Despite the fact that Greek culture (and consequently Roman as well) was intensely language conscious, the systematic investigation of language, its origin, its structure, and its varieties was a relative late bloomer in the ancient world. This is bound to surprise us. To be sure, there were reflections on the relation between speech and its objects from early on among the poets, the Presocratic philosophers, and especially among the sophists, the first professional rhetoricians and teachers of ‘how to do things with words’. That such concern did not immediately lead to the development of language as a field of research seems to be due to several factors. Though the Greeks were aware of the existence of different languages, the acquisition of a foreign language was not part of even an elite education in the Greek world, but was left, rather, to professional interpreters. Furthermore, despite a great wealth of speculation on the origin of culture, language was not a major topic in those considerations. Though there is a host of stories of divine gifts of craftsmanship to human beings, including the civic virtues as a means of survival and the Promethean clandestine handing down of fire, there is no parallel depiction of a miraculous distribution of language to a miserable horde of speechless primitive men. The lack of a mythological account of the origin of language is certainly no accident in a religious culture that presupposes that there is a language common to gods and men: such a mythical background quite unreflectively presupposes that language has ‘always’ been around, even before the creation of humankind (if such a creation was part of the common lore).

These conditions changed when the gods no longer stood in the limelight of the interpretation of the world, its origin and its order. Once philosophy had replaced the mythical explanation of the world, the existence and nature of language was no longer taken for granted. It is therefore no accident that Plato and Aristotle recognised the importance of the use of language as the decisive distinguishing feature between man and beast, and raised questions concerning the meaning and the proper use of words,
as well as their combinations to form sentences. Plato, famously, in his dialogue *Cratylus* for the first time addresses the problem of the status of language as such, i.e. whether it exists by nature or by convention, and what constitutes the ‘correctness of names’. Aristotle in his logical investigations not only analyses the structure of propositions and the types of oppositions between them, but also includes quantifiers and modal terms. But since in the main the interest of the great philosophers of the classical age (and their followers) focused on questions of proper definition, on the avoidance of ambiguities, and on the structure of basic affirmations and negations, their investigations of linguistic phenomena remained within narrow limits.

If the interest in language as a whole increased significantly in the schools of the Hellenistic age this is due to several distinct factors. First of all, both the Stoics and the Epicureans, albeit in a quite different sense, were not only physicalists but also ‘creationists’, in a way that naturally led to the question of the origin of humankind, its culture and its language. The Stoic theory of the development of an eternally recurrent world order under the guidance of divine reason included an account of the emergence of human beings and their command of language in each emergence of the world order. The Epicureans, by contrast, believed in the formation of an infinite sequence of world orders on the basis of purely mechanical interactions of the atoms and their conglomerates. This mechanical world view had to provide a rather different account for the development of higher faculties of humankind and for the status of language, quite generally. A second important factor that contributed to the concern with language was the increased antagonism and fierce competitiveness between the schools in the Hellenistic age, especially once the Academic sceptics had made it their mission to defeat any kind of ‘dogmatism’, i.e. the teaching of positive doctrine, about the nature of the world. Their criticism not only focused on the content of the dogmatists’ creed, but also on their epistemological and methodological justifications. This challenge led to an increase in vigilance and care on the dogmatists’ side concerning the linguistic precision and formal accuracy of their arguments, as well as concerning the criteria of truth which they proposed.

Though the concern with the origin of language and the defence against attacks from outside provided something like a common background for the concern with language, it would be misleading to speak of a ‘philosophy of language’ tout court as an autonomous discipline within the schools of the Hellenistic age. Questions of language were regarded as important by the schools, but their motivations were often quite different, as was the context within which they addressed linguistic problems. Each school
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not only dealt with these problems on the basis of its own philosophical presuppositions, but also with different ends in view. Moreover, linguistic phenomena were treated differently in connection with questions of logic, epistemology, ethics, physics and/or theology. The closeness of the ties between the study of language and the different parts of philosophy also explains why the development of grammar as a systematic discipline was taken up rather late by the philosophers. Its systematisation and maturation owes a lot to the work of a quite different set of scholars: if the study of language and grammar finally came of age this is largely due to the great philologists and literary critics in the Alexandrian library whose results gradually began to exert an influence on the philosophers. Only after the study of the grammatical structure of the Greek and Latin languages and their peculiarities had reached a certain level of sophistication did questions of grammar and syntax become a matter of philosophical reflection and a supplement to the analysis of the logical structure of propositions.

The different background of the philosophical treatment of language, its direction and its growth is mirrored in the topics discussed at the ninth Symposium Hellenisticum in Hamburg from July 23 to 28, 2001. Some of the papers assembled in this volume are dedicated to the treatment of particular problems of language within one of the schools of the Hellenistic age, while others address a problem that spans several centuries, and still others range across several schools. Given the diversity of the interest in questions of language (and, where applicable, grammar) during Hellenistic times, the deplorable scarcity of sources makes it particularly hard to reconstruct an overall picture. For we are not dealing with the remains of one ancient road whose course might easily be discerned from a bird’s eye view. Instead, we are confronted with a host of scattered pieces that belonged to quite different roads, that lead in confusingly different directions, and whose intersections are far from secure. Despite these discrepancies the different contributions address a set of basic concerns among the major schools of philosophy during the Hellenistic period, which not only supplement each other but also point to interesting congruencies. It is these congruencies that explain the emergence of a general interest in linguistic problems that finally led to more or less standardised views on the structure of language and grammar in late antiquity. This gradual consensus became the tradition that was revived in the Middle Ages. The collection of papers helps explain the emergence of such a tradition and at the same time illuminate the connections between the philosophical and the linguistico-grammatical problems which are all too often treated in isolation from each other, to the detriment of both disciplines.
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There are three main centres of interest that received special attention from all schools in the Hellenistic age and its aftermath. (1) There is the question of the origin of language or languages. Though the notion of a ‘wise inventor’ of language was generally treated with disfavour, the problem of the etymology of linguistic expressions and their reference to reality posed a challenge to all philosophical schools. (2) Special attention was also given to the question of the interdependence between language and thought in general, particularly in view of the importance attributed to rhetoric and other forms of self-expression. (3) Last, but not least, is the concern with the question in what sense ‘language’ can be treated as a technical subject with rules of its own, so that grammar is not merely a matter of empirical research and linguistic observation. This problematic also extends to the question of the precision of language and the avoidance of fallacies as well as to the relation between the grammatical and the logical functions of key terms in a language. Needless to say, each of these three topics would have deserved a conference of its own. The present volume does not pretend that the contributions do more than address some of the most pertinent aspects of each of these fields.

(1) The questions of the origin of language, the possibility of exploiting etymology as a means of interpretation, and the justification of the ‘correctness of speech’ was a particular challenge to the Stoics and Epicureans because both schools are concerned with a ‘naturalistic’ account of the rise of human culture. The articles of James Allen and Anthony Long deal with the Stoic theory of language and both take Plato’s *Cratylius* as their point of departure. The *Cratylius* is not only the first known work that highlights the alternative views that language is either based on nature or on convention (in a stricter or wider sense), but also explores the claim that there is a ‘correctness’ of language. The Stoics seem to have known that work and made it the reference point in their ‘naturalistic’ account of language. Though very little is known about the Stoic views on the early stage of culture in each cosmic cycle, it is clear that they did not hold an evolutionary view to the effect that human beings developed from a primitive level akin to that of animals; instead they assumed that there was an early natural stage in the history of humankind that was superior to their own day, and used it as an incentive to recapture its insights.

James Allen (*The Stoics on the origin of language and the foundations of etymology*) shows that this assumption explains the Stoics’ preoccupation with etymology as part of their concern with a time ‘when language was still young’ and the product of a primordial wisdom. Since they held a naturalist rather than a conventionalist view the Stoics assumed that there had been a
primary stock of words that somehow ‘imitate’ the nature of the objects in question and could therefore be used as a natural standard of correctness. Since they assumed that there had been a high level of rationality among humans at a primordial stage, the Stoics saw nothing unnatural in proposing the notion of an original ‘name-giver’ as a hypothetical construct. Such a construct escapes the sceptic’s ridicule because it merely assumes that the human need and the ability to converse rationally with each other, which manifests itself in every individual at a certain age, must also have been part of the nature of the (assumed) first generation of human beings. The ‘naturalness’ of names consists, then, in their suitability for communication with others; though it presupposes a mimetic relation between words and certain kinds of objects, it is not confined to onomatopoetics; instead it makes use of other means to augment language by associations and rational derivations of further expressions that are gradually added to the original stock of words. This explanation, as Allen points out, may make the etymologies less interesting and relevant in our eyes; but though the Stoics did not assume mechanical laws of derivation that would allow them to recover the ‘cradle of words’, attempts at rational reconstructions of the relation between different expressions provided them with a means to discover and to correct later corruptions of thought and so to play a crucial role in philosophical progress. Despite certain similarities of concern with the naturalist position in the Cratylus, the Stoic position therefore differs in more significant ways from the Platonic position than is usually acknowledged.

Anthony Long (‘Stoic linguistics, Plato’s Cratylus, and Augustine’s De dialectica’) also elaborates on the influence of Plato’s Cratylus on Stoic theory. But he goes much further than Allen with his hypothesis that the Stoics not only made use of Plato’s dialogue, but did so in a way that justifies the presentation of many central features of their linguistic theory as being the result of a revisionary reading of the Cratylus. It is a reading that makes Socrates’ suggestions about the ‘natural’ relation of names to things much more coherent than they are in the dialogue itself. This also applies to their etymological explanation of the names of the gods that they suggested as a revision of a corrupted tradition and a return to the original name-givers’ comprehension of the true nature of the universe. Given their ‘synaesthetic’ reconstruction of the relation between phonetics and semantics, the Stoics could avoid the Cratylus’ more absurd features of onomatopoetics, as Long shows by analysing different forms of ‘naturalism’, including ‘formal and phonetic naturalism’, and their application by the Stoics that not only includes names but also the famous lekta or ‘sayables’. Long contends that
the Stoics not only found a better balance between the phonetic and the formal constituents of meaningful discourse than emerges from Plato's dialogue itself, but restricted their use of etymology as a back-up to their theology, i.e. the naturalistic reconstruction of the names of the gods. As an additional witness to the sophistication of the Stoic linguistic theory Long adds an appendix on the four-fold semantic distinction (between *dicibile*, *res*, *verbum*, and *dictio*) in St Augustine's *De dialectica*, which he takes to be largely of Stoic origin.

The Epicureans also held that language is part of the natural emergence of human culture. But here the similarity between the Stoic and the Epicurean theory of language ends. For instead of an early stage of rationality and inspired 'name-givers', the Epicureans proposed a quite different account of the evolution of language as part of their mechanical reconstruction of the order in nature, which includes an animal-like primitive stage of human beings. Unfortunately the information on this early stage in the development of humans as cultural beings in Epicurean theory is extremely meagre; attempts to reconstruct it have to rely on a few lines in Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus* and in Lucretius' poem.

Alexander Verlinsky (‘Epicurus and his predecessors on the origin of language’) valiantly attempts a reconstruction of the different stages of Epicurus’ evolutionary picture by a confrontation with some of his predecessors’ views that had been inspired by Democritus. The picture that emerges is intriguing and suggestive. While some of the predecessors assumed that human language was derived from animal sounds that were gradually articulated and assigned to objects, Democritus seems to have regarded gestures as the initial way of signification; he therefore explained the development of sounds from being merely expressive to their function as signifiers by pointing out specific situations that first suggested to early human beings the means of such communication. For Epicurus by contrast, two different stages have to be distinguished. Though Epicurus agrees with his predecessors that the first utterances of human beings were emotional expressions like those of the animals, they not only displayed a greater variety because of a much richer natural endowment for such articulation, but the sounds also received their functions as signifiers through a kind of social covenant. Verlinsky derives the existence of a second stage in Epicurus’ theory of a linguistic development from the evidence of a treatise by Ptolemy that indicates that language became greatly enriched not only by the composition of new words derived from the first, natural ones, but also by a selection among the variants that had arisen from the various spontaneous designations of the same things. The separation of these two stages allows Epicurus
to give a more sophisticated explanation for the diversity of languages that developed because of the different external conditions of life in different societies.

While Verlinsky is concerned with a reconstruction of the evolution of Epicurus’ theory of language against the background of earlier developments, Catherine Atherton takes a frankly evaluative approach. Her paper is concerned with the limitations of the Epicurean account of the nature and origin of language (‘Lucretius on what language is not’). She subjects the Epicurean theory of the emergence of language to a sharp critical scrutiny and challenges its justification and its success on a variety of crucial points. She does so by drawing attention to some important differences between Lucretius’ account and the Epicurean original that is known to us only from his short summary in the Letter to Herodotus. As Atherton points out, these differences show that Epicurus quite explicitly assumed that humans are natural users of signs, an ability that is due on the one side to a rich natural endowment to vocalisation that far outstrips that of other animals, and on the other side to social pressure for cooperation that resulted in the emergence of names. Despite the seeming attractiveness of this explanation of the emergence of language, Atherton points to grave philosophical problems within the Epicurean theory. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the natural vocalisations caused by the impact of the situation and properly intentional communication. For the latter presupposes a system of communication that is based on a conscious and free use of signs and the conceptualisation of sounds as names. As Atherton points out with reference to contemporary theories of communication, the Epicurean emergentist view of the development of human nature and the limits his mechanistic laws of nature impose is incompatible with the inventiveness that leaves room for the free play that is necessary for the intentionality presupposed by the use of names as signifiers. This difficulty is not restricted to the Epicurean theory; it applies to all naturalistic and emergentist theories of language and therefore presents a challenge to contemporary naturalist explanations of language as well.

(2) While the origin of language remained a topic that fascinated philosophers to the end of antiquity, continued attention was also given to questions of the appropriate use and function of language as a means of social intercourse. Not all ancient philosophers made language a matter of explicit reflection. But all of them used it in a more or less conscious manner. Most eccentric was no doubt the way of communication chosen by the Cynics, in particular by their founder and model, Diogenes of Sinope, also called ‘the Dog’. As a critic once remarked, when the violinist Nigel Kennedy stands
in front of a symphony orchestra he appears like a parrot surrounded by a herd of penguins. Ineke Sluiter’s contribution (‘Communicating Cynicism: Diogenes’ gangsta rap’) promises a similarly colourful contrast to the more conventional investigations in this volume. But the addition of colour is not the main intention of this paper. Like Atherton’s paper, it shines a philosophical spotlight on the question of what would count as ‘communication’ and agrees that some kind of intention is required along with a form of behaviour that serves to indicate something. Sluiter aims to show that the Cynics, while not concerned with a theory of language in the conventional sense (unremarkably, since their concern with theory was minimal) were quite conscious of the importance of the modes of communication, both verbal and non-verbal, that anticipate modern notions of self-representation as a philosophical message. Thus Diogenes intentionally used shocking transgressive forms of non-verbal communication that puts the body and its processes to philosophical use. Though this non-verbal communication was meant to shock in a new way, it had certain precedents in features of ancient comedy and satire. These forms of art display the same kind of precarious balance between momentary outrage and a lasting message. It is important to remember that this exploitation of audience reaction is a feature of all aspects of Cynic ‘philosophy’ – here as with the other schools philosophy of language reveals its intimate links to the rest of their message. If it is fair to say that the Cynics lived their philosophy quite generally, then in Sluiter’s essay we see how it is that they performed their philosophy of language.

Yet if the Cynic’s communication is to achieve an effect beyond the momentary outrage it must be transformed into anecdote and accepted in the literary tradition, a transformation that robs it of its bite and ultimately makes it harmless. That there is a form of communication that lives on the ambiguity between the outrageous and the traditional not only represents Cynicism’s self-undermining message, but also establishes a tie to modern forms of self-expression like gangsta rap – a fact that accounts for the essay’s provocative title.

Sluiter is not alone in focusing on the practical effect of the philosophical interest in language. Charles Brittain (‘Common sense: concepts, definition and meaning in and out of the Stoa’) also focuses on an important aspect of the philosophical analysis of language: its relation to reality and to the conceptual apparatus in the human mind, which on most theories connects reality to language. To the naïve mind, a concept like ‘common sense’ would not seem to be in need of development since it must have been in place since the dawn of human reasoning. Nor is that the issue of Brittain’s
paper. Instead, he focuses on the development of a *theory of common sense* that is based on the connection between a stock of rational conceptions that is the common possession of all humans and the words which map naturally onto those conceptions and so give expression to them. The Stoics themselves did not maintain that everyone can acquire conceptions that successfully capture the essence of things; such success presupposes the uncorrupted mind of the wise; so these normative concepts do not seem to be an obvious source for a theory of common conceptions that are open to all. As Brittain contends, it would nevertheless be wrong to attribute such a theory to the later Platonists despite the fact that they advocated the existence of universally acceptable word-meanings that are open to every human being’s grasp. For Platonists regarded these meanings as mere accidental features of the thing in question. What was needed to establish a theory of common sense was a combination of the two theories: the ‘preliminary definition’ of a term with universal acceptance that lays claim to at least a partial grasp of the thing’s essence. En route to this solution Brittain offers, *inter alia*, a reconstruction of the mechanism at work in the formation of common concepts with abstract and general contents and seeks to solve the conundrum of how definitions of the words corresponding to the concepts are formed. He does so by carefully sifting through different sources that employ Stoic vocabulary (such as ‘preconceptions’ or ‘common conceptions’) but that differ significantly from the Stoic view that all humans have at least a partial grasp of a thing’s essential properties, rather than mere accidental properties. This assumption paves the way towards a theory of ‘common sense’ that establishes a direct connection between the concepts and the objects of the world and explains how ordinary language-speakers have at least an outline understanding of the world. Such a theory, so Brittain argues, is the upshot of Cicero’s treatment of preconceptions as the basis of definitions. The rendering of ‘preconception’ (*prolepsis*) as shared by all – by *communis menti* and finally by *communis sensus* – justifies the attribution to Cicero of at least ‘a fragment of a theory of common sense’ in civic and political matters that everyone in principle can understand. This was a theory that deeply influenced the later rhetorical tradition and thereby became a lasting asset in cultural history.

(3) The more technical issues concerning the function of language, its structure, properties and anomalies, and its relation to the world are taken up from three quite distinct perspectives in this volume. *David Blank* (*‘Varro’s anti-analogist’) investigates the concern with grammar as a philosophical discipline by a reconstruction of the controversy between analogist and anomalist theories of language as witnessed in *Varro’s De lingua Latina,*
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a major ancient source on ancient linguistic theory, even though it has survived only in part. The ‘accepted view’ on this issue so far has been that the protagonists in the controversy were Crates of Mallos who argued for the anomalist faction and contended that there are no rules of grammar and that de facto usage alone was the criterion of correctness, and Aristarchus of Samothrace, the proponent of the view that grammatical phenomena follow analogical patterns. Blank purports to show that no such debate between these alleged two schools of grammar can have existed; for Crates was an exponent of technical grammar who put great emphasis on philosophical methods. If there was disagreement between him and Aristarchus it must have concerned the explanation of particular grammatical phenomena, in which Crates proposed the use of analogically correct forms of speech, which Aristarchus rejected in favour of the customary forms. The real debate between analogists and anti-analogists, so Blank contends, was between philosophical as opposed to grammatical empiricists (or sceptics) and rationalist grammarians who advocated the adherence to rules, while the empiricists held that observation of common usage is all that is necessary to assure the correctness of speech.

Grammatical correctness was not the only issue that occupied the Hellenistic philosopher’s concern with language. The question of ‘semantic correctness’ has a much older pedigree because the sophists as well as the paradox-mongers in the Megarian tradition had made the treatment of fallacies and the exploitation of ambiguities part of their stock-in-trade. The avoidance of such pitfalls was therefore a major issue among the philosophers, as witnessed by the attention paid to such problems by Plato and Aristotle. That the Stoics still regarded them as a major challenge may at first blush seem strange, since one would expect that the shop-worn exploitation of blatant ambiguities must have appeared both ludicrous and tiresome. As Susanne Bobzien (‘The Stoics on fallacies of equivocation’) shows, the Stoics had philosophical reasons for the development of strategies to handle ‘lexical’ ambiguities, because they regarded fallacies of ambiguity as complexes of propositions and sentences that straddle the realm of linguistic expression (the domain of language) and the realm of meaning (the domain of logic); moreover, there is also a pragmatic component because being deceived is a psychological disposition that can be reduced neither to language nor to meaning. Not all arguments are, after all, as transparently fallacious as is the example that exploits the ambiguity of ‘for men/manly’ and concludes that a ‘garment for men’ must be courageous because manliness is courage. Bobzien provides a detailed analysis of the relevant passages, lays bare textual and interpretative difficulties, and explores what the Stoic