PLOTINUS' LAST WORDS*

At least according to Porphyry,[1] Plotinus moved in the autumn or winter of A.D. 269 from Rome to the neighbourhood of Minturnae, where he spent his last months on the estate of his dead friend Zethus and wrote his last four treatises (*Plot.* 2.17–20, 6.16–25, 7.22–4). He was suffering from a grave and loathsome illness (2.8–15), and was accompanied by not even one of his disciples—Porphyry he had already sent away more than a year earlier (11.11–19),[2] while all the others, like Castricius (who stayed in Rome) and Amelius (who journeyed to Apameia in Syria), apparently abandoned him of their own accord (2.31–3), at least in part, it seems, out of fear and disgust at his sickness (2.15–17). Only Eustochius, a student of his who was also a doctor, came to see him as he lay dying (2.12–13, 34, 7.10), travelling the seventy kilometres from his house in Puteoli to Minturnae and arriving too late to help him but just in time to hear his dying words:

> *μέλλων δὲ τελευτᾶν, ὡς ὁ Εὐστόχιος ἡμῖν διηγεῖτο, ἐπειδὴ ἐν Ποτιόλοις κατοικῶν ὁ Εὐστόχιος βραδέως πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφίκετο, εἰπὼν ὅτι*
> *σὲ ἔτι περιμένω*
> *καὶ φήσας*
> *πειρᾶσθαι* { *τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον* **BJy** / *τὸ ἐν ὑμῖν θεῖον* **wR** / *τὸν ἐν ὑμῖν θεὸν* $\mathbf{A}^{\gamma\rho mg}\mathbf{E}^{\gamma\rho mg}\mathbf{R}^{\gamma\rho s}$ } *ἀνάγειν πρὸς*
> *τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*
> [. . .] *ἀφῆκε τὸ πνεῦμα* [. . .] (2.23–9)

Plotinus' penultimate utterance has attracted little attention; but his very last sentence is one of the most controversial in all of later Greek literature. Until 1953, the scholarly consensus was that Porphyry had reported his words in indirect discourse, that the subjects of the participle *φήσας* and of the infinitive *πειρᾶσθαι* were both to be understood as Plotinus, and that in consequence his last words were a self-referential

* My thanks to Tudor Andrei Sala (Bonn), who showed me his forthcoming article on Plotinus' last words (it has now appeared: 'Die entwendeten (vor)letzten Worte Plotins', *Prima Philosophia* 15 [2002] 327–42), thereby stimulating me to rethink this passage; and also to Alan Griffiths (London), William Furley (Heidelberg), Luigi Battezzato and Maria Serena Funghi (Pisa), Cristina d'Ancona (Padua), and other friends for timely advice and insufficient discouragement.

[1] I cite Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* (*Plot.*) from P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (edd.), *Plotini Opera*, I: *Porphyrii Vita Plotini. Enneades I–III* (= Henry–Schwyzer^2) (Oxford, 1964), indicating chapter and line numbers from this edition. It should hardly be necessary to add that the issues addressed in this article are ones not of historical fact but of textual exegesis: the relevant question to ask is not what words this dying man actually said, but in what ways generic constraints have helped shape a panegyric philosophical biography of him. Whether or not Plotinus actually said the words Porphyry (that is, the author of the transmitted biography of Plotinus) attributed to him we shall probably never know, at least not in this life. But the author of the transmitted biography of Plotinus did in fact attribute those words to him, and it is our business to try to understand them as part of that text within the various relevant contexts of ancient culture. How that author might have understood them himself, or for that matter whether he even thought he did, are of course different questions. Cf. in general on these issues H.-R. Schwyzer, 'Plotins letztes Wort', *MH* 33 (1976), 85–97 at 96–7.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

statement addressed to Eustochius and describing his own situation: accepting the reading of BJy, as editors generally did, the resulting text read *φήσας πειρᾶσθαι τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον* and meant 'and having said that he was trying to restore the divine in us back up to the divine in the All'. But in a landmark article published that year, Henry argued that Plotinus' words were to be understood not as a statement about himself but as a command issued to Eustochius and, through him, to the rest of the disciples; he took the words to be in direct discourse, interpreted the infinitive *πειρᾶσθαι* as equivalent to a second-person plural imperative, and preferred the reading recorded as a variant in the manuscripts AER. Hence he proposed the text *φήσας* '*πειρᾶσθαι τὸν ἐν ὑμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*', meaning 'and having said, "Try [second-person plural] to restore the god in yourselves back up to the divine in the All".'[3] Since then, the issue has not come to a rest. In 1972, Igal accepted Henry's general interpretation of Plotinus' utterance as a command, but took it to be directed to Eustochius alone: he construed the phrase as indirect discourse but, taking the participle and the infinitive to refer to different subjects, the former to Plotinus and the latter to Eustochius, he understood them in combination to mean not that Plotinus was 'saying he (Plotinus) was trying . . .' but that Plotinus was 'telling him [Eustochius] to try . . .'; and he returned to the traditionally favoured reading of BJy, *τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον*. Hence he proposed the text *φήσας πειρᾶσθαι τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*, meaning 'and having told him to try to restore the divine in us back up to the divine in the All'.[4] Four years later, Schwyzer also accepted the interpretation of Plotinus' words as a command, but understood it as being directed to all men, not just to Eustochius; he took the phrase as direct discourse, but was dissatisfied with the infinitive, considering it not solemn enough for so important an utterance, and hence he accepted the emendation *πειρᾶσθε*, proposed by de Strycker. Combining the first person pronoun from BJy with the transmitted variant from AER, he proposed the text *φήσας* '*πειρᾶσθε τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*', meaning 'and having said, "Try [second-person plural] to restore the god in us back up to the divine in the All".'[5] Most recently, Jean Pépin returned in 1992 to the earlier *communis opinio*,[6] as Harder had already done in 1958:[7] both print the traditional text *φήσας πειρᾶσθαι τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον* and understand it to mean 'and having said that he was trying to restore the divine in us back up to the divine in the All'.

The scholars' uncertainty can be traced precisely along the course of the different versions of this passage to be found in the texts of the various magisterial editions of Plotinus by Henry and Schwyzer:

H-S[1]: *φήσας πειρᾶσθαι τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*[8]

[2] For a less favourable account of Porphyry's trip to Sicily, see Eunapius, *VS* 456.24–36 Boissonade–Dübner.

[3] P. Henry, 'La dernière parole de Plotin', *SCO* 2 (1953), 113–30.

[4] J. Igal, 'Una nueva interpretación de la últimas palabras de Plotino', *Cuadernos de Filologia Clásica* 4 (1972), 441–62.

[5] Schwyzer (n. 1).

[6] J. Pépin, 'La dernière parole de Plotin', in L. Brisson et al., *Porphyre. La Vie de Plotin II* (Paris, 1992), 355–83.

[7] R. Harder (ed.), *Plotins Schriften*, Vc: *Anhang. Porphyrios. Über Plotins Leben und über die Ordnung seiner Schriften*, ed. W. Marg (Hamburg, 1958), 4, 5, 80–2.

[8] P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (edd.), *Plotini Opera*, I: *Porphyrii Vita Plotini. Enneades I–III* (Paris and Bruxelles, 1951), 3.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

H-S^2: *φήσας πειρᾶσθαι τὸν ἐν ὑμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*[9]
H-S^2 corr.: *φήσας 'πειρᾶσθε τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον'*[10]

And as if this were not enough, scholars also disagree about whether Plotinus' reference to 'trying to restore the divine (or the god) in us (or in you) back up to the divine in the All' is intended to designate the activity of philosophical enquiry on the one hand or the process of dying on the other: does the soul rejoin the divinity in the universe by practising philosophy during life,[11] or in the moment of dying?[12]

It may seem incautious to hazard a new suggestion where the most distinguished experts on Plotinus have failed to reach a consensus. But it seems hitherto not to have been recognized that Plotinus' *penultimate* utterance is capable of casting a decisive light upon his *final* one. Of course, we cannot be certain on principle that these last two sentences are not in fact entirely unrelated to one another; but unless we presume that Plotinus was babbling incoherently and producing sentences which followed one another in sequence but which bore no semantic relation to one another—and Porphyry certainly does not appear to wish to give us the impression that he was—it would seem to be a sensible hermeneutic procedure to enquire whether understanding the first one helps us to narrow the possibilities for understanding the second one.

Plotinus' words of welcome to Eustochius, *σὲ ἔτι περιμένω*, have been largely neglected. But in fact they are bizarre in the extreme. For Plotinus does not write, in a letter to Eustochius, 'I am still waiting for you' before Eustochius has yet arrived, nor does he say to Eustochius 'I was waiting for you' when Eustochius does arrive. What he says is 'I am still waiting for you' and he says it to Eustochius after the latter has already arrived. This represents a remarkable violation of the general semantics and syntax of verbs of waiting: one can only wait for someone or something that has not arrived; the presence of the activity of waiting and the presence of the person or object waited for are mutually exclusive—once s/he or it has arrived, the waiting ceases. If I ask my old friend Humphrey, who is sitting next to me on a bench, what he is doing right now and he answers, 'I am waiting for my wife', I shall not think it odd. So too if, while his wife arrives and stands directly in front of us, I ask him what he was doing five minutes earlier and he answers, 'I was waiting for my wife.' But if, while his wife arrives and stands directly in front of us, I ask him what he is doing right now and he answers, 'I am waiting for my wife', I shall be forced to conclude either that he has suffered impairment to his mind (or his eyesight) or that unbenownst to me he has remarried. Nothing, either in the biography of Plotinus or in the philosopher's last four treatises, suggests that the grave bodily illness he suffered from at the end of his life brought with it the slightest diminution of his mental (or visual) acuity. But if Plotinus was still *compos mentis* when he addressed Eustochius, we must presume that he chose deliberately to deploy the Greek language in this highly eccentric way and thought that he had good reason to believe that a native speaker like his interlocutor would understand him as he intended him to do.

Now, one might be tempted to try to resolve this difficulty grammatically, with

[9] Henry–Schwyzer^2, 2, lines 25–7.
[10] P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer (edd.), *Plotini Opera*, III: *Enneas VI* (Oxford, 1982), 'Addenda et corrigenda', 304.
[11] So Henry (n. 3), 123, 127–8; Igal (n. 4), 449–52; Schwyzer (n. 1), 89, 91.
[12] So Harder (n. 7), 81; Pépin (n. 6), 377–83.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reference to a well-known usage of the present tense in ancient Greek, whereby it can refer to an action that begins in the past and continues into the present.[13] Might not, on this view, the present tense περιμένω be taken to mean 'I have been waiting for you'? But in fact this usage cannot correctly be made to apply to the present case. For in all the passages in which a Greek present-tense verb has a meaning that we would consider equivalent to a present perfect in English, the pastness of the beginning of the action in question is indicated unmistakably by an adverb, temporal clause, prepositional phrase, or other adverbial marker which points only to the past and not to the present: these markers can denote either a past moment as such (ἄρτι, ἀρτίως, νεωστί, πάλαι, πάρος, πρότερον), or the beginning in the past of an extended period of time (ἀφ' οὗ, ἐξ ὅτου, ἐκ παντὸς τοῦ χρόνου, ἐκ μειρακίου, πάντα τὸν μετὰ ταῦτα χρόνον).[14] The semantic effect of duration from the past into the present is created by the syntactical tension between the present-tense verb and such past-time markers. In the present case, however, not only does Plotinus employ the present tense περιμένω, he also emphasizes the presentness of his reference by using the adverb ἔτι. Unlike the past-time adverbial markers listed above, which index a time prior to that of the verb to which they are linked syntactically, ἔτι is indexed as being simultaneous with the verb (past, present, or future) with which it is associated: it means that some action not only began earlier than the time of that verb, but above all also coincides with that time. ἔτι emphasizes simultaneity, not priority: that is why ἔτι is never associated with a present-tense verb in ancient Greek in this present-perfect usage.[15] Thus there is no tension, in Plotinus' sentence, between a past-time adverb or adverbial modifier and the present-tense verb, and hence the verb emphasizes not that the action it denotes began in the past but instead that it is now continuing into the present. Had Plotinus said, σὲ πάλαι περιμένω, we would be entitled to understand him to have meant, 'I have been waiting for you for a long time.' Had he said, ἔτι ζῶ σε περιμένων, we might take him to mean, 'I am still alive, waiting for you', and we might well link this utterance, so understood, to his lingering on the point of death (μέλλων τελευτᾶν) while Eustochius made the long and time-consuming journey from Puteoli to Minturnae (ἐπειδὴ ἐν Ποτιόλοις κατοικῶν ὁ Εὐστόχιος βραδέως πρὸς αὐτὸν ἀφίκετο); if so, we might well be inclined to link Plotinus' ἔτι with the tardiness of Eustochius' arrival (βραδέως) and to imagine that what Plotinus meant was that he had remained alive this long just so that he could utter one more final sentence containing the sum of his philosophical wisdom before falling silent forever, and in that case Plotinus' penultimate utterance would serve no other purpose than to point to his last sentence and lend it even greater emphasis. But none of this is what Porphyry claims that Plotinus actually said. Instead, what we are told he said was, σὲ ἔτι περιμένω, and this can only mean, 'I am still waiting for you right now.'[16]

[13] Kühner–Gerth 1.134–5, §382.3; Schwyzer–Debrunner 2.273–4; B. L. Gildersleeve, *Syntax of Classical Greek from Homer to Demosthenes. Part One* (New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, 1900), 86–7, §202 ('present of unity of time'); W. W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb* (London, 1889), 9, §26.

[14] For the sake of convenience I take my examples from the discussions in the standard grammars listed in the preceding note.

[15] Hdt. 8.62.2 is no exception, for there ἔτι is not temporal but is instead an adverb of degree with the positive, cf. J. E. Powell, *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938), 150 s.v. ἔτι II.2.

[16] It might be added that even if it were correct (which it is not) to interpret the present tense περιμένω as being equivalent here to a present perfect, we would not be free of the logical difficulties pointed to in the preceding paragraph: for then Plotinus' utterance, 'I have been waiting for you', would be analysable into 'I was waiting for you' plus 'I am still waiting for you', and the latter sentence would still violate the semantics of verbs of waiting.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This is a grave interpretative aporia, and it can be measured easily in the frequency with which, against the simple and unambiguous grammar of the sentence, translators insist upon rendering its present-tense verb with an imperfect tense,[17] or in the tendency of even those scholars who translate the phrase correctly once to go on, by a kind of evidently unconscious slippage, to transform the present into an imperfect in the course of interpreting it later.[18] To be sure, many translations of Plotinus manage to get the tense right;[19] but, as far as I know, none actually explains it. Among published discussions, only Pépin's recognizes the difficulty, yet his own treatment of it is not philologically persuasive.[20] So the question remains: what can Plotinus possibly have meant?

Suppose we try to answer this question from Eustochius' point of view, by trying to reconstruct the circumstances in which he found himself at this moment and thereby attempting to gauge the effect Plotinus' first sentence might be expected to have had upon him. What can we surmise? Eustochius, impelled by his distress and concern for his friend, patient, and teacher, has travelled the seventy kilometres from Puteoli to Minturnae as quickly as possible,[21] anxious lest he arrive just too late to give Plotinus a final salutation. He manages to arrive at the house before it is altogether too late, but he hears that Plotinus is at the very edge of death. He rushes into the room where the dying philosopher is lying, they look at one another, and he hears him say—'I am *still* waiting for you.' Under the circumstances, Plotinus' utterance must have seemed paradoxical and astonishing to him. It was precisely *not* what he, or anyone, might have expected. Like a Zen Buddhist *koan*, it must have baffled Eustochius' immediate understanding and demanded a strenuous exertion of thought on his part if he was to understand it; presumably, Plotinus had prepared it carefully in advance, hoping to be able to deploy it for just this very moment, to achieve precisely this effect. To reduce Plotinus' present tense to an imperfect, as so many scholars have insisted upon doing, is thoroughly to banalize his utterance and to ruin a thoughtfully prepared effect.

[17] A. H. Armstrong, *Plotinus with an English Translation I* (London and Cambridge, MA, 1966), 7 ('I have been waiting a long time for you'); Brisson et al. (n. 6), 135 ('C'est toi que j'attendais'); M. Casaglia et al., *Enneadi di Plotino I* (Torino, 1997), 88 ('Sei tu che aspettavo'); V. Cilento, *Plotino. Enneadi I* (Napoli, 1986), 31 ('Vedi: t'ho aspettato!'); Harder (n. 7), 5 ('Auf dich habe ich noch gewartet'); W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus I* (London, 1948^3), 121 ('I was waiting for you'); S. MacKenna, *Plotinus. The Enneads* (London, 1956^2), 2 ('I have been waiting a long time for you'); G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Porfirio. Vita di Plotino ed Ordine dei suoi libri* (Napoli, 1946), 56 ('Vedi: t'ho aspettato!').

[18] P. Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard* (Paris, 1963), 155 ('Je t'attends encore') vs. 156 ('Je t'attendais encore'); Henry (n. 3), 113, 121 ('Je t'attends encore') vs. 130 ('Je t'attendais encore').

[19] For example, E. Bréhier, *Plotin. Ennéades I* (Paris, 1924), 2 ('Je t'attends encore'); M. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints. The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students* (Liverpool, 2000), 3 ('I am still waiting for you'); J. Igal, *Porfirio. Vida de Plotino* (Madrid, 1982), 131 ('A ti te estoy aguardando todavía'); G. Leopardi, *apud* Pugliese Carratelli (n. 17), 92 ('adhuc te, inquit, expecto').

[20] Pépin (n. 6), 381–2, n. 97: 'La salutation à Eustochius σὲ ἔτι περιμένω ne peut être traduite littéralement «C'est toi que j'attends encore»: Plotin ne l'attend justement plus, puisqu'il est là. Le verbe a un sens duratif, et porte sur le passé récent plus que sur le présent. . . . Je fais quant à moi le calcul naïf: ἔτι + περιμένω = «j'attendais».' But, as indicated above, Pépin's claim for a durative usage for the present tense of the verb would require a past-time temporal marker lacking here; and I fail to understand what he calls his naïve calculation. One of the merits of Sala's article (see above at n. *) is that he emphasizes the importance of the fact that περιμένω is in the present tense.

[21] βραδέως here must mean, not that Eustochius travelled slowly (this would require the adverb to modify a verb of motion), but, given that the verb, ἀφίκετο, designates the moment of his arrival, that he reached Plotinus (almost too) late. Cf. LSJ s.v. βραδύς II.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

What Plotinus must presumably have intended Eustochius to understand by these words was that Eustochius' arriving physically at Plotinus' bedside was simply not enough to satisfy him. Eustochius might have imagined that travelling this distance corporeally could suffice to fulfil any possible obligations he might have with regard to his master and to himself—and yet for Plotinus it evidently did not. Plotinus was still waiting—waiting, so it seems, not for Eustochius' body to reach his own body (for his body had already arrived there, yet Plotinus was still waiting), but for Eustochius' mind to reach his own mind (for apparently his mind had not yet got there, and hence Plotinus was still waiting). His words 'I am still waiting for you' mean 'So what if your body has arrived here? Do you imagine that that is enough? Your body is not what I am really waiting for, for it is not who you are in your most authentic being. The you whom I am really awaiting is not your body, but your mind. And your mind has not yet reached me where I am.' Plotinus' words, so far from expressing gentle fondness for the only one of his disciples who has come to find him,[22] or a profound anxiety lest he himself might have died in isolation,[23] are an admonition, indeed a rebuke, a correction of some mistake that Eustochius has made.

But just what mistake? If Plotinus had died immediately after this sentence, neither Eustochius nor we would ever have found out just what he had had in mind. But, at least according to Porphyry, at least according to Eustochius, Plotinus managed to hold on just long enough to say one more phrase, and it is reasonable to expect that these very last words of his are to be understood in connection with the sentence we have just examined. This last sentence is, of course, the controversial phrase whose text, grammar, and interpretation are all hotly debated. Let us set aside for the moment the questions of its text and grammar (we shall return to them shortly). The two fundamental interpretative disagreements regard the subject of the verbal activity (either a first-person statement about Plotinus' situation, or a second-person imperative directed, at least in the first instance, to Eustochius) and the reference of the words 'trying to restore the divine (or: the god) in us (or: in you) back up to the divine in the All' (either to the activity of philosophy, or to the process of dying), and these two sets of alternatives generate four possible basic interpretations of this phrase:

1. 'I am trying to restore the divine (or: the god) in us (or: in you) back up to the divine in the All', sc. by means of philosophical enquiry.
2. 'I am trying to restore the divine (or: the god) in us (or: in you) back up to the divine in the All', sc. by dying.
3. 'Try to restore the divine (or: the god) in us (or: in you) back up to the divine in the All', sc. by means of philosophical inquiry.
4. 'Try to restore the divine (or: the god) in us (or: in you) back up to the divine in the All', sc. by dying.

Put in these terms, and aided by our understanding of Plotinus' penultimate sentence, it is not difficult to make a choice among these options. The notion that Plotinus might be referring to rejoining the divine in the All by means of the process of dying (2, 4) can be dismissed immediately. To be sure, in Plotinus' philosophical writings, death is indeed sometimes interpreted in just these terms.[24] But in the context of the present situation, such an interpretation would be outlandish in the extreme. If

[22] Hadot (n. 18), 156. [23] Pépin (n. 6), 382–3.
[24] For example, *Enn.* 4.3.12.8–12, 6.9.10.1–7.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Plotinus is referring to his own dying (2), it makes no sense to say that he is 'trying' (*πειρᾶσθαι*) to return to the divine in the All by dying: for that is something which he can achieve without having to make any effort or attempt whatsoever;[25] and the connection with his preceding sentence becomes opaque. If Plotinus is referring with an imperative to Eustochius (4), then he is in effect criticizing his pupil for still being alive and ordering him to kill himself at once; but there can be little doubt that Plotinus in general opposes killing oneself except under rare and extreme circumstances and for very good philosophical reasons[26]—did he not send Porphyry away to Sicily precisely in order to rescue him from his depression and suicidal thoughts (*Plot.* 11.11–19)?[27]—and such an abrupt behest would not only be an extraordinarily uncivil way to greet an arriving pupil, it would also be a command that Eustochius himself evidently refused to perform (for he must have survived long enough to tell Porphyry what Plotinus had said to him: *Plot.* 2.12).

This leaves us with two options: either Plotinus is telling Eustochius that he (Plotinus) is trying to philosophize (1), or he is telling Eustochius to do so (3). Of these two alternatives, the latter is surely far preferable. If Plotinus had meant the former, he could probably only be taken to be wanting to indicate that even under the present dreadful circumstances, at the very end of a painful and mortal illness, he is still trying to do what he has been doing during his whole life, namely to philosophize. This would indeed be a possible thing for him to want to say, but in its apparent pride it would comport ill with the modesty he elsewhere demonstrates, and it would be hard to establish any other connection to his penultimate utterance than to suggest that he meant that if he, Plotinus, was managing to philosophize even under these unpropitious circumstances, then Eustochius should be criticized for not philosophizing under his own more favourable ones. But if the point of his criticism of Eustochius is that the latter should philosophize, this can be conveyed far more clearly and modestly by a simple imperative to Eustochius (3). This is precisely how Synesius, less than a century after Porphyry's publication of his account of Plotinus' death, evidently understood his last words: for he concludes a letter with the salutation, *ἔρρωσο καὶ φιλοσόφει καὶ τὸ ἐν σαυτῷ θεῖον ἄναγε ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτόγονον θεῖον*,[28] where the second *καὶ* is clearly definitional in function ('philosophize, that is, restore the divine in you back up to the first-born divine').[29] That Synesius is thinking of Plotinus is guaranteed by the fact that he goes on, in the following sentence, to identify these

[25] Cf. W. Beierwaltes, 'Neoplatonica', *Philosophische Rundschau* 16 (1969), 130–52 at 132; Igal (n. 4), 450–1.

[26] Cf. J. Dillon, 'Singing without an instrument: Plotinus on suicide', *ICS* 19 (1994), 231–8; the crucial text is *Enn.* 1.4.16.

[27] On Porphyry's account of this episode, Plotinus does seem to permit suicide if the wish arises *ἐκ νοερᾶς καταστάσεως* (11.14); but it is hard to see in this concession anything that would support an interpretation of his last words as recommending to Eustochius that he kill himself.

[28] Synesius, *Ep.* 139.33–4 Garzya (= 138 Migne, 139 Hercher). Scholars are divided on the exact relation between Porphyry's account and Synesius' letter: cf. Henry (n. 3), 126–30; Harder (n. 7), 81; Igal (n. 4), 453–7; Schwyzer (n. 1), 89–90; Pépin (n. 6), 375–6. On my own view, there can be no doubt that Synesius has just this passage of Porphyry in mind; his use of the plural *τοῖς παραγενομένοις* in the next sentence (cf. n. 30) is either a lapse of memory, an adaptation of the text to his present rhetorical purposes, an inclusion of Plotinus' household, or a generalization beyond the single immediate addressee towards all mankind, and in any event has no significance for the text of Porphyry. The further textual question in this passage of Synesius (*πρωτόγονον* or *πρόγονον*) is not relevant to my present purpose.

[29] Cf. LSJ s.v. *καί* A.I.2 ('to add a limiting or defining expression').

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

words explicitly as Plotinus' dying utterance;[30] and of course he can hardly be supposed to be using Plotinus' words in order to recommend to his distinguished correspondent that he die.[31]

Thus what Plotinus is saying to Eustochius may be paraphrased as follows: 'Thank you for coming to see me. I appreciate your gesture. But you have evidently not yet recognized something of capital importance, and it is this that I am still waiting for you to understand: learn to philosophize!' By travelling to see him, Eustochius has clearly demonstrated his deep attachment to the person of Plotinus. In social terms, that may be thoroughly admirable as an expression of personal friendship and loyalty, but for Plotinus it is not ultimately an acceptable philosophical attitude, or at least it is not the philosophical heritage he would like, at this very last moment of his life, to bequeath to his pupil. The philosopher, in rebuffing this emotion directed to his person, is inviting Eustochius instead to move above the level of individuals, of the divine found in us, and to direct his attention instead to the One, to the divine found in the all. Plotinus is saying, in effect, 'Love not me, but my philosophy.' What could possibly be more endearing?

This interpretation of Plotinus' last words has implications for the constitution of the Greek text of this passage. Since only Eustochius is present and the criticism is directed at him personally, the second-person plural pronoun is quite out of place; the first-person pronoun must be taken then to mean not 'in me, Plotinus', but rather 'in us humans'.[32] Between *τὸ . . . θεῖον* (BJy) and *τὸν . . . θεὸν* ($A^{\gamma\rho mg}E^{\gamma\rho mg}R^{\gamma\rho s}$) there is no perceptible difference in meaning in Plotinus' usage; but Schwyzer's argument that, given the parallelism with the words *τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον* a little later in the same sentence and the fact that *τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον* is a *terminus technicus* in Greek philosophy, *τὸν . . . θεὸν* is the *lectio difficilior* which would far more likely have been corrupted into *τὸ . . . θεῖον* than the other way around,[33] is not decisive but provides a good reason to prefer *τὸν . . . θεὸν*. Finally, *πειρᾶσθαι* turns out to be equivalent to a second-person singular imperative that is addressed in the first instance to Eustochius, but which goes beyond him by communicating an injunction valid for him precisely because it is valid for all human beings.[34] Whether we take this last utterance of Plotinus' as being reported by Porphyry in direct discourse, with the infinitive functioning as an imperative, or as indirect discourse, with *φήσας πειρᾶσθαι* meaning 'telling (him) to try' (so Igal), is hard to decide and in the end not very important. Perhaps the former construction is slightly to be preferred: on the one hand, the choice of the infinitive form rather than the imperative would lend the command a greater weight and urgency;[35] and on the other, constructions of the sort Igal proposes almost always have a dative pronoun, which is lacking here. Evidently, I presume that when he prepared his edition for publication Porphyrius made use of an appropriate critical sign in this passage in order clearly to separate *φήσας* from *πειρᾶσθαι* and to indicate unambiguously that he was quoting Plotinus' utterance in direct discourse.[36] If so, then

[30] *Καλὸν γὰρ ἅπασαν ἐμὴν ἐπιστολὴν τοῦτο παρ' ἐμοῦ τῇ τιμίᾳ σου διαθέσει λέγει ὅ φασι τὸν Πλωτῖνον εἰπεῖν τοῖς παραγενομένοις ἀναλύοντα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος* (139.34–7 Garzya).

[31] Cf. Schwyzer (n. 1), 89.

[32] Cf. Harder (n. 7), 82; Igal (n. 4), 451.

[33] Schwyzer (n. 1), 92–4.

[34] Cf. Igal (n. 4), 452.

[35] See especially Kühner–Gerth 2.23–4, Anm. 2 ('die gewichtigere, eindringlichere Form der Aufforderung'); also Schwyzer–Debrunner 2.380–3.

[36] See E. G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World*, 2nd edn rev. and enlarged, ed. P. J. Parsons, BICS Suppl. 46 (London, 1987), 14–15. Exactly what sign or signs Porphyrius did

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the text should be printed as follows: *καὶ φήσας 'πειρᾶσθαι τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον'*, and it should be translated, 'and having said, "Try to restore the god in us back up to the divine in the All"'.

Up to this point, the argument presented here has been based largely upon evidence drawn from the immediate context of this sentence itself. But it also receives further support (1) from Plotinus' philosophical writings, (2) from what we are told elsewhere about the personalities of Eustochius and Plotinus, and (3) from the evident parallels between the death of Plotinus and the death of Socrates.

1. In his commentary on the oracle of Apollo, which he places climactically near the end of his biography of Plotinus, Porphyry interprets the poem in terms which clearly refer back to the last words of the dying philosopher, which he had placed near the beginning of that biography:

οὕτως δὲ μάλιστα τούτῳ τῷ δαιμονίῳ φωτὶ πολλάκις ἐνάγοντι ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸν πρῶτον καὶ ἐπέκεινα θεὸν ταῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τῷ 'Συμποσίῳ' ὑφηγημένας ὁδοὺς τῷ Πλάτωνι ἐφάνη ἐκεῖνος ὁ θεὸς ὁ μήτε μορφὴν μήτε τινὰ ἰδέαν ἔχων, ὑπὲρ δὲ νοῦν καὶ πᾶν τὸ νοητὸν ἱδρυμένος. ᾧ δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ Πορφύριος ἅπαξ λέγω πλησιάσαι καὶ ἑνωθῆναι ἔτος ἄγων ἑξηκοστόν τε καὶ ὄγδοον. ἐφάνη γοῦν τῷ Πλωτίνῳ σκοπὸς ἐγγύθι ναίων. τέλος γὰρ αὐτῷ καὶ σκοπὸς ἦν τὸ ἑνωθῆναι καὶ πελάσαι τῷ ἐπὶ πᾶσι θεῷ. ἔτυχε δὲ τετράκις που, ὅτε αὐτῷ συνήμην, τοῦ σκοποῦ τούτου ἐνεργείᾳ ἀρρήτῳ. (*Plot.* 23.8–17)

For Porphyry, Apollo, rightly understood, testifies to the spiritual purity and intellectual effort with which Plotinus managed during his life to achieve the goal of philosophy, separation from the muddy materiality of this life and reunification with the divine source of his being. It was not easy, and required an exertion of all his extraordinary faculties. Plotinus had only achieved it four times during the years that Porphyry had spent with him, and Porphyry himself, with what we may choose to regard, as we wish, either as disarming candour or as arrogant presumption, confesses that even now, after a long life, he himself has only managed to accomplish this one time. Well indeed might Plotinus bid Eustochius to *try* (*πειρᾶσθαι*) to reunite the divine in him with the divine in the All.

If there is one thing that we can say with certainty about Plotinus' philosophy, it is that this effort of ascent back up to a divine origin is at its very centre.[37] It can be traced throughout his writings from his very earliest onwards.[38] Very often, as Porphyry suggests, it is the image of the ascent of the philosophically erotic soul upwards along the rungs of the ladder of the various, ever higher forms of beauty, proposed by Diotima in Plato's *Symposium* (210a–d), which provides an explicit model and guide for the Plotinian ascent.[39] Thus the endeavour that he proposes to Eustochius on his deathbed is precisely the activity that best epitomizes the process of philosophical enquiry. Does Eustochius feel a devotion to Plotinus? If so, then he should devote himself to the true person of his master, and that is not the living being,

use—diple, dicolon, blank space, paragraphos?—is unknown. Such signs are easily lost in the course of transmission.

[37] Cf. Beierwaltes (n. 25), 131; Pépin (n. 6), 363–7; and in general J. Halfwassen, *Der Aufstieg zum Einen. Untersuchungen zu Platon und Plotin*. Beiträge zur Altertumskunde 9 (Stuttgart, 1992).

[38] For example, *Enn.* 1.6.6.12–15, 5.1, 6.9.3.14–27.

[39] For example, *Enn.* 1.3.2.1–3.11, 1.6.7.1–25, 5.9.2.1–9, 6.7.31.18–34.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

compounded of beast and spirit, which is in the course of slipping away from Eustochius at this very moment, but rather the process of thought that begins above the animal level and is directed upwards towards the source of all being—this, as Plotinus affirms in his very last writings, is the true 'we'.[40] Does Eustochius cherish his friendship for Plotinus? If so, then he should seek the true friendship that is only possible on the level of the world soul, not here in this life, where the best friendship we can hope to find is but an imitation of that higher and more perfect one.[41] At the best of times, Plotinus was an elliptical writer; in these last moments, he had additional reason not to waste words. Otherwise he might well have made his meaning even clearer by saying: *πειρᾶσθαι τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν πᾶσι θεὸν ἀνάγειν μὴ πρὸς τὸ ἐν ἐμοὶ θεῖον ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖον*.

2. Eustochius was a doctor (*Plot.* 7.8), one of several in Plotinus' entourage.[42] As such he was a representative of the kind of special science for which Plotinus had a certain degree of respect but which he evidently considered to be of an intellectual dignity inferior to that of philosophy.[43] Furthermore, as a doctor he was most likely to have had a professional tendency, like most doctors, then as now, to concentrate more upon the concrete, individual conditions of his particular patients and less upon abstract, universal metaphysical issues.[44] About his relation to Plotinus and to philosophy Porphyry tells us, *ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέα Εὐστόχιον ἰατρικὸν ἔσχεν ἑταῖρον, ὃς περὶ τὰ τελευταῖα τῆς ἡλικίας γνωρισθεὶς αὐτῷ διέμενε θεραπεύων ἄχρι τοῦ θανάτου καὶ μόνοις τοῖς Πλωτίνου σχολάζων ἕξιν περιεβάλλετο γνησίου φιλοσόφου* (*Plot.* 7.8–12). The fact that Eustochius studied only the philosophical doctrines of Plotinus himself (*μόνοις τοῖς Πλωτίνου σχολάζων*) certainly expresses his deep personal attachment to the person of his master, patient, and friend, but in its exclusiveness can hardly be considered good philosophical practice and is very much at variance with the eclectical philosophical erudition characteristic of Plotinus himself (*Plot.* 3.15–17, 14.4–7, 10–16). As for the final words of this sentence, *ἕξιν περιεβάλλετο γνησίου φιλοσόφου*, it is unclear whether Porphyry is to be understood more to be praising Eustochius for the degree to which, although merely a doctor, he had nonetheless succeeded in acquiring something of the *habitus* of a genuine philosopher, or disparaging him for having cloaked himself in the appearance of being a genuine philosopher, although he was nothing of the sort, and in this way having secured Plotinus' approval for his continuing attendance upon him. In either case, we hear in these words the judgement—either patronizing or derogatory or somewhere in between—on the part of someone who considers himself a genuine philosopher, Porphyry, passed upon someone whom he considers to be not quite a genuine philosopher, Eustochius.[45] To such a person, no more fitting death-bed injunction on the part of Plotinus can be imagined than the urgent recommendation to devote himself henceforth fully to philosophical enquiry.

As for Plotinus, Porphyry is at pains to emphasize the gentleness of his character (*ἦν δὲ καὶ πρᾶος καὶ πᾶσιν ἐκκείμενος τοῖς ὁπωσοῦν πρὸς αὐτὸν συνήθειαν ἐσχηκόσι*

[40] For example, *Enn.* 1.1.7.14–18, 10.7–10.
[41] For example, *Enn.* 6.7.14.18–23.
[42] So too Paulinus (*Plot.* 7.6) and Zethus (7.19).
[43] Plotinus was acquainted with the principles of geometry, arithmetic, mechanics, optics, and music, but evidently did not feel it incumbent upon himself to be able to work through problems in these disciplines on his own (*Plot.* 14.7–10).
[44] For example, Hippoc. *VM* 20, Arist. *Eth. Nic* 1.6.1097a11–13.
[45] Cf. Schwyzer (n. 1), 85. Is Porphry justifying his own edition of Plotinus' writings to the detriment of Eustochius' competing one?

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

9.18–20, ἡ πραότης 13.8, ἀγανὸς γέγονε καὶ ἤπιος καὶ πρᾶός γε μάλιστα καὶ μειλίχιος 23.1), and there is no reason to doubt his testimony. But such generalized kindness to all is not in the least incompatible with a sense of privacy, even of embarassment, with regard to one's own person that would lead one to try to discourage any too close attachment to, or even curiosity about, oneself on the part of others. This seems to have been the case with Plotinus. The beginning of Porphyry's biography narrates over and over again the attempts of his disciples to penetrate that personal reserve, to express too close an attachment to his person, attempts that he repeatedly and resolutely rebuffs. His character was such that he could not endure to tell of his origin, of his parents, or of his homeland (*Plot.* 1.2–4); he forbade his disciples to arrange to have a portrait of himself painted by a leading contemporary artist (1.4–10); he refused to tell them what his birth-month and birthday were so as to prevent them from celebrating it, even though he himself celebrated the birthdays of Plato and Socrates (2.37–43). This is the context for his final words to Eustochius: an obstinate discouragement of any kind of personality cult, or even of any strong and personal devotion, which no doubt was founded as much upon Plotinus' particular character as it was justified in his eyes by his philosophical views, and which no doubt only increased the fascination he exerted upon his disciples and associates. For such a person, no more fitting death-bed injunction to Eustochius can be imagined than the urgent recommendation to devote himself henceforth not to his attachment to Plotinus, but to philosophical enquiry.

3. An obvious intertextuality links the death of Plotinus with the death of Socrates, as reported in Plato's *Phaedo*.[46] It would be very strange indeed if the philosopher who celebrated the birthdays of Socrates and of Plato (but not his own), who tried to found a utopian city named Platonopolis (*Plot.* 12.3–12), who wrote the treatise 'Against the Gnostics' (*Enn.* 2.9) in order to refute the notion ὡς δὴ τοῦ Πλάτωνος εἰς τὸ βάθος τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας οὐ πελάσαντος (*Plot.* 16.8–9), and whose writings are filled with reminiscences and close interpretations of the writings of Plato,[47] had not paid close attention to the unforgettable scene of Socrates' death which provides an extraordinary climax to Plato's *Phaedo*. It would hardly be surprising if a philosopher nurtured in the tradition that philosophy is a preparation for death should have turned for consolation and guidance, when he felt his own death approaching, to the depiction of the death of the philosopher who had founded that very tradition.[48] And indeed, the fact that the *Phaedo* was much on Plotinus' mind during the last months of his life is indicated by the frequency with which the treatises he wrote during those months allude to that Platonic text.[49]

[46] One of the nastiest moments in Firmicus Maternus' polemic against Plotinus is his denial of even this evident link between the death of Plotinus and the death of Socrates: *Math.* 1.7.19. On the Platonic scene, cf. my 'A cock for Asclepius,' *CQ* 43 (1993), 96–111. Perhaps Socrates' dying reference to Asclepius (*Phd.* 118a) has helped generate the reference in Porphyry to the snake which departs together with Plotinus' life (*Plot.* 2.27–29), for snakes were notoriously sacred to Asclepius.

[47] See in general J.-M. Charrue, *Plotin Lecteur de Platon* (Paris, 1978), esp. 183–204 (Plotinus and the *Phaedo*). Of the 96 columns of the 'Index fontium' in Henry–Schwyzer^2, 3.326–73, references to Plato fill 34, far more than any other author; the second most frequently cited source, Aristotle, only has 19 columns to his credit.

[48] Philosophy as liberation of the soul from the body and hence as a preparation for death: *Phd.* 63e–68c, 80e–81a, 82d–83c. It will be noted that these are among the passages that Plotinus most conspicuously cites from the *Phaedo* in his last treatises: see the following note.

[49] Henry–Schwyzer^2 list the following references: *Enn.* 1.1.1.1 to *Phd.* 83b, 9.25 to 66d, 11.9 to

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Seneca, another admirer of Socrates, managed by the dubious grace of Nero to stage for himself a spectacular philosophical death that recapitulated certain prominent aspects of the death of Socrates: the philosophical discourses, the moral injunctions, the courage, the farewell to the wife and the tearful friends, even the hemlock.[50] Plotinus was not so lucky: surrounded as he was only by his household slaves, abandoned by his disciples, he was deprived of the possibility of enacting certain forms of philosophical *mimesis*. Had Eustochius arrived a few hours earlier, Plotinus would no doubt have been able to deliver a moving lecture on the soul's confidence about its life after death. But as it was, time was short. Plotinus was about to die. He only had time for one or two sentences.

So he picked out for imitation another feature of the scene of Socrates' death: Socrates' repeated rebuffing of Crito's unphilosophical devotion to what he mistakes to be Socrates' true person. Crito asks Socrates if they can please him by following any instructions he might have regarding his children or other matters, and Socrates replies that the best thing they can do to please him is to follow the philosophical life he has outlined to them (115b). Crito asks how they should bury him, and Socrates answers that the true person he really is is not his body after all but the mind that has been presenting philosophical arguments during his life and during that day (115c–116a). Crito suggests that Socrates should wait until the last possible moment to drink the poison, and Socrates counters that to do so would be inconsistent with his philosophical beliefs (116e–117a). To the friends and disciples who react with uncontrolled weeping to the sight of him drinking the hemlock he says in reproof that it had been to avoid just such an embarrassing scene that he had sent the women away (117c–e).

In general, it may be said that the disciple's love for the philosopher's person is quite indispensable but at the same time quite imperfect: without it, the teacher could not direct his pupil's attention to his person, and through it to higher objects; but with it, the pupil runs the danger of stopping at the teacher's person and not passing beyond it. As the philosopher dies, he rectifies the disciple's love for his person and redirects it as a whole beyond himself to an object which, unlike him, is immortal. To love him truly is to love him as a philosopher; if we will be true to him, we must not betray his teachings. So Socrates, with Crito; and so Plotinus, with Eustochius.

Reading between the lines of Porphyry's hagiographical account, we can suspect that much in Plotinus' life in fact went very wrong. His disciples abandoned him; a fellow-student, Olympius, tried to use magic to make the stars harm him (*Plot.* 10.1–13); contemporary Greek philosophers accused him of plagiarism (17.1–2); he followed Gordian III towards India but after the emperor's murder he barely managed to return from Mesopotamia to Rome (3.17–22); his grand plans for a philosophical community came to nothing (12.9–12); he found no one better to become his philosophical heir and literary executor than the low-wattage, neurotic Porphyry. But at least his dying words would have worked perfectly—if only they had more often been properly understood.

Pisa/Chicago GLENN W. MOST
most@sns.it

82a; 1.8.1.12–13 to 97d, 4.4 to 65a, 5.29 to 107d, 13.16–17 to 69c; 2.3.9.20 to 67c, 13.4 to 65a, 17.24 to 109c.

[50] Tac. *Ann.* 15.61–4.

https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/53.2.576 Published online by Cambridge University Press