

ΔΕΝ IN CLASSICAL GREEK

Δέν occurs in two classical contexts. They are: (i) Alc. 320 L.-P. (23 Diehl) καί κ' οὐδέν ἐκ δενὸς γένοιτο; (ii) Democr. 156 Diels (in Plut. *Adv. Colot.* 4, p. 1108 F. . . . ὁ Κολώτης ἐσφάλῃ περὶ λέξιν τοῦ ἀνδρός, ἐν ᾗ διορίζεται μὴ μᾶλλον τὸ δέν ἢ τὸ μηδέν εἶναι, δέν μὲν ὀνομάζων τὸ σῶμα, μηδέν δὲ τὸ κενόν. Further, Diels adds two other passages showing Democritus' use of the word. Simpl. *De Caelo*, p. 294. 33 f. Heiberg (Diels, *Frag. d. Vorsokr.* ii. 93) προσαγορεύει δὲ τὸν μὲν τόπον τοῖσδε τοῖς ὀνόμασι, τῷ τε κενῷ καὶ τῷ οὐδενὶ καὶ τῷ ἀπείρῳ, τῶν δὲ οὐσιῶν ἐκάστην τῷ τε δένι καὶ τῷ ναστῷ καὶ τῷ ὄντι. Galen *De Elem. Sec. Hipp.* 1. 2 (Diels, op. cit., p. 97) κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἀλήθειαν δέν καὶ μηδέν ἐστὶ τὰ πάντα· καὶ γὰρ αὐ καὶ τοῦτ' εἴρηκεν αὐτός, δέν μὲν τὰς ἀτόμους ὀνομάζων, μηδέν δὲ τὸ κενόν.

There should not be any doubt about the origin of δέν as a back-formation made from οὐδέν/μηδέν by the isolation of the negative element οὐ- (μη-) instead of the correct οὐδ- (μηδ-). Etymology is not always so easy. But even here attempts have been made to avoid the obvious.¹ An ingenious older interpretation (Wharton, *Etyma Graeca*)² suggested deriving δείς from δεῖνα, on the analogy of εἷς: that is, presumably, δείς as a nominative masculine would be a back-formation from δεῖνα, with this form taken as an accusative and on the analogy of the declension of εἷς. The sense would not be impossible: δεῖνα 'so and so, somebody'; δέν 'something'. But a number of difficulties arises whose effect is surely fatal. There is no form *εῖνα as accusative of εἷς; nor is δείς itself attested, but only the neuter δέν.³ This upsets the analogical pattern of the morphology. Further, the attempt to connect with δεῖνα illustrates the danger of etymologizing without reference to the facts of usage. Alcaeus provides the first evidence of the use of δέν, but about six generations pass before the earliest use of δεῖνα (Aristophanes, Sophron). Again, Lesbian and Ionic have δέν, Attic and Doric δεῖνα. The separation of time and place is too much to bridge.

Schwyzler (*Griech. Gramm.* i. 588, n. 4) notes with approval the suggestion of Kühner-Blass, i. 634 (also 614), that the separation of δείς, δέν was made possible by the psilosis of εἷς in Aeolic, and, presumably, Ionic. I cannot see any reason why psilosis was a necessary stage in the development. It is thereby suggested that a pronunciation *ouden* could easily be divided into *ou-dén*, but that in Attic the pronunciation *oudhen* (*oud'hen*) to which the emergence of οὐθέν in the fourth century bears witness prevented such a division and so stopped the creation of the word. This does not make sense. All that stood in the way of the formation of the word δέν was a correct morphological division of οὐδέν, and that would be the same whether there was an aspirate present or not after οὐδ-. For a speaker of Aeolic 'one' was ἓν, and of Attic ἐν: the amount

¹ A brief reference will suffice for Pisani, *Rendic. Accad. Lincei*, vii (1931), 71 ff. He derives οὐδέν from οὐ †δέν, the latter supposedly an emphatic particle built upon a new form *δέ and on the analogy of μέν. There is no justification at all for this view, which also leaves out of account the pronominal

use of δέν in Alcaeus and Democritus.

² I owe the reference to Professor L. J. D. Richardson.

³ Hence it might have been better for L. S. J. to use δέν as their lemma, and not the form δείς, which only appears in *Et. Mag.* as part of its explanation of the form δέν.

of distinction from *den* in the first case, and from *dhen* in the second, was precisely the same. The only role that aspiration could have played—but did not—might have arisen if in a non-psilotic dialect οὐδέν were pronounced as *ouden*, while ἐν retained the aspirate; in this way the link between the two words would have become less obvious, and so the way laid open for an interpretation of *ouden* as *ou-den*. In other words, *non-psilosis* might have assisted in the formation: psilosis could not. In a psilotic dialect ἐν and -έν in the compound remained as closely linked as ever they were.

It is not, however, to be assumed that δέν was due to a mistaken analysis of οὐδέν¹ if that implies that the correct morphological division of the word was not at the same time appreciated. In my view Alcaeus and Democritus were quite aware of what they were doing: it would be most surprising if they were not. οὐδ(ε)- was commonly found in other compound words as the initial element. Thus, οὐδέποτα and οὐδέπω occur in Lesbian verse. Could Alcaeus have 'mistakenly' isolated *δέποτα 'ever', or *δέπω 'yet' from these forms? The question hardly needs an answer. Again, δέν is not found in language drawing upon a popular source, such as comedy, yet that would be a more likely context for it if based upon *Volksetymologie*.

The analysis into οὐ-δέν, artificial as it is, is due to a sophisticated, and not an ignorant, division of the word. Its purpose is not difficult to see. It was made in order to provide a striking antithesis of form to the negative οὐδέν (μηδέν); and the use of δέν in antithesis in both passages (καί κ' οὐδέν ἐκ δενός γένοιτο: μὴ μᾶλλον τὸ δέν ἢ τὸ μηδέν εἶναι) shows that the word was felt to be a form which could not be used freely in isolation from its opposite. There is a parallel in the use of the precisely similar form θέν, made from οὐθέν: this word appears in Theodotion's translation of the *O.T.*, quoted by Philoponus, *De Opif.* ii. i. 59. 12 (Reichardt): ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν θέν καὶ οὐθέν.² We note again the appearance of the two opposites, one a regular form, the other an artificial construct. For parallels to this usage I would refer among others to the use of the verbal form ἀτίει (*Theog.* 621 πᾶς τις πλούσιον ἄνδρα τίει, ἀτίει δὲ πενιχρόν), which is irregular in prefixing ἀ- to a purely verbal stem; also ἀνήδομαι (*Hermipp.* 77 K. ἃ τόθ' ἥσθην, ταῦτα νῦν ἀνήδομαι).

We may now turn to the meaning of δέν. In view of its derivation, and its use in antithesis to οὐδέν and μηδέν, there would seem little reason to question the meaning 'something', 'anything' (on the analogy of τι: οὐ τι); or possibly 'one thing' (δέν = ἐν). 'Something' is the interpretation of *Et. Mag.* 305. 1 Gaisford (s.v. εἷς): δείς, δενός· ὅπερ ἰσοδυναμοῦνται τῷ τίς· ὅπερ μετὰ τοῦ οὐ, οὐδείς, οὐδενός· καὶ μετὰ τοῦ μή, μηδείς.³ So too 'etwas' in Frisk, *Et. Wb.*; Schwyzler, *Griech. Gramm.* ii. 593; Leumann, *Homerische Wörter*, p. 108. In the usage of Democritus it is quite plain that this is the sense required: τὸ δέν is 'something' in the sense of matter or substance. θέν in Theodotion has the same meaning. It is when we come to the earliest use, the passage of Alcaeus (καί

¹ Schwyzler, *Griech. Gramm.* i. 426, n. 1, and Frisk, *Et. Wb.*, use the terms *falsche Auslösung*, *falsch ausgelöst*. Schwyzler makes this comment on δέν in reference to cases of compounds in which 'das Hinterglied für das Sprachgefühl völlig undeutlich wurde'. But it is quite clear that these words could not be applied to δέν.

² I take the reference from Diels, *op. cit.*,

ii. 174, discussing Democr. 156. Notice also Philoponus' comment on the passage: θέν ἦν, τουτέστι ἦν τι.

³ It is necessary to remove from the text εἷς, ἐνός, which was corruptly inserted after δείς, δενός. A later reference in *Et. Mag.* (639. 17, s.v. οὐδείς) is a source of the fragment Alc. 320 L.-P., but does not go into the question of meaning.

κ' οὐδὲν ἐκ δενὸς γένοιτο), that difficulty arises; or perhaps we should say, has been unnecessarily produced. L.S.J., s.v. δείς, offer two meanings, one for each occurrence: (i) 'no one' or 'thing', for Alcaeus; (ii) 'something', for Democritus. Reinach-Puech (Budé) give the translation for Alcaeus (no. 35), 'Rien ne naîtrait de rien.' Treu, *Alkaios*, p. 77, 'Aus nichts könnte nie etwas entstehen.' The index of Lobel-Page, *Poet. Lesb. Frag.*, p. 318, has δείς: δενός (=οὐδενός). An older commentator than any of these can be traced in a manuscript of the second source of the fragment (Schol. Marc. in Dion. Thrac. *Art.* 12, p. 381 Hilgard), which has οὐδενός in place of ἐκ δενός: this will have arisen from a gloss on δενός. This highly unlikely interpretation may be due to a desire to range the Alcaeus fragment with the later philosophical statement of the materialists, that physically nothing can come into being out of nothing. Treu indeed explicitly affirms this (*Alkaios*, pp. 114, 173). Can the Greek bear this meaning? It cannot be seriously suggested that δέν in itself meant 'nothing': everything argues against such a view. Treu (op. cit., p. 173), in stating that δέν equals οὐδέν, refers to *Et. Mag.* 639. 17 ff. This passage runs: οὐδείς· ἰστέον ὅτι τὸ οὐδείς ὅτε ἰσοδυναμεῖ τῷ οὐτις δύο μέρη λόγου εἰσί, τό τε οὐ καὶ τὸ δείς· οὐδὲ γάρ ἐστι σύνθετον (there follow remarks on the accentuation of οὐδείς) . . . αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ οὐδείς¹ (δείς Edmonds) τὸ οὐδέτερον δέν χωρὶς τῆς οὐ παραθέσεως ἔχομεν παρὰ Ἀλκαίῳ ἐν τῷ ἐνάτῳ· καὶ κ' οὐδὲν ἐκ δενός γένοιτο· Ζηρόβιος. There is nothing in this to justify the remark that δέν = οὐδέν. The final sentence refers only to the morphology of δέν; and, as previously mentioned, *Et. Mag.*, s.v. εἶς, informs us that δείς has the meaning of τις. One must therefore conclude that it is supposed that δενός in the particular context of the Alcaeus fragment acquired negative meaning; and that this was due to the preceding οὐδέν. However, this line of explanation is equally untenable. It would have to suppose that the negation in οὐδέν could be carried on and turn δενός into a negative. But this is not possible. 'Nothing comes out of nothing' is οὐδὲν ἐξ οὐδενός γίγνεται. Further, because of the Greek preference for repeated negation, οὐδέν ἐξ οὐδενός γίγνεται could also quite regularly mean 'nothing comes out of something (anything)': cf. Kühner-Gerth, ii. 204, quoting among other examples Pl. *Parm.* 166 a τὰλλα τῶν μὴ ὄντων οὐδενὶ οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς οὐδεμίαν κοινωνίαν ἔχει (also with repeated οὐδείς). It is, however, possible for the meaning 'nothing out of something' to be given by indefinite forms (pronominal and adverbial) after οὐ or οὐδείς: cf. Kühner-Gerth, ii. 206, n. 4, and Pl. *Phaed.* 57 a οὐτε Φλειασίων οὐδείς πάνν τι ἐπιχωριάζει τὰ νῦν Ἀθήναζε οὐτε τις ξένος ἀφίικται; also *Parm.* 166 a (the continuation of the passage just quoted) οὐδέ τι τῶν μὴ ὄντων παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων τῷ ἐστίν. This second course was especially useful if there was risk of ambiguity: οὐδέν ἔκ τινος γίγνεται could not be mistaken for 'nothing from nothing'. Thus we see that, so far from being able to take οὐδέν ἐκ δενός as 'nothing from nothing', we can only enjoy the freedom

¹ δείς appears both a simple and a desirable emendation of οὐδείς (τοῦ δείς replacing τοῦ οὐδείς: so Edmonds, *Lyra Graeca*, i. 426). It is still possible to make sense with οὐδείς. The article in *Et. Mag.*, after saying that οὐδείς is made up of οὐ and δείς, then goes into a long discussion of the accent of οὐδείς, so that this form is foremost in the mind. It would therefore not be out of the question to continue by referring to it:

'of this word οὐδείς we have the neuter form δέν without the added οὐ- in Alcaeus'. Contrasted with this, τοῦ δείς returns to the earlier mention of the word: χωρὶς τῆς οὐ παραθέσεως will then draw attention to the rarity of the form δέν, as compared with the frequency of the compound οὐδέν. It will be seen that the problem of the reading does not vitally affect the general sense of the passage.

of alternative translations with the double negative form of sentence οὐδὲν ἐξ οὐδενός. The language of Alcaeus (and of Sappho) does not differ from this general situation. I have not found in it any other example exactly of the type seen in our fragment: that is, of οὐδέις followed by an indefinite form. But there are several cases of repeated negation. Note especially Alc. 69. 5 L.-P. οὐ πάθοντες οὐδάμα πῶσλον οὐδέν. This has repetition in οὐδάμα and οὐδέν, but πῶ retains its indefinite form (after οὐ). Further id. 129. 16 μηδάμα μηδένα τῶν ἑταίρων; Sappho 56. 1-2, 63. 5-6.

What then is the meaning of the Alcaeus fragment? Unfortunately we have too little of it to give the basis for a certain answer. The most likely seems to be, 'nothing may come out of something (anything)'; 'something (anything) may lead to nothing': that is, perhaps, one may labour to no purpose. As already mentioned, Reinach-Puech give the translation 'Rien ne naîtrait de rien'; and Treu, *Alkaios*, p. 77, 'Aus nichts könnt' nie etwas entstehen'. Treu discusses the passage, *op. cit.*, pp. 114, 173. He sees it as the oldest certain example of the philosophical maxim found later in Anaxagoras and Democritus; suggests a connexion between Alcaeus and Thales; and regards this 'philosophical' fragment as a sign of Alcaeus' advanced and modernistic outlook. The conclusions would be important both for the study of Alcaeus and for that of the Greek materialists if capable of justification; but the arguments against are too strong. The principal one is that already advanced, that δένος cannot mean 'nothing'. By itself this does not completely destroy the philosophical case, since it is open to argue that Alcaeus was aware of the maxim and was making a parody of it, with 'nothing out of something' instead of 'out of nothing'. Alcaeus nowhere else shows any approach to philosophical or scientific thought, so that if he did know of the maxim, a parody might be less inappropriate than a statement of philosophical belief. But *could* he have known of it, at that time? This seems most unlikely. The historians of philosophy, as Professor Kerferd informs me, are not able to put the date of the doctrine so far back as Alcaeus. We are then left with the conclusion that the similarity of Alcaeus' phrase to the philosophical use is accidental.

I do not know whether anyone has proposed an 'etymological' translation of the passage: 'the word οὐδέν might be derived from δέν'. It would be pleasant to put Alcaeus among the founders of Greek grammar instead of philosophy, but I am afraid it would be safer to deny him this honour as well.

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ADDENDUM

A possible third occurrence of δέν came later to my notice: *Ar. Thes.* 1197 ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔκω δέν (generally taken as ἔκωδέν for ἔκω οὐδέν). It is thus read by van Leeuwen. His account of δέν deserves mention, though I regard it as wrong: it would be *decurtatum* for οὐδέν, with the negative lost as in Fr. (*pas*) *du tout*—as in N. Gk. δέν has replaced οὐδέν (there of course under the influence of stress accent). But I doubt that we can accept such loss of the negative for Classical Greek.