande Veire, p. 164.1006.

[2] About pagans in medieval philosophy, see Marenbon 2015.

Abelard presents this idea and strengthens it with etymologies, especially in the second book of his *Theologia christiana*, in his *Epistola XIII*, in his *Soliloquium*, and in his *Sermo XXXIII*. Summing up what Abelard writes in these works, we can say that according to him ancient philosophers, authentic logicians, authentic Christians, and authentic monks share a common and substantial feature: they all follow the *logos* or *ratio* or *sapientia*, recognising its divinity.[1]

Thus, for Abelard, thanks to the convergence between philosophy and Christianity (which, in accordance with Augustine, he considers to be the "true philosophy," *vera philosophia*[2]), on the one hand the mysteries of faith can be partly clarified and defended using natural reason, and on the other hand—and this point has been less investigated—philosophy itself, and particularly logic, turn out to be in themselves divine and Christian: to Abelard, they are a gift of grace.[3]

Let us look at some examples of how Abelard argues those theses by means of etymology. His *Soliloquium* is completely structured around etymologies. In the introduction to his edition of the text, Charles Burnett writes:

> Most striking of all, however, is the very careful and logical arrangement of the subject-matter. In each of the first three sections a name of Christ and the implications of an adjectival form derived from that name are analysed, by investigation of the true meaning of the name and its adjectival form. So, the names in section I – Christus and Christiani – are followed in section II by Christ = *sapientia* (*sophia*) and *philosophi* ("lovers of wisdom"), and, in section III, by Christ = *Verbum* (*logos*) and *logici*. In section IV the terms discussed separately in section I to III, *Christus*, *Sapientia* and *Verbum*, are brought together. Their combination is responsible for the perfect teaching of Christianity, and the power of eloquence of those spreading the teaching. Section V sums up this

[1] Cf. Zerbi 2002, Georges 2007, Valente 2011, and Valente 2014.
[2] Cf. D'Onofrio 2013.
[3] Cf. Allegro 2008.

> conclusion with Christ's words of encouragement to his disciples as he prepared them for their ministry.[1]

As Burnett remarks in his introduction, the *Soliloquium* and *Epistola XIII* are concerned with showing that being a philosopher and a logician is not incompatible with being a Christian, but that, rather, Christians by necessity should be philosophers and logicians, and in practice can be called such in a truer sense than pagan philosophers and logicians.[2]

Let us have a look at the second and third sections of the *Soliloquium*, to gain an idea of Abelard's method in this text. Here Peter Abelard has a discussion with his *alter ego* Abelard Peter about the interpretation of the word *philosophi* as "lovers of wisdom," *sapientiae amatores*, and of the word *verbum* as *logos*, with the consequence that only Christians would be true philosophers and true logicians:

> II Ab<aelardus>. Sed et iuxta Apostolum, cum sit Christus ipsa Dei sapientia quam sophìam Greci nominant, nullos rectius dici philosophos autumo quam qui huius summe ac perfecte sapientie amatores[3] existunt.
>
> P<etrus>. Hoc equidem ipsa philosophici nominis ethimologia requirit, et maxime, tam doctrina fidei quam morum disciplina seu vita, ipsos nobis philosophos gentium certum est convenire. Adeo namque de fide Trinitatis aperte disseruerunt, ut mirabile sit eos quoque in plerisque diligentius quam prophetas ipsos totam huius fidei summam exposuisse. … Quod si vitam quoque philosophorum ac morum disciplinam pensemus, nullos aut paucos fidelium Christianorum de contemptu seculi aut morum disciplina

[1] Burnett 1984, p. 874.

[2] Burnett 1984, p. 877. And again Burnett writes (1984, p. 878): "Abelard's method of argument in the *Soliloquium* implies that a word can be analysed in two ways: (a) in respect to its audible sound (*nomen, appellatio*; this might be called its outward form), and (b) in respect to its interpretation or 'etymology' (*ethimologia*; its inner significance)." Cf. also Anselmus Cantauriensis, *De grammatico*, ed. and tr. Henry, pp. 37–40 (parr. 4.232–4.415); ed. Schmitt, pp. 156–61.

[3] For the explication of *philosophus* as *amator sapientiae*, cf. e.g. Augustinus, *Soliloquia* I, 13, 22 and *De trinitate* XI, 1.2. In *De civitate Dei* VIII, 1 Augustine writes "verus philosophus amator Dei." Cf. also *ibid*., VIII, 8 and 11, where he mentions Plato as his source for this concept. In fact, cf. *Timaeus* 92c.

eis anteferendos esse censebimus–qui etiam sophum sive philosophum magis ex vita quam ex scientia dicendum esse asserunt. De fide autem philosophorum atque vita seu etiam disciplina morum in exhortatione nostra ad fratres et commonachos nostros satis arbitror a nobis esse expositum. Quam quidem exhortationem quisquis legerit, videbit philosophos non tam nomine quam re ipsa Christianis maxime sociatos. Neque enim Grecia tot philosophicis rationibus armata, evangelice predicationis iugo colla tam cito submisisset nisi antea scriptis philosophorum, sicut Iudea prophetarum, ad hoc esse preparata.

III Ab<aelardus>. Verbum quoque Dei–quod Greci logon vocant–solum Christum dicimus. Unde Augustinus in *Libro Questionum .lxxxiii*, capitulo .xliiii.: In principio erat verbum, inquit, quod Grece logos dicitur. Hinc, et iuxta nominis ethimologiam, quicumque huic vero ac perfecto verbo per doctrinam et amorem coherent, vere logici sicut et philosophi dicendi sunt, nullaque disciplina verius logica dici debet quam Christiana doctrina.

Petrus. Etsi hoc quidem modo sermonis usus non habeat–ut videlicet aut Christianos nunc specialiter nominemus philosophos, aut eorum de Christo scientiam aut a Christo traditam doctrinam appellemus logicam–profitemur tamen his que dicis nominum ethimologias maxime consentire.[1]

II Ab<elard>. But also, according to the Apostle, since Christ is the very wisdom of God and the Greeks call wisdom σοφία, I affirm that no people are more rightly called philosophers than those who live as lovers of the highest and perfect wisdom.

P<etrus>. This, I agree, is what the very etymology of the word "philosopher" demands, and it is certain that, as much in regard to faith in the doctrine as in discipline of character or mode of life, the philosophers of the gentiles themselves especially agree with us. For they so evidently were debating about faith in the Trinity that, remarkably, they expounded the full summation of this faith in many ways more thoroughly than the prophets themselves. Moreover, their successors have dared to rush into such madness as to say that even the Lord Jesus learnt what he preached about the faith in the Trinity from the philosophers. … And if we weigh up the mode of life of the philosophers and their discipline of character, we

[1] Abael. *Solil*., ed. Burnett, pp. 886–89.

> will judge none or very few of the Christian faithful to be superior to them in denying the world or in disciplining their character. For they also assert that a man should be called "wise" or "a philosopher" for his mode of life rather than for his knowledge. However, I consider that enough has been expounded by us about the faith of the philosophers and their mode of life or discipline of character in our *Exhortation to our Brothers and Fellow-Monks*. Whoever reads this exhortation will see that the philosophers are especially in fellowship with Christians not so much in name as in fact. For Greece, equipped with so many philosophical arguments, would not have submitted to the joke of the teaching of the Gospel so quickly had it not been prepared for this in advance by the writings of the philosophers, just as Judea had been prepared by those of the Prophets.
>
> III Ab<elard>. We call Christ alone "God's word"–which the Greeks call λόγος. Hence St. Augustine in his book *The 83 Questions*, chapter 44, says: "In the beginning there was the Word, which in Greek is called λόγος". Therefore, also according to the etymology of the word, all those who cling to this true and perfect word through doctrine and love, should truly be called logicians as well as philosophers, and no discipline ought more truly to be called "logic" than Christian doctrine.
>
> Peter. Although usage of the term does not sanction this form of speaking – that is, that either we should now call Christian as a species "philosopher," or that we should name their knowledge about Christ or their doctrine handed down by Christ, "logic" – we nevertheless claim that the etymologies of the words are in absolute agreement with what you say (trans. Burnett, pp. 892–93).

The same thesis according to which the concordance between philosophy, logic, and Christianity may be demonstrated by etymology is also present in Abelard's *Collationes*:

> Christianus. Adiunge et quod patet et legem naturalem suscitatam esse et perfectam morum disciplinam, qua uos, ut dicitis, sola nitimini et ad saluandum sufficere creditis, non nisi ab ipso traditam fuisse, a quo tamquam uera sophia id est sapientia Dei quicumque instructi sunt, ueri sunt dicendi philosophi.

> Philosophus. Atque utinam ut dicis sic conuincere possis, ut ab ipsa, ut dicitis, suprema sapientia, quam grece logon, latine uerbum Dei uocatis, uos uere logicos et uerborum rationibus exhibeatis armatos.[1]
>
> Christian. And add–what is clear–that there is one who both raised up natural law and handed down the perfect teaching on how to live, on which alone you, as you say, depend, and which you believe is enough for salvation. Those who are instructed by *him*–by, as it were, true sapience, that is, the wisdom of God–should be called true philosophers.
>
> Philosopher. If only you were able to convince your own people of what you are saying, so that you would show yourselves truly as logicians, armed with verbal reasoning, through what, as you say, is the highest wisdom, which you call in Greek the '*logos*' and in Latin the 'word of God' (trans. Marenbon).

Epistola XIII shares with the *Soliloquium* the intention of defending logic from the attacks of those who do not recognise its value or even consider it dangerous for faith.[2] Here we find considerations quite similar to those of the *Soliloquium*, but with a stronger emphasis on the divine origin of logic itself:

> Ipsum quippe Dei filium quem nos uerbum dicimus, Graeci λόγον appellant, hoc est diuinae mentis conceptum seu Dei sapientiam uel rationem. Unde et Augustinus in libro Quaestionum Octoginta Trium capite quadragesimo quarto: "In principio", inquit, "erat uerbum quod graece λόγος dicitur". Idem in libro Contra Quinque Haereses: "In principio erat uerbum. Melius Graeci λόγος dicunt; λόγος quippe uerbum significat et rationem". Et Hieronymus ad Paulinum de diuinis scripturis: "In principio erat uerbum; λόγος Graece multa significat. Nam et uerbum est et ratio et supputatio et causa uniuscuiusque rei, per quam sunt singula quae subsistunt. Quae uniuersa recte intelligimus in Christo". Cum ergo uerbum patris, Dominus Iesus Christus, λόγος Graece dicatur, sicut et σοφία patris appellatur, plurimum ad eum pertinere uidetur ea scientia quae nomine quoque illi sit coniuncta et per deriuationem quandam a λόγος

[1] Abael. *Collationes*, II, 71–72, pp. 88–90.

[2] On this "letter," see Jolivet 1982, pp. 269ff., and Allegro 2008.

logica sit appellata et sicut a Christo christiani, ita a λόγος logica proprie dici uideatur. Cuius etiam amatores tanto uerius appellantur philosophi quanto ueriores sint illius sophiae superioris amatores. Quae profecto summi patris summa sophia cum nostram indueret naturam ut nos uerae sapientiae illustraret lumine et nos ab amore mundi in amorem conuerteret sui, profecto nos pariter christianos et ueros effecit philosophos. Qui cum illam sapientiae uirtutem discipulis promitteret qua refellere possent contradicentium disputationes dicens: *Ego enim dabo uobis os et sapientiam cui non poterunt resistere aduersarii uestri*, profecto post amorem sui, unde ueri dicendi sunt philosophi, patenter et illam rationum armaturam eis pollicetur qua in disputando summi efficiantur logici.

Quae duo, de hoc uidelicet amore et doctrina eius quibus tam philosophi quam summi efficerentur logici, hymnus ille Pentecostes "Beata nobis gaudia" diligenter distinguit, cum dicitur: "Verbis ut essent proflui / Et caritate feruidi."[1]

The same son of God that we call Word, the Greeks call *logos*, that is, the concept of the divine mind or the wisdom or reason of God. This is why even Augustine, in the book of the *Eighty-three Questions*, chapter 44, states: "In the beginning was the Word, which is called *logos* in Greek." And the same <Augustine> in the book *Against the Five Heresies* <writes>: "In the beginning was the Word. More appropriately, the Greeks call it *logos*; in fact, *logos* means both word and reason." And Jerome in his epistle to Paulinus on the Holy Scriptures states: "In the beginning was the word. *Logos* in Greek means many things. For it is word and reason and reckoning and cause of every thing, by which the individual subsistents exist. And all these things we rightly understand in Christ." Since, therefore, the word of the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, is said to be *logos* in Greek, and is also called the *sophia* of the Father it is clear that in many ways this science belongs to him: a science which is conjoined with him also in its name and which, by its derivation from the word *logos*, is called logic. For just as Christians are named after Christ, so logic seems to be properly named after *logos*. Moreover, lovers of logic are said to be philosophers more truly the more truly they are lovers of that higher *sophia*. This supreme wisdom of the supreme father, moreover, when it

[1] Abael. *Epistola XIII*, pp. 274.101–275.134.

> clothed herself in human nature to enlighten us with the light of true wisdom and to convert us from love of the world into love of her, has unquestionably made us both Christians and true philosophers. In fact, he promised his disciples that skill in knowledge by which they would be able to repel the disputes of those who contradicted them, by these words: *I will give you a language and wisdom which your adversaries will not be able to resist*. All the more will he [*scil.* Christ, i.e. the wisdom], after that love for him by which they are to be called true philosophers, grant them that armour of reasoning by which in disputing they will also be made supreme logicians.
>
> These two things, namely, this love and his teaching by which they would become both philosophers and supreme logicians, are accurately distinguished in the Pentecost hymn entitled *Beata nobis gaudia* when it says: "With words to be eloquent, with charity to be fervent."

The etymology of *logica* from *logos* is often repeated in the early Middle Ages: it can be found, e.g., in Isidore's *Etymologies* (II, 24, 7), in Alcuinus' *Dialogus de rhetorica et virtutibus* (PL 95, 1581A) and, in the twelfth century, in Hugh of Saint Victor's *Didascalicon.*[1] But what is special in Abelard's treatment of the subject is very well explained by Edmé Benno Smits, the editor of *Epistola XIII*, when he writes:

> The elaborately worked out treatise on the relation between logic and Christ and the relation between logic and the Holy Spirit we find in letter 13 only. It is a clear attempt to present dialectic as a "Christian scientia."[2]

We can read something similar in Abelard's *Sermo XXXIII* as well. This sermon is usually considered to have been written for the Monks of Saint

[1] Hugo uses this etymology in *Didascalicon* I, XI, *De ortu logicae*: "Logica dicitur a Graeco logos, quod nomen geminam habet interpretationem. Dicitur enim logos sermo sive ratio, et inde logica sermocinalis sive rationalis scientia dici potest. Logica rationalis, quae dissertiva dicitur, continet dialecticam et rhetoricam. Logica sermocinalis genus est ad grammaticam, dialecticam atque rhetoricam: et continet sub se dissertivam. Et haec est logica sermocinalis, quam quartam post theoricam, practicam et mechanicam annumeramus." Ed. Buttimer, pp. 20.28–21.7.

[2] Smits 1983, p. 184.

Gildas and dated no earlier than 1127. But its content and opening address to *Fratres et commonachos*, quite rare in Abelard's writing and in general, correspond to the description of an *Exhortatio ad fratres et commonachos* mentioned in the *Soliloquium* and usually considered lost (see the passage from the *Soliloquium* quoted earlier in this section). In my opinion, it is worth it to reconsider the question, and to better investigate whether this *Sermo XXXIII* could not be in fact that "lost" *exhortatio,* or at least derive from it (as has been suggested by, e.g., Cousin).[1]

In any case, here Abelard's aim is that of exhorting his fellow monks to be respectful of their prerogatives as monks.[2] In the context of an admonishment not to accept gifts, and right after praising the morality and frugality of ancient philosophers, Abelard inserts the same identification of *sophia* and Christ as the true *logos* that we have seen in the *Soliloquium*:

> Ut autem nunc documenta sanctorum omittam, gentilium saltem philosophorum exempla nostre cupiditatis impudentiam reprimant. Hi quippe sine ulla regule professione adeo mundum contempserunt, ut non solum potentum respuerent dona, uerum etiam possessiones amplissimas abdicarent. Quorum nonnulli tanta frugalitate referuntur contenti, ut uel unum retinere sciphum censerent superfluum cum ad hauriendum aque poculum proprias manus uiderent sufficere. Ex quibus illum Diogenem famosissimum et de contemptu mundi notissimum doctor praedictus Contra Iovinianum in IIo libro inducens, inter ceteras eius laudes id quoque adiecit: "Quodam uero tempore habens ad potandum caucum ligneum uidit puerum manu concaua bibere, et elisisse illud fertur ad terram dicens: 'Nesciebam quod et natura haberet poculum.' Ad quem <cum in sole sedentem accessisset> etiam potentissimus Alexander multa ei donaria offerens, cum dolio eius tanquam dator importunus adsisteret, hoc unum ab ipso suscepisse dicitur responsum: "Ne obstes mihi, iuuenis, a sole. " …
>
> Quod si de philosophis ad apostolos, immo ad ipsam sophiam Christum, quasi a minimis ad maxima conscendere uelimus, ut eorum uidelicet exemplis et auctoritate amplius instructi dona libentius respuamus, Paulum

[1] Cf. Valente 2011, pp. 47–48. Cousin 1859, pp. 357 and 727.

[2] About *Sermo XXXIII*, cf. Leclercq 1970; Delaurelle 1965, p. 233. On Abelard's 'monasticism' see also Luscombe 1975.

> doctorem Ecclesie maximum ponamus in medium, qui non solum data sed etiam sibi debita recipere non acquieuit; ne, ut ipse ait, uel gloriam suam minueret uel occasionem turpis quaestus exemplo suo aliis relinqueret.[1]
>
> To say nothing of the teachings of the saints, let the examples of the pagan philosophers at least restrain the impudence of our greed. For these, without having professed any rule, despised the world so much that they not only refused gifts offered by the mighty, but also renounced too great possessions. Of some of them it is said that they contented themselves with such frugality that they considered even a single glass superfluous when they realised that their own cupped hands were sufficient to drink. Among them was that very famous Diogenes, well-known for his contempt for the world. The aforementioned doctor, introducing him in the second book of *Contra Jovinianium*, among other praises also added this: "once upon a time, having a wooden cup for drinking, he saw a child drinking with his hands. He then threw his cup on the ground and said: 'I did not know that nature also had a cup.' It is also said that one other time, <while he was sitting in the sun> and the most powerful Alexander had stood in front of his barrel like an importunate bidder and had offered him many gifts, this received in reply only this phrase: 'Move, young man, from the sun.' " […]
>
> If we then wish, as from the lesser to the greater, to ascend from the philosophers to the apostles, nay to the wisdom itself <that is> Christ, so that, instructed more amply by their examples and authority, we may more easily reject gifts, let us have recourse to Paul, the greatest doctor of the church who did not only refuse to accept gifts, but also what was due to him. And this, he said, either so that his glory would not be diminished, or so that he would not provide others with an occasion of foul profit by his example.

Another important part of the exhortation is built around the etymology of the word *monachus* from *mónos*, i.e., *unus* in the sense of *solus*. Monks are those who have promised to live a solitary life:

[1] Abael. *Sermo XXXIII*, ed. L. J. Engels and Ch. Vande Veire pp. 359.404–360.421. About the equivalence wisdom = (true) philosophy = christian/monastic life, and even *philosophia* = *Christus*, cf. Leclerq 1961, pp. 39–79 (in particular p. 54), and Rochais 1951, pp. 244–47.

> Ecce enim a solitudine monachi uocamur, id est solitarii. Etsi enim 'monos' unus interpretatur, non tamen monachus ita unus personaliter dicitur sicut etiam quilibet de plebe, sed ex solitarie uite conuersatione.[1]
>
> For we are called "monks," that is, solitarians, from solitude. For although *monos* is translated as *unus*, nevertheless the monk is not said to be one personally (like any person of the people), but because he leads a solitary life.

4 Conclusions

In conclusion: it seems to me that Peter Abelard, while clearly recognising, as his logical texts show, the limits of etymological argumentation, nevertheless uses etymology at the very heart of his theology. In particular, he uses etymology as the key argument to explain the convergence of ancient philosophy and Christian revelation.[2]

Abelard's extensive use of etymology in his writings is not a sign of an incoherence compared to his declarations about the limits of this kind of argumentation. On the contrary, it seems to me to be the consequence of an incontrovertible fact: the fact that in the domain of theology there is no place for exact definitions and for strong kinds of argumentation. In theology, as Abelard often asserts, words are used in an improper, transferred sense.[3] Consequently, more than in any other domain, they need to be interpreted—even if interpretation, and etymology as a kind of interpretation, will never fully explain the signified thing.

[1] Abael. *Sermo XXXIII*, p. 367.624–27.

[2] Which allows him to speak of monasticism and theology as *christiana philosophia*. He uses this formulation in his *Epistola* VII, ed. Luscombe, p. 282: "in laude christiane phylosophye, hoc est monastice praerogatiue"; *Sermo XXXIII*, p. 350.136–38: "Ab his duobus [i.e. Elias and John the Baptist] tanquam ducibus nostri propositi seu principibus huius philosophie christiane tam in ueteri quam in nouo populo studia sunt exorta."

[3] Cf. Jolivet 1982, pp. 283–84; Rosier-Catach 1999.

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