

Plotinus on Sounds*
An Interpretation of Plotinus' *Enneads*
V,5,5,19-27
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Οἶον ἐν φθόγγῳ ἐναπερείσαντος αὐτὸν τοῦ φωνοῦντος ὑφίσταται τὸ ἐν δηλοῦν τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνὸς καὶ τὸ ὄν σημαῖνον τὸ φθεγγάμενον, ὡς δύναται. Οὕτω τοι τὸ μὲν γενόμενον, ἢ οὐσία καὶ τὸ εἶναι, μίμησιν ἔχοντα ἐκ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ ῥύεντα· ἢ δὲ ἰδοῦσα καὶ ἐπικινηθεῖσα τῷ θεάματι μιμουμένη ὃ εἶδεν ἔρρηξε φωνὴν τὴν "ὄν" καὶ "τὸ εἶναι" καὶ "οὐσίαν" καὶ "ἐστίαν". Οὗτοι γὰρ οἱ φθόγγοι θέλουσι σημήναι τὴν ὑπόστασιν γεννηθέντος ὡδῖνι τοῦ φθεγγομένου ἀπομιμούμενοι, ὡς οἶόν τε αὐτοῖς, τὴν γένεσιν τοῦ ὄντος.

In their first edition of Plotinus' *Enneads* Henry-Schwyzler point out that this passage is translated in various ways by modern interpreters. This variety, I think, is partly accounted for by the uncommon type of thought which is expressed in it and partly by its elusive wording. Therefore, in this article, I want to examine each word of it carefully and also to pay attention to similar ways of thinking in other authors and other cultures, hoping that in that way we do get hold of what Plotinus had in mind.

Fortunately there is no discussion concerning the fact that, as the first word indicates, we are dealing with a comparison here, meant to clarify the foregoing lines. Plotinus there argues that, at its birth, being does not want to go far (from the One), but that it turns inward again; after this inward turning, it comes to a standstill.

But from this point onwards discrepancies abound. To start with, Plotinus never uses the word ἐν in similes or comparisons to denote "in the case of," as some interpreters translate it here. To convey that notion the word ἐπί is required, as in IV, 3, 2, 21 and 39; IV, 4, 14, 4 and 6 and VI, 5, 5, 5. It is true that the *Lexicon Plotinianum* (column 367) quotes several examples where ἐν can have the meaning of "in the case of," but even in the texts which are cited there (and which are not in comparisons!) I doubt whether ἐν has that meaning. At IV, 4, 35, 63, e.g., ἐν definitely suggests that ποιεῖν must be *in* some beings. At I, 2, 5, 16, the

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meaning of ἐν νουθετήσῃ is not “except in the case of” (warning), but rather “except in a state of being warned,” which is comparable to the many instances of this usage, quoted by L. S. J. s.v. II, 2 (p. 552). If it is agreed that the meaning “in the case of” is out of the question here, we shall have to look for another solution, (see below p. 49).

The third word of this passage, φθόγγος, is generally translated as *the* sound (*viz.* ἔν or ὄν). But since Plotinus does not use the definite article here, we have to accept that he has something in mind which has a less specific meaning. The word usually denotes a sound in music. It is opposed to ψόφος (I, 3, 1, 24) which is less articulate (noise) and it also seems to be opposed to φωνή which is the harmonious voice or sound composed of different φθόγγοι, (I, 6, 1, 34-36; III, 3, 5, 10), although φθόγγος itself can also have the meaning of the totality of different musical sounds, as at III, 2, 17, 73. If we now turn our attention to the meaning of φθόγγος in general, we will find almost no discrepancy between the use of φθόγγος and of φωνή. So the words ἄφθογγα and ἄφωνα both mean “consonants” or “mutes” and φωνήεντα and φθογγήεντα both mean vowels. There has been some discussion of whether a distinction should be made between ἄφωνα and ἄφθογγα in Plato, *Philebus* 18c4, but it seems unnecessary to make that distinction in view of texts like *Theaetetus* 203b and *Cratylus* 424c. However, there may be one case where we do find a difference between φωνή and φθόγγος. The word ἡμίφωνα means “semivowels” (ζ, ξ, ψ, λ, μ, ν, ρ, σ). According to Dionysius Thrax (*De Vocalibus et Consonantibus* 631b,18) these letters are called semi-vowels because they are slightly less melodious than the vowels in the use of more than one m or s.¹ For these semi-vowels the word ἡμίφθογγα is not used in Greek. This may be sheer coincidence, but it could also mean that φθόγγος itself was felt to be close to, or the same as, a semi-vowel and that therefore the term ἡμίφθογγα would not have made much sense. This hypothesis may find support in a rather enigmatic expression in Plato’s *Philebus* 18c1 where the semi-vowels are said to partake of a certain φθόγγος, although they do not partake of

1. Ἠμίφωνα δὲ λέγεται, ὅτι παρ’ ὅσον ἦττον τῶν φωνηέντων εὐφωνα καθέστηκεν ἐν τε τοῖς μυγμοῖς καὶ σιγμοῖς. Cf. also Dionysius Halicarnasensis, *De Compositione* (Opuscula II, Radermacher-Usener (Leipzig 1904) 162): Οἱ δὲ τριχῆ νειμαντες τὰ πάντα, φωνήεντα μὲν ἐκάλεσαν ὅσα καὶ καθ’ ἑαυτὰ φανεῖται καὶ μεθ’ ἑτέρων, καὶ ἔστιν αὐτοτελῆ· ἡμίφωνα δ’ ὅσα μετὰ μὲν φωνηέντων αὐτὰ ἑαυτῶν κρείττον ἐκφέρεται, καθ’ ἑαυτὰ δὲ χεῖρον καὶ οὐκ αὐτοτελῶς· ἄφωνα δ’ ὅσα οὔτε τὰς τελείας οὔτε τὰς ἡμιτελεῖς φωνάς ἔχει καθ’ ἑαυτὰ μεθέτερων ἢ ἐκφωνεῖται.

φωνή.² This could mean that a φθόγγος is a less open sound than a φωνή and that it is produced by placing the lips against each other (m and n) or by placing the tongue against the teeth or the palate (the others). Unfortunately this one piece of evidence from the *Philebus* is not corroborated by other texts. In fact Aristotle states, in a well-known passage of his *Poetica* XX, 1456b 25 ff, that a vowel is produced when lips and tongue, or teeth, do not touch each other, and that a semi-vowel, in order to be an audible sound (φωνή), is produced when lips and tongue, or teeth, are in contact in one way or another.³ If the word φθόγγος would have had the specific meaning of semi-vowel, Aristotle would not have used the word φωνή in this text.

Therefore, although it is clear from *Enn.* VI., 3, 1, 12-18 that Plotinus was familiar with the *Philebus* passage, it is doubtful that he uses the word φθόγγος here in the particular sense of semi-vowel, or in the (even more specific) sense of νυγμός which, according to the scholiast of Dionysius Thrax (see above) is an uttering of more than one ν.⁴ The most we can say is that φθόγγος is a sound which is not yet very articulate or definite, in which perhaps only vowels and/or semi-vowels are heard.

Ἐναπερείσαντος. Generally speaking, the literal meaning of this word is: to press (something) out of (something) into (something else).⁵ However, the exact meaning of it in the passage we are discussing does not appear to be absolutely clear, as is evidenced

2. Θεὺθ δς πρῶτος τὰ φωνήεντα ἐν τῷ ἀπίρῳ κατενόησεν οὐχ ἐν ὄντα ἀλλὰ πλειῶν, καὶ πάλιν ἕτερα φωνῆς μὲν οὐ, φθόγγου δὲ μετέχοντά τινος, ἀριθμὸν δὲ τινα καὶ τούτων εἶναι τρίτον δὲ εἶδος γραμμάτων διεστήσατο τὰ νῦν λεγόμενα ἄφωνα ἡμῖν. τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο διήρει τὰ τε ἄφθονα καὶ ἄφωνα.

3. Ἔστιν δὲ φωνῆεν μὲν (τὸ) ἄνευ προσβολῆς ἔχον φωνὴν ἀκουστὴν: ἡμίφωνον δὲ τὸ μετὰ προσβολῆς ἔχον φωνὴν ἀκουστὴν, οἷον τὸ Σ καὶ τὸ Ρ. In A. Rostagni's *Commentary* (Torino 1944 p. 118) we find the following explanation: ἄνευ προσβολῆς: " 'senza incontro (nè della lingua nè delle labbra)'. Così va intesa l'espressione προσβολή anche nelle successive definizioni, ricordando ciò che sul modo di prodursi delle lettere dice Arist. stesso in *De part. an.* II. 16, 660a, 2sgg.; *Hist. an.* IV, 9, 535a, 32 sgg.; *Metaph.* XIV. 6. 1093a, 23 (cfr. *Plat. Crat.* 426), e che era stato oggetto di particolari ricerche per opera di Archino, l'introduttore dell'alfabeto ionico ad Atene nel 403."

4. μυγμός λέγεται ὁ τοῦ μ ἤχος, οἷον συμμένειν. ὁ δὲ τοῦ ν νυγμός, οἷον συννεύειν.

5. Mackenna thinks this "pressing" has something to do with the pronunciation of the *spiritus asper* in the case of ἐν. Unfortunately, the word ἐναπερείδειν does not have that meaning. And when one tries to find out along these lines what exactly the meaning of this passage could be, the text bears an intolerable contradiction as is shown in the following commentary of D. Roloff, *Plotin, Die Gross-Schrift III, 8, V, 8, V, 5, II, 9.* (Berlin 1970) 115 and 116:

by the widely varying translations of it. In our attempt to end the confusion it would be pleasant to find other instances of this verb in Plotinus which have the same meaning but, unfortunately, the few other instances where Plotinus uses it (and the noun that is derived from it) are not much help.

The noun ἐναπέρεσις at IV, 4, 1, 26 is, in fact, a *hapax* in Greek and the context in which it is used leaves its meaning rather ambiguous. In this text Plotinus deals with the perception of intelligibles. Are they perceived by the soul one by one, or all at once? He asks in line 25: "But, (what would happen), when the soul divides and unfolds one particular object?" "Well" (the answer is) . . . the division has already been made in the mind, and such a thing (the state of dividedness) in the mind or: such an act (of dividing by the soul) is, as it were, more an ἐναπέρεσις. L.S.J. s.v. translates it as the "fixing of attention" and the *Lexicon Plotinianum* s.v. as "insistence," circumscribing it further as, "emphasizing the above division." Ficino translates: "ibique tale quiddam magis innixum quendum esse et firmamentum."

"Nun zu den etymologischen Äusserungen: Die Abhängigkeit des Seins vom Einen findet laut Plotin in dem Verhältnis der beiden Namen ἔν und ὄν ihre Spiegelung: Beide Wörter gelten ihm trotz abweichender Selbstlaute für gleichwertig; als den entscheidenden Unterschied scheint er lediglich den Spiritus asper hier und den Spiritus lenis dort anzuerkennen. Und zwar kostet das Wort ἔν den Sprechenden eben seines Spiritus asper wegen einen grösseren Aufwand an Kraft und deutet damit an, dass das Eine selber dem durch hauchloses ὄν repräsentierten Sein gegenüber eine höhere Stufe einnimmt, eine Stufe, die zu erklimmen zusätzliche Energie erfordert, plotinisch gesprochen eine Stufe höherer Mächtigkeit. Das Wort ὄν hingegen entsteht durch blosses Nachlassen in der fürs ἔν vollzogenen Anstrengung und bekundet mit diesem Absinken zu einem geringeren Kraftaufwand für das Sein selber, dass es gegenüber dem Einen, obschon als πρώτη ἐνέργεια, u. d. h. durch das erstmalige Vorkommen tatsächlicher Kraft charakterisiert, eine Stufe von minderer Mächtigkeit darstellt. So führt der Weg und zwar lediglich durch Verminderung des Kraftaufwandes — vom ἔν zum ὄν, und indem die Sprache diese Abhängigkeit des einen Wortes vom anderen offen kundtut, spiegelt sie die ontologische Beziehung zwischen Sein und Einem nicht nur wieder, sondern hebt sie nach Massgabe des ihr Möglichen zugleich hervor. Verwunderlich allerdings, dass Plotin Z. 23ff. — wie aus ὁδῖς ersichtlich — die besondere Anstrengung des Sprechenden beiden Wörtern gleichermassen zuspricht, was doch der zunächst vorgetragenen Version strikt zuwiderläuft. Vielleicht liegt die Erklärung darin, dass jetzt neben dem ὄν samt εἶναι und οὐσία auch die Bezeichnung des Seins als ἔστια einbezogen wird, ein Wort, das mit seinem Spiritus asper möglicherweise die Verwandtschaft des Seins mit dem Einen betonen soll, zumal wenn der Spiritus lenis des Wortes ὄν gerade den Unterschied zwischen beiden hat symbolisieren müssen. Nichtsdestotrotz wäre Plotins Theorie über die Entsprechung der beiden Seinsstufen zu ihren Benennungen und umgekehrt weitgehend entwertet."

In Plato *Cratylus* 427a the word ἀπέρεσις is used to indicate the pressing of the tongue against the teeth so that the letters t and d are produced. In Dionysius Halicarnassensis o.c. p. 165, 24 this pressing is expressed by προσερείδειν.

Mackenna: "The act of the soul is little more than a reading of this." Bouillet: "qu'elle (cette chose?) y (dans l'intelligence) a comme un fondement particulier." Harder: "ein derartiger Akt ist mehr ein Festhalten." Bréhier: "Cette division achevée lui sert de point d'appui pour la division qu'elle fait." Cilento: "un atto di tal genere è piuttosto un punto di appoggio per così esprimerci." I think this last translation is the best: "Such an act of dividing [on the part of the soul] is more like a search for a foothold [for further understanding]".

The verb itself occurs in its middle form three times in the same treatise: IV, 3, 17, 23: just as captains *fix their attention* on the care of their ships; IV, 3, 23, 18: there the power of the technician should *find his support or foothold* so to speak; IV, 3, 23, 39: "Since that power *finds its support or foothold* there, so to speak." It is amazing that in all these instances the word is used as a comparison, or as a metaphor, preceded by the word οἶον. Plotinus evidently wished to soften the harsh literal meaning of the word.

When we return to V, 5, 5, 19, we can see that the main difference between it and the instances just quoted lies in the fact that the verb is used in its active form in our passage, and is accompanied by an object in the accusative form (αὐτόν). There are not many such examples of it in Greek. The first question to be answered is whether this object αὐτόν refers to φθόγγον, as Henry-Schwyzler suggest and as Harder translates, or whether it means αὐτόν as L.S.J., the *Lexicon Plotinianum* and most other interpreters insist. If, however, we take αὐτόν to refer to φθόγγον we have to render it as: "Pressing it [the sound] out of [the lungs, the throat, the mouth] into [something]" and then we have to decide what this last "something" can be.

Roughly speaking, there are two possibilities. Aristotle says (*De Anima* 420b 28): "Hence, voice consists of the impact (πληγή) of the inspired air upon what is known as the windpipe under the agency of the soul in those parts," and in line 421a1 he states that in uttering a sound the agent uses the respired air to strike the air in the windpipe against the windpipe itself.⁶ Ammonius, *In Aristotelis De Interpretatione*, p. 30 line 11, says that it could also be the palate or the uvula. The Stoics, however, believe that a sound is "air that is hit" (*S.V.F.* I, 74) although they also admit that it is the wind or breath which stretches all the way from the *hegemonikon* to the windpipe and the tongue and other appropriate organs (*S.V.F.* I,

6. "Ὡστε ἡ πληγή τοῦ ἀναπνεομένου ἀέρος ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν τούτοις τοῖς μορίοις ψυχῆς πρὸς τὴν καλουμένην ἀρτηρίαν φωνή ἐστιν. 421a1: Ἀλλὰ τούτῳ τύπτει τὸν ἐν τῇ ἀρτηρίᾳ πρὸς αὐτήν.

150).⁷ These organs are the windpipe itself and the muscles and sinews which move it (S.V.F. II, 144).

According to Plotinus, air is matter to the word (λόγος or φωνή). The word is not the impact (πληγή) as such, but the impression (in the air) which moulds it, as it were. A sound or a voice is a kind of significative creation (VI, 1, 5). It is also a quantity and therefore it is a movement (VI, 3, 12, 26 and 19, 8). It is in an undivided state everywhere in the air. The soul is as a whole in the bodies, just as the voice is as a whole everywhere in the air, but before it enters the bodies it is similar to the speaker and to him who is about to speak (VI, 4, 12). For the transmission of the sound to the ear air is not absolutely necessary (IV, 5, 5), but the impression is in the air as a kind of articulate impact; it can be compared to letters written in the air by the utterer of the sound (IV, 6, 2).

If we have to decide, by looking at these texts, what, according to Plotinus, the sound is pressed into, we cannot but admit that it is pressed into the air. Neither the windpipe, nor the other organs are mentioned in the texts quoted above. However, if we accept this solution we are then faced with two more problems: a) what shall we do with ἐν φθόγγῳ, which, as we have seen, cannot mean "in the case of a voice", as Harder has translated; and b) what is the point of comparison between this pressing in the air and the unwillingness to go forward and even the inward movement of being, in the preceding sentence. As I see no solution to these problems I would like to investigate another possibility, viz. that αὐτόν is in fact αὐτόν.

The use of the reflexive pronoun with ἐρείδειν and its compounds is very rare. Normally, "pressing oneself against" or "leaning" is expressed by the middle form ἐρείδεσθαι. The construction with the reflexive pronoun is, however, not unfeasible. Plutarch (*Moralia* 2, 463c) uses ἐπερείδειν with the reflexive pronoun (give oneself up to, or, rather, push oneself, to love)⁸ and Philostratus Junior uses ἐναποκλίνειν ἑαυτὸν στιβάδι, (*Imagines* 3) where normal speech would have had ἐναποκλίνεσθαι στιβάδι (recline oneself on a mattress). I therefore think it is possible to assume that Plotinus also uses ἐναπερείδειν here with

7. S.V.F. I. 74 Eustath. in Iliad. Σ 506, p. 1158,37. Ἡεροφώνους κήρυκας "Ὀμηρος κἀνταῦθα εἰπὼν τὸν κατὰ Ζήνωνα τῆς φωνῆς ὄρον προϋπέβαλεν εἰπόντα: "φωνή ἐστὶν ἀήρ πεπληγμένος". S.V.F. I. 150 Aëtius IV 21,4 p. 411 Diels: Τὸ δὲ φωνᾶεν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ζήωνος εἰρημένον, ὃ καὶ φωνὴν καλοῦσιν, ἔστι πνεῦμα διατεῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ ἡγεμονικοῦ μέχρι φάρυγγος καὶ γλώττης καὶ τῶν οἰκείων ὀργάνων.

8. "Ὡσπερ οὖν οἱ κατὰ κενοῦ βαίνοντες, ὅσῳ μᾶλλον ἐπερείδω τῷ φιλεῖν ἑμαυτόν, ἄμαρτάνω μᾶλλον καὶ σφαλλόμενος ἀνιδῶμαι.

the reflexive pronoun in the sense of “pressing oneself heavily upon something,” “making a strong effort to express oneself.”

It is necessary to add one more thing. The shorter verb ἀπερείδασθαι can also mean “to push out”, “to give birth to” (cf. Callimachus, *Hymn* 4,120). If that notion is also apparent in our verb ἐναπερείδαι, this “giving birth to” has to take place in something. It may already be clear from the foregoing discussion that this “in something” is, in my opinion, ἐν φθόγγῳ. It is true that our verb normally governs the dative and that the majority of other compound verbs with ἐναπο — or ἐν — also govern the dative. But Plotinus himself uses ἐνσφραγίζειν ἐν at VI, 5, 6, 11 and in Galenus 8, 196 we find ἐναπερείδασθαι τὸ κέντρον ἐν νεύρῳ. So there is no obstacle to our combining here ἐν φθόγγῳ with ἐναπερείδασθαι. As Kühner Gerth, *Griechische Grammatik*, I, p. 407, says, the addition of the preposition in these cases increases the “Deutlichkeit und Bestimmtheit” of the expression.

Before continuing to the next line I would like to examine briefly the last two words of this line: τοῦ φωνοῦντος. According to all translators and interpreters those words should mean: “of the utterer”. This would seem to be perfectly all right as far as the Greek text is concerned but, unfortunately, there has yet been no mention of a person who utters, so that it appears rather strange that Plotinus would use the definite article here in a comparison. I think the text should be changed very slightly in order to remove this difficulty. This can be done by omitting the accent on τοῦ. In the textual tradition of the *Enneads* we often see that a scribe places an accent on τοῦ, where the meaning is clearly του (cf. I, 1, 12, 22 and I, 1, 5, 17). The meaning of line 19 would therefore be: “Just as when a person who utters has made a strong effort to express himself in a sound” (*viz.* a sound which is not yet very articulate or definite and in which only vowels and/or semi-vowels are heard).

The interpretation of the main sentence ὑφίσταται τὸ φθεγξάμενον hinges upon the way in which the word καί is conceived. Theiler changes it into καλεῖ and therefore he cannot help us to understand the *textus receptus*. What Bréhier had in mind while translating this line remains very unclear, contributing nothing to its clarification. This is also true of Bouillet. All other translations seem to take καί as “also”, although in doing so they create new difficulties.

In the first place, there is the problem that δηλοῦν should govern σημαῖνον. Now there are many instances in Greek where δηλοῦν governs a participle, even σημαίνων (Sophocles, *Antigone* 242) although here this participle is preceded by ὡς. In most of these cases, however, the subject of it is the same as that of the participle

(cf. *Enn.* II, 3, 15, 10 and IV, 8, 5, 22). But, fortunately, even in Plotinus there are two examples where the subject of δηλοῦν and the participle are not the same (III, 2, 15, 35 and IV, 6, 3, 30) and therefore the *Lexicon Plotinianum* places our passage under the same heading as these texts and probably wants it to be translated as “signifying that that which sounds indicates as far as possible that ὄν also derives from ἔν”, which is approximate to MacKenna’s translation. This kind of rendering, however, neither takes into account the word τό before ἀπο τοῦ ἑνός nor the beautiful parallelism between the two parts of the sentence which, in my opinion, are connected by καί. I therefore prefer to embark upon a speculation about the meaning of this line, as has been indicated by Henry-Schwyzler¹: “subsistunt simul sonus” ἔν qui demonstrat originem ab uno et sonus ὄν qui significat id quod sonuit.”

In their interpretation two sounds come into existence, ἔν and ὄν, and both of them signify or clarify something. I would like to point out the perfect symmetry between these two statements by presenting them again here:

τὸ ἔν δηλοῦν τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνός
τὸ ὄν σημαίνει τὸ φθηγζόμενον

“The sound “hen” (one) clarifying its origin from the One and the sound “on” (being) signifying that which sounded.”

Before we ask what the exact meaning of these words is, I will first refer to some useful remarks which Mrs. Rijlaarsdam made on the verbs δηλοῦν and σημαίνειν.⁹ According to her there is no difference between them except for the fact (which does not apply here) that a “lautsymbolisches Wort” only δηλοῖ something, while a “nicht lautsymbolisches Wort” δηλοῖ or σημαίνει something. This similarity of meaning does, of course, strengthen my point that we should keep to the parallelism between the two parts of the sentence. In the second place, it is useful to say something about the expression τὸ φθηγζόμενον. Usually it means “that which has spoken,” or “uttered a sound”. However, it may also be interpreted as the sound that was heard, or that conveyed the message, as in Herodotus 8, 65. If this holds true in this passage, the meaning of the last part would be: the sound ὄν signifies that which can be heard, (*viz.* the world of being) and the corrective addition of ὡς δύναται corroborates this idea because it implies, of course, that the sound and the message are not *completely* the same.

9. J. C. Rijlaarsdam, *Platon über die Sprache, Ein Kommentar zum Kratylos* (Utrecht 1978) 97 and 98.

When considering the complete line, I think that the strangeness of the idea expressed in this comparison is the main reason why so many interpreters have gone astray. Speculation about the birth of letters and its relation to their meaning and being in words is not unknown in Greek philosophy, as may be seen in Plato's *Cratylus* which, unfortunately, most scholars consider to be a number of peculiar and impossible etymological derivations. In my opinion, however, Plotinus took the dialogue in this passage quite seriously and borrowed both the words and reasoning in question. In his *Cratylus* Plato advocates the idea that the giver of a name imitates the essence of things by the letters and syllables (431d). It is precisely this imitation which concerns Plotinus in this passage. Because he was not the only philosopher of his time to elaborate on the relationship between sound and essence, it might be useful for our understanding of this passage to turn to later Neoplatonic philosophers, especially Theodorus of Asine, a pupil of Porphyry and a rather strong opponent of Iamblichus.¹⁰ In Proclus' *In Platonis Theologiam libri sex* edited by Portus, IV, XVI, p. 215, we read that this Theodorus followed Plotinus in calling that which comes closest to the ineffable the "vault, which is just under the heaven" (ὕπουράνιος ἄψις). As far as we know this is not a quotation from Plotinus in whose *Enneads* we do not find these words, but from Plato (*Phaedrus* 247b), although it is possible of course that there was an unwritten tradition of Plotinian sayings, which Proclus seems to hint at in *In Timaeum* III 205c, p. 213, 10, Diehl. According to Proclus in *In Timaeum* III, 225b, p. 274, 10, "this same Theodorus was also filled with the words of Numerius of Apamea. He invented a rather revolutionary theory on the birth of the soul which he based on letters, characters, and numbers. The first entity he made ineffable and unutterable as the source of everything and the cause of goodness, and he wrote beautifully about it. After that first thing which is completely transcendent, there is a triad which he determines as the intelligible plane or surface. He calls it the "hen"; it consists of the breath, which in a certain sense is (part of) the ineffable and which is imitated by the breathing (*spiritus asper* or h) of the word hen; further, of the vault of the e alone without the consonant; and, thirdly, of the n itself. After this there is another triad which defines the intelligible depth, and another one which defines the demiurgical depth. The

10. On Theodorus of Asine cf. S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena* (Leiden 1978) 24 ff. and the Excursus on page 289 ff. Also the article in P. W. R. E. Suppl. V. A. (s.v. Theodorus N. 35), especially column 1835. Theodorus' fragments are found with introduction and commentary in W. Deuse, *Theodorus von Asine*, Palingenesia VI, Wiesbaden 1973.

first of these is “to be” before being, “to think” before mind and “to live” before life. The Demiurgical triad comes thereafter, and contains first, being, second, mind, and third, the source of the souls. After that triad we have yet another triad *viz.* soul itself, the soul of the universe and the entire world.”¹¹ A few lines further on, Proclus tells us that where the letter o is concerned, Theodorus believes that it is the middle circle, the intelligible one, which is the cause of the soul (p. 275, 28).¹²

These texts reveal a type of thinking which may seem rather unfamiliar to us but which perhaps was not unknown to Plotinus, who held Numenius (from whom Theodorus may have learned it) in high esteem, and from whom he borrowed many ideas (*Vita Plotini* 17 and 18). It is quite possible that Plotinus, when he wrote this passage, had something in mind which later led to the seemingly tiresome elucidations of Theodorus.

The same type of thinking is also very common in Indian literature and can be illustrated with a few examples.¹³ In the Upaniṣads, some 4 or 5 hundred years BC, the syllable “om” was the first candidate when considering the question of which syllable is really essential, and identifiable with the brahman. Originally this syllable may have been no more than the interjection “yes!” or “oh!”, but upon speculation *om* can be understood as summing up three distinguishable vocal entities, ending with the nasal sound

11. Θεόδωρος δὲ ὁ ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίνης φιλόσοφος, τῶν Νουμηνείων λόγων ἐμφορηθεὶς, καινοπρεπέστερον τοὺς περὶ τῆς ψυχογονίας διέθηκε λόγους, ἀπὸ τῶν γραμμάτων καὶ τῶν χαρακτήρων καὶ τῶν ἀριθμῶν ποιούμενος τὰς ἐπιβολὰς. Ἵνα οὖν καὶ τὰ τούτῳ δοκοῦντα συντόμως ἐχωμεν ἀναγεγραμμένα, φέρε, καθ’ ἕκαστον ὧν λέγει, ποιησώμεθα σύνοψιν ἐν κεφαλαίοις. Τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον ἄρρητον αὐτῷ καὶ ἀνεκκλάητον καὶ πηγὴ τῶν πάντων καὶ τῆς ἀγαθότητος αἴτιον καλῶς ἀνόμνηται. Μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο (τὸ) οὕτως ἐξηρημένον τῶν ὄλων τριάς ἐστὶν ἢ τὸ νοητὸν αὐτῷ πλάτος ὀρίζουσα, ἣν καλεῖ τὸ ἐν, ἐκ τε τοῦ ἄσθματος οὖσαν τοῦ ἄρρητου πως ὄντος, ὃ μιμεῖται ἢ δασεῖα τοῦ ἐν, καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀπίδος αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἰ μόνου, χωρὶς τοῦ συμφώνου, καὶ αὐτοῦ ἥδη τοῦ ἦ. Ἄλλη δὲ μετὰ ταύτην τριάς ὀρίζει τὸ νοερὸν βάθος καὶ ἄλλη τὸ δημιουργικόν. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶ τὸ εἶναι πρὸ τοῦ ὄντος, τὸ νοεῖν πρὸ τοῦ νοῦ, τὸ ζῆν πρὸ τῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ δὲ δημιουργικὴ τριάς μετὰ ταύτας ἐστὶ, πρῶτον μὲν ἔχουσα τὸ ὄν, δεύτερον δὲ τὸν νοῦν, τρίτον δὲ τὴν πηγὴν τῶν ψυχῶν. Ἀπὸ δὲ ταύτης τῆς τριάδος ἄλλη τριάς, ἢ αὐτοψυχὴ καὶ ἡ καθόλου καὶ ἡ τοῦ παντός.

12. Οἶον ζ ὁ ψ. Μέσος δὲ ὁ κύκλος, ὃ νοερὸς ὧν, ὅτι νοῦς αἴτιος τῆς ψυχῆς.

13. For this *excursus* on India I am indebted to my friends Professor Kees W. Bolle of the University of California at Los Angeles and Dr. Karel van Kooy of the University of Utrecht. The best book on this subject is A. Padoux, *Recherches sur la symbolique et l'énergie de la parole dans certains textes tantriques*, Paris 1963. Cf. also J. A. B. van Buitenen, “Akṣara,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79 (1959) 176-187 and J. Gonda, *Die Religionen Indiens I* (Stuttgart 1960) 182.

m: It functioned to mark the end of any important section of the ritual recitation, but eventually it came to be considered as an uttering of primal importance, as the syllable *par excellence*, which could lead to the highest goal of one who truly realized how *om* relates to the supreme. Speculation on sound and syllable never ceased. Breath (breathing) is the essence of *om* and *om* contains in itself the whole universe. Prajāpati (the Lord of all living beings), the *parā vāc* = supreme word or Viṣṇu presses (or squeezes like juice) the original sound and from this essence of being the worlds are born. When these worlds are pressed, the gods Agni, Vāyu and the sun are produced. These, when pressed, produce the three Vedas which give the triad *bhuḥ*, (the earth), *bhuvah* (the middle region of the air), and *svah* (heaven). These three regions form the entire, threefold world and this is homologized with the *akṣara*, the imperishable syllable “om”, which, in the beginning, consisted of the three elements a, u, and m. Still later, especially in Tantric Buddhism (but not only there), more representations of the birth of the syllable occur, such as the following: An extremely subtle fire arises from the heart. Together with another fire, caused by churning or rubbing, this fire arrives at the throat where it has two atoms, and then at the end of the tongue, where it has three atoms. It then leaves the body and becomes the mother of the phonemes. But even in its condensed state (i.e. inside the body) the highest word contains a sort of internal, mental articulation. Its differentiation is due only to the fact that the same breathing, by making an impact on the several organs of speech, brings to light the diverse phonemes and makes them audible.

To conclude this digression on India I would like to draw attention to the meaning of the word *akṣara*. *Akṣara* means “phoneme”, and also “imperishable”, and sometimes the number of vowels connected with it is not the usual 15 or 16, but innumerable. It seems quite amazing to me that the discussion in Plato’s *Philebus* 18c, on the origin of letters, takes place in the course of a discussion of infinity and that the idea that sound was infinite was attributed to the Egyptian god Theuth. There is no indication, of course, that Plato had any other god in mind than the Egyptian Thoth, or Theuth, whom he mentions. However, it is very interesting to note that a theory which Plato attributes to a god of a people, which in Greek literature is always considered to be old and wise, is so similar to what can be found in Indian literature. In this case, therefore, the implication may be that “Egyptian” god should not be taken too literally, but should include the gods of other wise and old peoples as well.

But let us return to our text. The meaning of the sentence has

now become clearer. An utterer makes a real effort upon an (unarticulate) sound in order to express himself. This sound, the result of the pressing, can be heard as two sounds, the one very similar to the other, (ἐν and ὄν). The ἐν sound indicates that it stems from what is presumably the first and ineffable Ἔν. We could say that it is the vault which is just under the heaven; in other words it is the ἐν-πολλά, which is the highest part of the intelligible realm of being. The ὄν is the middle circle of this realm; the two parts of the realm of being, then, are as close and similar as the sounds which signify them. Letters and being are so intertwined in this way of thinking that Plotinus can conclude his comparison by saying that, really in the same way (as the sounds), that which is born, "being" and "to be", imitate the highest entity by flowing out of its power. For the participle construction instead of a main verb that we find here I refer to H. R. Schwyzer's Plotinus article in P. W. *RE* XXI, 1 col. 518, with many references (e.g. VI, 6, 18, 42). In order to make it quite clear that there is a close relation between this last sentence and the foregoing passage, it is advisable to change the full stop after δύναιται into a semi-colon, and to let οὕτω begin with a small o, as has been done in H-S.²

Before continuing to the next line, I would like to call attention to two Plotinian passages which may throw some additional light on the foregoing passage. First, *Enneads* VI, 5, 1, 7. People would come to rest when they cling (συνερείδοντες) to (the idea that being is) one and the same, and when they would not want to be separated from that unity. This is the most reliable, or firm, principle which our souls put forward (φθέγγονται), so to speak. Second, VI, 6, 13, 12: For if our thinking (διάνοια) does not seek support or a foothold on (ἐρείσασα πρὸς) "one" (ἐν), it will not say "other" nor "different", and when it says "alone", it says "one alone". From these texts we learn that ἐν (or ὄν as a unity) gives support, firm ground, or foothold to the development of thought, and its expression by the soul. In order to express the idea that one has to find that foothold, Plotinus uses the verb ἐρείδειν and its compound συνερείδειν. However, while in these texts the ἐν and the ὄν already exist, we see that the *sounds* ἐν and ὄν in our passage V, 5, 5, come into existence after, or together with, the effort of the utterer.

In line 23 another difficult problem arises. What does Plotinus mean by ἡ δέ? H.-S¹ think it must be the soul, but the soul is not mentioned after V, 5, 3, 7, and it seems rather strange that ἡ would simply refer to that line. If therefore it is the soul, the word ψυχή should be put in the text as a *conjectura*. For a similar way of

reasoning I refer here to VI, 4, 12, quoted above. (p. 0) and also to VI, 7, 22, 8. Another, quite similar, solution is put forward by Theiler who puts διάνοια in his text, referring to VI, 6, 13, 12, which I have just quoted, and which indeed presents a somewhat comparable way of reasoning to our text. But both the word ψυχή and the word διάνοια produce the difficulty that they indicate an entity which comes into existence after the entity they speak about, while the person who speaks in line 19 seems to be there before the words he utters. Moreover, at this stage of the progression from the One, soul or reason has not even come into existence. We may as well look for another solution and one which is nearer at hand. In line 22, there are two feminine nouns οὐσία and δύναμις, if we do not take μίμησις into account. Now οὐσία is, of course, more often spoken of as being able to "see" (V, 1, 7, 6), although the expression "moved by the sight" is rather strange and οὐσία normally does not "cry out". Moreover, οὐσία is not an important word in the sentence; it simply clarifies τὸ γενόμενον together with τὸ εἶναι. If Plotinus would refer to being, it would have been more appropriate to use the neutral article τὸ here. What is then left is the word δύναμις which obviously denotes the power of the One. It seems impossible, at first sight, that the power of the One would be able to see, to be moved, and to speak out. But elsewhere in the *Enneads* the One is called the father of λόγος (VI, 8, 14, 38) and its root, more beautiful than λόγος (VI, 8, 15, 30-33), and, as the great king, it dispenses all the good things (I, 8, 2, 6). So Plotinus does not hesitate to bestow human characteristics upon his highest entity, if the circumstances so demand.

In addition to this we see that Plotinus very often refers to the One as He, which also seems to indicate that he considers his highest entity as something more personal than is usually admitted. He may have been influenced in that respect by Jewish tradition as transmitted by Philo and Numenius¹⁴. It would be

14. Cf. H. Guyot, *L'infinité divine depuis Philon le Juif jusqu'à Plotin* (Paris 1906) 69 and 99s. Also by the same author: *Les réminiscences de Philon le Juif chez Plotin* (Paris 1906) 33-67. In Philo's philosophy these δυνάμεις, with whom God talks in *Gen.* 1,26, are the cause of the evil side of the creation (*Fug.* 68-72, *Mut. Nom.* 30f. *Op. Mund.* 72-75). Cf. H. F. Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des hellenistischen und palästinischen Judentums* (Berlin 1966) 320ff. We find also references to δυνάμεις around God in the Hermetic writing *Poimandres* 26 and 27 and XIII, 9. According to C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London 1935) 110-111, the author shares this conception of divine δυνάμεις with Hellenistic Judaism. In Stoicism too δυνάμεις and θεός are put in relationship e.g., *S.V.F.* I, 176 and 177 and II, 1047. Cf. also O. Schmitz, "Der Begriff δύναμις bei Paulus", in *Festgabe für Adolf Deissmann* (Tübingen 1927) 151: "Bezeichnend für das

going too far to relate here as a piece of evidence the first chapter of Genesis in which God speaks, and things come into being, and where He delights at their sight and calls them good. However, I believe that Plotinus may have used unusual ideas in this peculiar passage and that, indeed, the word ἡ refers to the feminine noun which is next to it. If my hypothesis is correct, then we have a perfect parallel to the speaker of line 19 who is also “before” the words he utters. The translation then would be “and the power saw it and was moved by its sight and, imitating what it saw, broke forth saying ὄν and εἶναι and οὐσία and ἐστία. These words are the subject of speculation in Plato’s *Cratylus* 401 bc and 421 bc, and they all refer to the same substance and indicate its manifold aspects which only come to the fore at this second stage of speaking. This stage is more clear and fuller than the first stage (line 19), as also seems to be indicated by the use of φωνή in line 24 as opposed to φθόγγος in line 19. In line 19 the words are still kept back, so to speak, they stay inward, *viz.* perhaps behind the teeth of the utterer, while in line 24 they come out.

Plotinus then continues with a sentence which is also difficult to translate, especially because of the words γεννήθεντος ὠδῖνι τοῦ φθεγγομένου. Henry-Schwyzler¹ think they form a “*genitious absolutus*” because there is an interpunction before and after these words in the manuscripts. This means that their translation would have to be “when that which sounds is born in birthpangs”. This construction agrees with other instances, e.g., III, 8, 8, 5 ἰόντων τῶν γνωσμένων (when the things that are known go, etc). In our passage, however, this translation is very harsh because then ὑπόστασιν would not have a word to which it refers. From the way ὠδῖνι τοῦ φθεγγομένου is printed in the *Lexicon Plotinianum*, I infer that the authors take the four words to be “generated by the birth-pangs of the utterer.” This is how Harder and Cilento

Eindringen des unpersönlichen griechischen Kraftbegriffs in das hellenische Judentum ist Kap 7.25 des Weisheitsbuches, wo die Weisheit als ein “Aushauch” der Kraft Gottes erscheint”. P. 153: “Auch bei Platon erscheint gelegentlich eine θειοτέρα δύναμις als die der Menschen zur Erklärung der Urworte (*Crat.* 397c vgl. 438c); es ist von der δύναμις τοῦ θεοῦ *Crat.* 404e bzw. den vier δυνάμεις τοῦ θεοῦ die Rede *Crat.* 405a f. im Sinne spezifischer Fähigkeiten;”

A letter (kappa) can also have “power” according to Plato in his *Cratylus* 412e 2 and in his *Protagoras* 349b 4 he states that in words there is a thing which has a power of its own. The ideas also have power, as in *Sophist* 247 d-e. Philo identifies these powers with the ideas and these ideas are according to him created by God. Cf. H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, (Cambridge 1947), I, 217f. and II, 134f. Also: F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London 1971) 29ff. and E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (Cambridge 1979) 47.

interpret it, as well as Mackenna and, probably, Ficino. But this is also very strange, as the translators themselves probably realized, because they all translate it as if there were a definite article before γεννήθεντος, which, unfortunately, our text does not have. In order to avoid this difficulty Bréhier prints (τοῦ) γεννήθεντος. Grammatically speaking, the best solution seems, however, to be to take τοῦ φθεγγομένου directly with ὑπόστασιν and make γεννήθεντος an attribute, although it has the form of a predicate. This manner of writing is often found in Plotinus, evidenced in such passages as IV, 3, 24, 12 ἀστάτω τῆ φορᾶ and VI, 5, 12, 36 ἀμεγέθει τῷ ἀπειρῷ (cf. Schwyzer o.c. column 516). If this is accepted, then the only possible translation is “the coming into existence of the sound which is born with birth-pangs”. Φθεγγομένου would thus have the same meaning as it has in line 21, where it refers to being and we would also have a perfect parallel to τὴν γένεσιν τοῦ ὄντος in line 27.

Therefore, in my opinion, the translation of the whole passage is: “Just as when an utterer has made a strong effort upon a (as yet inarticulate) sound, (in order to express himself), there come into existence (the sound) ἐν, signifying its derivation from the (first) One, and (the sound) ὄν meaning, as far as it can, that which has sounded; in the same way really that which is born, being and to be, imitate that by flowing from its power. When the power sees it and is moved by that which it sees, it imitates what it has seen and speaks out loudly ὄν and εἶναι and οὐσίαν and ἔστιαν. For those sounds intend to indicate the coming into existence of that which sounds, and which is born in birth-pangs, imitating, as far as possible, the birth of being.”

This may be what Plotinus had in mind. But we should be careful and not forget that, in fact, Plotinus considered this type of thinking as inferior to an overall-intuition (ἐπιστήμη ἀθρόα V, 8, 6, 10). Not separate letters but complete images (ἀγάλματα), such as the Egyptian hieroglyphs, form a good representation of the essence of being (*Enneads* V, 8, 4 and 6).¹⁵ That is, methinks, the reason why he concludes our passage with the casual remark: “Let these words be said, just like everyone wishes” (V, 5, 6, 1).

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15. Cf. M. Hirschle, “Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie im Neuplatonismus”, *Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie*, Heft 96 (Meisenheim am Glan 1979) 39-42. The same idea occurs in the *Corpus Hermeticum* XIV and is taken up by G. Bruno in *De Magia* (Op. Lat.) III, 411-12. See Yates *op. cit.* 263/4 and T. Dornseiff, *Das Alphabet in Mystik und Magie*, Leipzig 1922.