

# **Stony Brook University**



OFFICIAL COPY

**The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.**

**© All Rights Reserved by Author.**

**Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus: A Psychoanalytic Reading**

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Jessica Ann Mayock**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Philosophy**

Stony Brook University

**May 2008**

**Stony Brook University**

The Graduate School

**Jessica Ann Mayock**

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the  
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend  
acceptance of this dissertation.

**Dr. Edward Casey – Dissertation Advisor  
Distinguished Professor of Philosophy**

**Dr. Donn Welton – Chairperson of Defense  
Professor of Philosophy**

**Dr. Peter Manchester  
Associate Professor of Philosophy**

**Dr. Bruce Wilshire  
Professor of Philosophy, Rutgers University**

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Lawrence Martin  
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

**Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus: A Psychoanalytic Reading**

by

**Jessica Ann Mayock**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Philosophy**

Stony Brook University

**2008**

Heraclitus is the first philosopher to focus on the psyche, but he also raises language to a cosmological principle, thereby giving his enigmatic statements a unique status. They are not intended to describe cosmos as much as to evoke it, making his cosmology a psychology. The true subject of his work is the psychological process it initiates. Attempts by commentators to attribute a doctrine to Heraclitus or to impose an order upon his fragments have therefore always misrepresented him, since his ‘method’ is to frustrate any method that would project itself upon him. Attempts to resolve the apparent contradictions of the fragments miss the point of his technique, which is to reflect the psyche back onto itself in order to discover the repressed contradictions there. This is why Heraclitus has a strange affinity with psychoanalysis, because both attempt to reveal invisible or hidden structures of the psyche. His logic is associative and mythological, as his poetic medium suggests, and his *logos* must be understood in this context: as a language of the soul. Heraclitus’ prevalent theme of the conflict of opposites and the dynamic tension they produce also appears very conspicuously in the theoretical constructs of psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalysis is the modern analogue of mythology insofar as both reveal the structures of the psyche using symbol, image, and metaphor. This dissertation consists of five sections; the first is an introduction to Heraclitus’ method. The second is a study of Heraclitus’ controversial use of *logos* and an examination of his use of language in this context. The following section is a study of Parmenides’ poem and the historical development of *eidolon*, as it is advanced by Plato, particularly in the *Sophist*. The fourth section examines the archaic uses of *psyche* alongside Heraclitus’ fragments, with special attention to the conflict of opposites and cosmology. The last section explores the theme of “psychical blindness”, the peculiar oblivious state of human beings that is so ubiquitous in Heraclitus’ fragments.

Like my wise predecessor,  
I dedicate this first fruit to Artemis

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction to the Method and Technique of Heraclitus.....	1
I. Logos	
A. Logos, Limit, and Law.....	17
B. Crypt and Encyption.....	35
II. Parmenides and Heraclitus	
A. The Poem of Parmenides.....	50
B. The Reality of Appearances.....	67
III. Psyche	
A. Irrationality and the Senses.....	78
B. Conflict of Opposites.....	100
C. Cosmology and Psychoanalysis.....	122
D. The Death Drive.....	136
IV. Psychological Blindness	
A. Hubris: I and Mined.....	150
B. Sleep and Psychosis.....	165
V. Conclusions: Psyche as Borderland.....	181
Bibliography.....	193

## Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to:

Dr. Peter Manchester: This dissertation was set in motion while studying the Presocratics in his graduate seminar, and was furthered by his careful readings during our extra-curricular Greek study group. Without his patient and helpful guidance, this project would never have begun.

Dr. Edward Casey: Throughout my graduate studies, his imaginative work and teaching inspired me to dig into the depths of psychoanalysis. His example encouraged me to be original, and as my advisor, he allowed me the latitude that I needed to do so.

Dr. Bruce Wilshire and Donna Wilshire: For their commitment to meaningful philosophy and for their kindness, energy, and friendship.

Dr. Donn Welton: For being an engaging reader and wonderful defense chairman.

Dr. James Tuedio and the faculty at California State Stanislaus: For the lucky opportunity to teach in their department while this dissertation was in progress.

Dr. Nicolas Leon: My fellow student of Heraclitus, for spending countless hours discussing the fragments with me, and for being a good friend.

Dr. Peter Kingsley and Maria Kingsley: For their wisdom, responsibility, and patience. Without their example, this work would never have been possible.

My husband Matthew Mayock: My appreciation and love are endless.

*Other men are oblivious of what they do awake, just as what they do asleep escapes them.*  
Heraclitus<sup>1</sup>

*Humankind cannot bear very much reality.*  
T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets<sup>2</sup>

### **Introduction: The Method and Technique of Heraclitus**

In studying Heraclitus' fragments, one is first faced with the problem of ordering them. The way in which one does this greatly influences, if not determines, the interpretations that will follow. On the one hand, Heraclitus' fragments seem to include a broad range of topics; he seems to be addressing physical phenomena, psychic processes, political topics, criticisms of other thinkers, religious ideas, and cosmology. Since we have no record of the original ordering of his fragments, if indeed there was one, we must be content to group them according to our own perceptions of his intentions.

However, despite this seemingly disparate variety, Heraclitus' thought contains an elusive consistency—especially when all of his fragments are considered together. Most commentators on Heraclitus have recognized this feature of his thought, but have grouped the fragments together nonetheless, usually for the convenience of structure; in addition to this convention, many commentators have left certain fragments out of their interpretations due to their inability to group them according to their pre-established guidelines.<sup>3</sup> Charles Kahn remarks upon both the difficulty and the necessity of grouping

---

<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus, Fragment One; my translation slightly amended from Kahn's in *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge, 1979. All Heraclitus fragments in this dissertation conform to the standard Diels-Kranz numbering, and all translations are Kahn's, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets", *Collected Poems and Plays*, Harcourt Brace, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Kirk, Raven, and Schofield include less than half the fragments listed in the Diels edition, and group them according to the somewhat simplified conclusion that the grouped fragments purportedly express [*The PreSocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge,



the fragments, and he introduces two principles that he follows in doing so: *linguistic density* and *resonance*.<sup>1</sup> By linguistic density, he means “the phenomena by which a multiplicity of ideas are expressed by a single word or phrase”, and he defines resonance as “a relationship between fragments by which a single verbal theme or image is echoed from one text to another in such a way that the meaning of each is enriched when they are understood together.”<sup>2</sup> Using this principle of resonance, Kahn groups the fragments in what he readily admits is a somewhat arbitrary grouping, but which will, nonetheless, allow these repetitions to be heard. This principle of resonance is a great insight into Heraclitus’ thought, because it reveals that his method is *associative* rather than linear or strictly logical. As Kahn describes, “it is because of this semantic role of resonance that the order in which the fragments are read need not, after all, be decisive for their meaning. The stylistic achievement of Heraclitus is to have contrived a non-linear expression of conceptual structure”.<sup>3</sup> This associative character of Heraclitus’ fragments resists any rigid categorization or strict logical grouping; readers who attempt to group his fragments in this way are often forced to exclude certain fragments that do not conform to their classification, and may even conclude that Heraclitus is himself inconsistent, rather than recognize their own forceful presuppositions about his “subject”.

Following Heraclitus, this dissertation will proceed according to an associative model;

---

1957]; Wheelwright discusses most of the fragments, but similarly groups them according to topic and does not offer interpretation for all individual fragments, but treats each group as a whole. He also excludes more than ten fragments “as being either too trivial or obscure or insufficiently authorized” [*Heraclitus*, Princeton, 1959].

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

this inescapable aspect of his method inspired the psychoanalytic framework within which I will frequently be reading Heraclitus' fragments.

The "subject" of Heraclitus' fragments is considered by most commentators to be the soul (*psyche*), and the soul's relation to the world. The way in which the "physical" fragments are related to the "psychical" ones, however, has been a matter of controversy. Kahn believes that Heraclitus' "real subject is not the physical world but the human condition"<sup>1</sup>, similarly, Dilcher believes that Heraclitus is only concerned with human behavior, and not with the "order of things" or "the nature of all things".<sup>2</sup> Kirk, Raven and Schofield argue that Heraclitus' fragments reveal that "the structure of the soul is related to the structure of the world as a whole", a view that seems to unite his physical fragments with his psychical ones.<sup>3</sup> Philip Wheelwright unites the physical to the psychical in a more specific way, and claims that, in Heraclitus' works, there is "an overtone of suggestion that we come to know reality not by merely knowing *about* it, but by becoming of its nature"; in this sense, Wheelwright argues, Heraclitus can be responsibly allied with mysticism.<sup>4</sup> The efficacy of this view is that it underscores the relation between the soul and the physical world, and helps to approach Heraclitus' fragments as a comprehensive unity, rather than as a conglomeration of separate topics.

The importance of linking the fragments into a consistent whole becomes especially prominent when one considers Heraclitus' own preoccupation with unity. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield agree that "it does appear that Heraclitus' thought possessed a

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, 23.

<sup>2</sup> Roman Dilcher, *Spudasmata (Studies in Heraclitus)*, Published by George Olms Verlag, 1995, page 20.

<sup>3</sup> KRS, 204.

<sup>4</sup> Wheelwright, 25.

comprehensive unity”<sup>1</sup>, and Kahn even goes so far as to say that “one might reasonably claim that *all* of Heraclitus’ fragments have only one single meaning, which is in fact the semantic structure of his thought as a whole”.<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus has been frequently associated with the doctrine of “flux”, which is Plato’s characterization, and hardly more than a caricature, since it avoids the *paradox* of flux and stasis that the river fragment suggests.<sup>3</sup> As Wheelwright remarks, “so closely has Heraclitus’ name been associated in Western philosophical tradition with the related themes of change and paradox, that there has often been a tendency to overlook the peculiar emphasis which he gives to the unity, in a qualified and paradoxical sense, of all things.”<sup>4</sup> Heraclitus’ fragments often imply or specifically invoke unity, as fragments 50, 41, 32, and 33 demonstrate.

Heraclitus places *psyche* at the center of his inquiry, but part of the problem involved in naming the “subject” of his inquiry is the nature of *psyche*—Heraclitus is not placing *psyche* as an *object* of study, rather, he is actively engaging *psyche* by the very nature of his method. In other words, the riddling nature of his fragments does not rely upon any specific solution to the riddle; the *process* of exploring the riddle is Heraclitus’ purpose. His fragments are essentially a study of the *dynamic* of *psyche*, or what Dilcher calls “life-force”, the organic movement of awareness.<sup>5</sup> The subject of Heraclitus’ fragments, if we must name one, is the reader’s own *psyche*; as Dilcher says, “the reader is challenged to reflect upon his own state of mind”.<sup>6</sup> Using various devices, including paradox, simile, metaphor, and image, Heraclitus is demonstrating *psyche*’s ability to

---

<sup>1</sup> KRS, 212.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, see especially *Cratylus* 402a.

<sup>4</sup> Wheelwright, 102.

<sup>5</sup> Dilcher, see especially chapter IV of *Spudasmata*.

<sup>6</sup> Dilcher, 15.

mirror itself; he is revealing, as Kirk, Raven, and Schofield have recognized, that the structure of the world and the structure of the psyche are the same. Before turning to these devices themselves, we might examine two fragments that suggest Heraclitus' method with regard to *psyche*:

45: You will not find out the limits of the soul by going,  
even if you travel over every way, so deep is its logos.

115: To the soul belongs a logos which increases itself.

Kahn comes to some very interesting conclusions in his reading of fragment 45; he believes that this fragment, like fragment 113: "thinking is shared by all", is evidence of Heraclitus' belief in panpsychism.<sup>1</sup> While this conclusion is extremely probable, it contradicts Kahn's frequent claims that "logos", for Heraclitus, refers to a "rational principle".<sup>2</sup> The *limits* referred to in the fragment echo a passage from Hesiod, where he describes a place "where 'the sources and limits' of earth, Tartarus, sea and heaven are located together."<sup>3</sup> Heraclitus is denying that these limits can be "found out", even after comprehensive travel, which suggests the concept of the *limitless* (*apeiron*) but here with reference to the soul. The invocation of Hesiod's description, taken together with the limitless quality of the soul, implies that the soul is like the circle in nature—particularly

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, 128.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn claims that logos means not only speech but "rational discussion", and "rationality as a phenomenal property" (102); in his reading of fragment 107, he claims that "this is the first time that psyche is used for the power of rational thought", and he defines rationality as "the capacity to participate in the life of language" (107). It is difficult to square this rational reading with Kahn's recognition that Heraclitus believed in panpsychism, unless the physical world can be said to somehow "participate in the life of language", though given the ubiquitous nature of Heraclitus' logos, it is not entirely unfathomable. However, describing the physical world itself as "rational" might dilute the concept to the brink of unintelligibility.

<sup>3</sup> Kahn, 128. Hesiod, cited in Kahn: *Theogony* 738-809.

when Heraclitus' fragment 103 is kept in mind: "the beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle". Hesiod's description is of the source *and* the limits in the *same place*, which provides a very rich metaphor for the soul. This reference to the circle as an image of limitless reality calls to mind the poem of Parmenides; the second chapter of this dissertation is devoted to his philosophy, and to the parallels between his poem and the poetic fragments of Heraclitus.

The most startling word in fragment 45 is the adjective "deep"; this is a strange word to apply to "logos", particularly in this situation, where the logos is said to belong to the soul. This depth is of a different character than mere *distance*, since no traveling can exhaust it; the word "deep" also has close associations with water. Kahn interprets Heraclitus' use of this word "deep" as an indication that the logos of the soul and *the* logos coincide; "the logos of the soul goes so deep that it coincides with the logos that structures everything in the world."<sup>1</sup> This analysis is somewhat unsatisfying, however, because it is unclear how the *depth* of the soul's logos would cause it to "coincide" with the logos of the world; why not simply say that the logos of the soul and the logos of the world are the *same* logos? Even more pressingly, what does it mean for the soul to have a logos in the first place? Perhaps these questions may be addressed by examining fragment 115, which also mentions a logos of the soul.

An entire chapter of this dissertation is devoted to the problem of logos in Heraclitus, so a sketch will have to suffice for the moment. Logos traditionally refers to speech and language, but is also used by Heraclitus in such a way that it implies a universal pattern or order. There are at least two puzzling elements in fragment 115; the

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, 130.

first is the meaning of a *logos* that belongs to the soul, and the second is the “increase” that Heraclitus names. Kahn takes this increase to be some kind of “self-expansion”, but he equates this with the “boiling up of heated vapor”, which makes the fragment more perplexing without resolving either of the two puzzles.<sup>1</sup> In what way can the soul be said to “increase itself”? Kahn’s principle of *resonance* comes to mind; a single word or image is multiplied when it is placed in different contexts.<sup>2</sup> This kind of multiplication can be likened to the psychic process that we now call “reflection”; just as a single image or word multiplies through *resonance*, the psyche increases the meaning of words and image through reflecting upon them. This activity is, as implied in fragment 45, limitless, since an infinite number of *associative* connections can be made. This principle of *association* is constantly present in Heraclitus’ method, as Kahn has pointed out, and this is not surprising considering Heraclitus’ preoccupation with the dynamic of psyche.

Reading these two fragments together, we get a glimpse of Heraclitus’ method, which is a *mirroring* effect. Just as the world and the psyche reflect one another in structure, as Kirk, Raven and Schofield have argued, Heraclitus is using language to reflect this structure back onto the psyche, effectively holding up a mirror for the reader to study. As Dilcher has pointed out, when reading Heraclitus, “men are deceived because they do not know their own existence is concerned.”<sup>3</sup> The “increase” of the soul that Heraclitus here describes is like the multiplication that occurs in a hall of mirrors, since the reflection and resonance, like the soul, are limitless.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, 237.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that this fragment bears such a strong resemblance to Kahn’s own principle of *resonance*, and yet he is somewhat suspicious of this fragment’s authenticity, despite the recurrence of the “*logos of the soul*”.

<sup>3</sup> Dilcher, 26.

One of the ever-present dangers of reading an ancient Greek philosopher like Heraclitus is the importation of modern ideas where they do not belong. In this regard, Wheelwright offers three instructive cases where modern modes of distinguishing do not apply to the thought of Heraclitus' time; these are so relevant and important that they bear repeating here. The first of these is the grammatical distinction between parts of speech, the second is the logical difference between the concrete and abstract, and the third is the distinction between subject and object.<sup>1</sup> Verbs, nouns, and adjectives were not as rigidly separate, particularly in the case of *qualities* versus the *things* they inhabit; it was not until the time of Aristotle that this distinction was made firm. The difference between the concrete and the abstract that we naturally make as modern thinkers is decidedly blurred in the time of Heraclitus; with regard to this interpretative difficulty, the question has often been asked, for example, whether or not Heraclitus means *actual* fire or fire as a *metaphor*. Wheelwright insists that “no one-sided answer can be maintained without doing violence to the doctrine; the true answer has to be—both!”<sup>2</sup> This observation sheds much light on Heraclitus' method as a whole, since he often uses physical images and concrete phenomena to demonstrate a psychological truth. Kahn, Dilcher, and other commentators have argued that Heraclitus' subject of inquiry is *only* human behavior or the mortal condition, but this position denies the very *physical* aspect of Heraclitus' thought—as Hölscher has argued, it “turns out we cannot properly tell what is image and what is statement” and the image itself “takes on something of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Wheelwright, 14.

quality of metaphor.”<sup>1</sup> The things themselves are the physical evidence of the abstract truth; the physical and the psychical reflect one another.

The third element that we must keep in mind when reading Heraclitus is the coalescence of subject and object; “to an ancient thinker... whose mind would not have been conditioned (as ours have largely been) by the postulates of Cartesian dualism, the division between subjective and objective wore no such appearance of clarity and finality. The idea of what might belong to the one and what might belong to the other would vary according to mood and circumstance”.<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus’ doctrine of change must be read with these explanations in mind. Change that is perceived may be happening in the perceiver rather than in that which is perceived, according to our modern distinctions. This is particularly true in the case of qualities—observation itself may be the agent that effects the perceived change rather than some external force. This modern understanding is foreign to Heraclitus, since the perceiver and the perceived were not considered to be separate. “This psycho-physical dualism, which for the past three centuries or so has been an *idée fixe* with most of us, was not a natural and required starting point for thinking in Heraclitus’ day.”<sup>3</sup> Thus his fragments may be read on two levels by those of us who are accustomed to this “psychophysical dualism”; on the level of the concrete and the abstract, the objective and the subjective. This fission into two levels would not have been necessary in Heraclitus’ time, but to our bisected minds, it is crucial for recovering his meaning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hölscher, Uvo. “Paradox, Simile, and Gnostic Utterance in Heraclitus”, *The Presocratics*, edited by Alexander P.D. Mourelatos, Anchor Books, NY, 1974.

<sup>2</sup> Wheelwright, 15.

<sup>3</sup> Wheelwright, 31.



The most apparent technique of Heraclitus, and one that he explicitly mentions, is the *oracular* character of his sayings. Much hinges on this technique, because it reveals Heraclitus' position on language, and thus helps to elucidate his strange use of *logos*. Fragment 93 is the best original source for evidence of his oracular tendencies:

93: The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither declares nor conceals but gives a sign.

For Heraclitus, both words and things have a double character—they “present a paradoxical, secret reality, which, at the same time, is manifest. Things themselves are a riddle to be solved—one has only to be able to read the cipher; that is, one must learn to understand the visible as a sign, as the self-proclaiming of the invisible.”<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus' fragment 54 reveals this truth by claiming that “the invisible harmony is better than the visible one.” When Heraclitus mentions something like fire or seawater, it does not benefit us to consider whether or not he means the concrete object or some metaphorical meaning; similarly, it does not further our understanding to ask whether he is offering description of phenomena or *simile*—“the phenomenon *is simile*.”<sup>2</sup> A parallel fragment to 93 is fragment 124, which states “nature loves to hide.”

This fragment cannot refer only to the physical world, but also to the invisible nature of *psyche*, since these share the same structure. The way in which it is *hidden* is hinted at in fragment 93, with Heraclitus' use of *kruptei*—the concealment is one of *encryption*. The physical world, the realm of the visible, is a *language*, and the truth of the *psyche*, the realm of the invisible, is encoded in it. This theme is consistent in Heraclitus' philosophy, but fragment 107 is perhaps the most explicit statement:

---

<sup>1</sup> Hölscher, 231.

<sup>2</sup> Hölscher, 233.

107: Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men  
if their souls do not understand the language.

The formula “eyes and ears” is an interesting choice of words, since Heraclitus is describing a hidden *harmony*, and the Pythagoreans perceived the cosmic harmony as most evident in astronomy and music, in its visible and audible aspects, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not Heraclitus’ ideas about harmony were influenced by Pythagorean thought, the notion of an underlying harmony is certainly shared between them. The language of fragment 107 is not merely words and speech, but a language *of the soul*—and this language also necessarily includes *image*. Heraclitus’ use of image, in this regard, is remarked upon at length in Hölscher’s essay; he explains that “when image itself becomes statement, the border between simile and referent disappears; image takes on something of the quality of metaphor.”<sup>2</sup>

This harmony is, according to a prominent formula of Heraclitus, the result of *conflict*. Perhaps the most characteristic expression of Heraclitus is fragment 51:

51: They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself;  
it is a harmony turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.

The status and meaning of Heraclitus’ conflicting opposites is one of the most prominent discussions in the commentaries; a chapter is devoted to exploring this question in more detail later in this dissertation. Before approaching Heraclitus, we must become familiar with the kind of logic that he employs, for it is very different from the Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction. Heraclitus’ logic is *associative*, and much closer to a mythological model than a rational one, since it does not proceed according to a

---

<sup>1</sup> KRS, 214.

<sup>2</sup> Hölscher, 235.

linear structure, nor does it recognize the traditional rule of non-contradiction. As Wheelwright says, before entering the world of Heraclitus, we must attempt to “transcend the “either/or” type of thinking and to recognize in each phase of experience that a relationship of “both/and” may be present in subtle ways”.<sup>1</sup> In formulating his statements, Heraclitus tends to “describe the same thing now as a god, now as a form of matter, now as a principle”; this associative logic is perplexing to those of us conditioned to expect adherence to traditional logical categories.<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus’ use of opposites reveals their reliance on one another for meaning, and frequently establishes a paradoxical identity between them.<sup>3</sup>

These paradoxes are demonstrative, for Heraclitus, of the nature of truth and reality, and are not merely fabricated by him, but reflect the true order of things. Thus, as Hölscher argues, “Heraclitean utterance mirrors exactly the character of Heraclitus’ knowledge: in its use of similes the hinting or signifying quality of phenomena; in its antithetical construction the paradoxical unity of contradiction...gnomic utterance is for him a necessary form.”<sup>4</sup> The obscurity of Heraclitus is not intended to *conceal* truth from the reader, it is, like the Delphic oracle’s pronouncements, the only appropriate form for the content. As Peter Struck has convincingly shown, it was commonly believed, before the time of Aristotle, “that *unclear* language, whose message is by definition obscured, is the chief marker of great poetry.”<sup>5</sup> According to this model, Heraclitus would be a great poet indeed. Wheelwright summarizes Heraclitus’ position, concerning his use of

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 91.

<sup>2</sup> KRS, 186.

<sup>3</sup> For example, fragment 69: the way up and down is one and the same.

<sup>4</sup> Hölscher, 238.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Struck, *The Birth of the Symbol*, Princeton, 2004.

obscure, paradoxical language, as “the view that paradox lies inextricably at the heart of reality”; thus Heraclitus’ riddles are a necessary device.<sup>1</sup>

Before outlining the scope of this project, one more essential clue to Heraclitus remains to be mentioned. Heraclitus is known to have dedicated his book in the temple of Artemis at Ephesus.<sup>2</sup> While this action might be dismissed as merely coincidental, Heraclitus’ consistently deliberate style does not make such an accident likely. His reliance on the *bow* as an image is further connection to the Goddess of the Hunt (and to her brother Apollo), as well as her strong link to *war*—as sacrifices are often made to her before battle.<sup>3</sup> Burkert argues, based on the evidence of ritual sacrifice to Artemis, that in this sense, “hunting and war are shown as equivalent.”<sup>4</sup> The place of Artemis in Greek cult is very interesting, as she signifies a relation to *alterity*, as Vernant argues.<sup>5</sup> Her landscapes are borderlands:

“She haunts all the other places the Greeks call *agros*, noncultivated lands that mark the boundaries of the territory, those *eschatiai* that lie beyond the fields...in the coastal zone where the lines between water and earth are not clearly defined. She also can be found in the interior regions where an overflowing river or stagnant waters create a space that is neither entirely dry nor yet altogether aquatic and where all culture seems precarious and perilous. What is the common denominator among these different places that belong to the Goddess and where her temples are built? We should not think of a totally wild space representing a radical alterity with respect to the town and the humanized terrain of the city. What really counts is the presence of boundaries, border zones, and frontiers where the Other is manifested in the regular contacts that are made

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 92.

<sup>2</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Blackwell Publishing, 1985, page 310.

<sup>3</sup> For the bow in Heraclitus, fragment 48: the name of the bow is life; its work is death and fragment 51, cited above. His mentions of war are too numerous to collect here. For sacrifices to Artemis before battle, see Vernant’s essay “The Figure and Functions of Artemis in Myth and Cult” as well as “Artemis and Rites of Sacrifice, Initiation, and Marriage”, from *Mortals and Immortals*, Princeton, 1991; also see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Blackwell Publishing, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, Blackwell Publishing, 1985, page 152.

<sup>5</sup> Vernant, “The Figure and Functions of Artemis in Myth and Cult”, *Mortals and Immortals*, Princeton, 1991, pages 195-6.

with it, where the wild and the cultivated exist side by side—in opposition, of course, but where they may also interpenetrate one another.”<sup>1</sup>

Vernant outlines her functions and demonstrates how they are consistent with her alterity and haunting of borderlands; they include hunting, rearing of the young, childbirth, and battle. The danger of hunting is the encounter with the wild; the hunter is challenged with savagery while still maintaining lawful human status. Artemis presides over the transition from childhood to adulthood, and various ritual practices are associated with this essential transformation; young people are on the border of both childhood and adulthood, not yet occupying their roles as civilized men and women. Childbirth and battle are both times where the boundaries between life and death are blurred, and Artemis is invoked in both of these contexts.

In this way, she is a goddess of contradiction; she is the bridge that both separates and binds together opposing forces and places. The tension of this conflict is personified in the figure of Artemis, and Heraclitus could hardly have been unaware of her status when he dedicated his book in her temple at Ephesus. His fragments continually return to this image of *tension*, which he expresses with the figure of the bow in fragments 48 and 51; the harmony of this opposition is one of the crucial elements of Heraclitus’ philosophy. This concept of *borderland* will provide a guiding thread to this reading of Heraclitus, and have bearing on all of his major themes: *logos*, *psyche*, and the conflict of opposites.

This dissertation is divided into four sections. The first, “Logos”, is a study of Heraclitus’ controversial use of *logos* in the fragments, and his innovative linguistic style will be examined within this context. Using Hesiod’s myth of Pandora and Sophocles’

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 198.

figure of Antigone, I will explore the nature of *encryption* in poetic language and its relation to the Feminine as evidenced by these texts. This analysis will help to elucidate Heraclitus' techniques and method, especially his use of oracular language.

The second section contains a reading of Parmenides' poem, in order to examine the status of "appearances" in Presocratic thought, and Plato's reformulation of *eidolon* in the *Sophist*. This analysis will outline the similarities in technique between Heraclitus and Parmenides, especially with regard to the intended effects of their language; in both cases, their poetic statements are *evocative* rather than argumentative. Using Vernant's study of *eidolon*, the significance of the visible world for Heraclitus and Parmenides will be explored. This analysis will allow us to approach the paradox of presence and absence that Heraclitus explicitly invokes in fragment 34, and its relation to the "twin-headed" mortals that Parmenides describes.

The third section, "Psyche", will trace the archaic use of the word in order to examine Heraclitus' puzzling use of this concept, and approach his philosophy as the first "psych-ology". The conflict of opposites holds an essential place in Heraclitus' fragments, and is crucial in understanding his cosmology and his notion of the psyche; a chapter is devoted entirely to this element of his philosophy. His cosmology, along with that of Empedocles, demonstrates striking resemblances to elements of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and invites analysis of the nature of mortality.

The final section is devoted to the phenomenon of "psychical blindness", the peculiar state of oblivion that Heraclitus ascribes to most human beings. First, I will offer a reading of *hubris* using Sophocles' tragic figure of Oedipus Rex and Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, and demonstrate the nature of *hubris* as

psychical blindness. This blindness is a necessary condition of the mortal state, and leads to the inevitable encounter with *law*. The last chapter is an application of Heraclitus' description of the human condition as a state of *sleep*, and suggests a reappraisal of some elements of Freudian theory, particularly his "reality principle", his description of psychosis, and the nature of the death instinct.

**Part One: Logos**  
Logos, Limit, and Law  
Crypt and Encryption



## Logos, Limit, and Law

*Although this logos holds forever uncomprehending become humans both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this logos, they are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature and telling how it is. But other men are oblivious of what they do awake just as what they do asleep escapes them.<sup>1</sup>*

Heraclitus

*Humility is endless.*

T.S. Eliot

In this chapter, I will explore Heraclitus' use of *logos* in the fragments in order to discover the relations between *logos*, language, and law. This analysis will begin with fragment one, where Heraclitus describes the mortal condition as one of *alienation* from the *logos* despite its pervasiveness and eternal nature. The role of the law, particularly the divine law (sometimes expressed as *Zeus*), is clearly paralleled by *logos* in the fragments. This observation, made by Kahn and others<sup>2</sup>, raises interesting questions about the *logos* of the soul mentioned in fragments 45 and 115. The obvious connotation of language with regard to *logos* is also complicated by Heraclitus' broad application of the term; is he implying a law of the soul, or a language of the soul? Could he mean both of these simultaneously?

The notion of "limit" (*peirata*) also recurs in the fragments, often implicitly; his explicit references are to the "limits" of the soul that cannot be found out (45) and the "limits of Dawn and Evening" that are watched over by Zeus' warder (120). Zeus may himself prove to be a guide in understanding Heraclitus' use of limit, particularly his

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn's translation with Peter Manchester's amendment of the first line to account for the ambiguous *aiei*, and replacing Kahn's "forgetful of what they do asleep" with "what they do asleep escapes them" (*epilanthanontai*) to read consistently with fragment 16: how can one escape the notice of (*lathoi*) that which never sets?

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 172, 268; Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, 69, 87.

paradox about the seemingly *limitless* soul of fragment 45; Zeus holds all of creation within limits, while he remains limitless. This formula has bearing on the mortal condition as one of *limit*, and the human phenomenon of *hubris*, which is at once a lawlessness and a failure to recognize limit. The complex relation of law to hubris and limit will be taken up in a later chapter<sup>1</sup>; here, we will explore Heraclitus' *logos*, particularly so that we might approach the fragments according to his own method. Beginning with the first fragment, this method is intensely "subversive" and "methodically undermines all certainties"<sup>2</sup>; the method that Heraclitus employs is a deliberate attack on usual modes of understanding, and his purpose will begin to emerge only through a recognition of his method.

There is good evidence that fragment 1 actually came at the beginning of Heraclitus' book, and it is regarded as a statement of his subject and method by some commentators, since a proem such as this one was a common convention.<sup>3</sup> While this cannot be established with certainty, the first fragment does have the effect of preparing the reader for Heraclitus' style; as Dilcher says, "the proem deliberately provokes confusion".<sup>4</sup> Heraclitus' characteristic use of ambiguity shows up in this first fragment, with the placement of *aiei* between *logos* and the uncomprehending humans; while arguments have been made for both interpretations, Kahn wisely suggests "when both readings have a good case to be made for them, it is important to leave open the possibility that the difficulty of deciding between them is itself the intended effect."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> "Hubris: I and Mined"

<sup>2</sup> Dilcher, *Spudasmata*, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, 20-1; Dilcher, *Spudasmata*, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Dilcher, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Kahn, 94.

This approach seems especially compelling when one becomes acquainted with Heraclitus' consistent use of ambiguity, and it becomes very clear that it is deliberate.

The incomprehension of mortals is expressed by the word *axunetoi*, which literally means "out of sync"; there is a contrast between this state and the one described in fragment 50, where the result of listening to the *logos* is wise agreement (*homologeîn*):

50: It is wise, listening not to me but to the *logos*, to agree that all things are one.

Reading this fragment alongside of fragment 1 is very instructive, because it provides insight into the nature of *logos*; Heraclitus is here distinguishing his own speech from *the logos*, implying that the *logos* mentioned in fragment 1 refers to something more than his own words. His words must, at least, have some other origin or force. While some commentators reject the implication of a universal law<sup>1</sup>, Heraclitus' use of *logos* plainly exceeds the usual meanings; Kahn expresses a widely held opinion when he calls *logos* a "universal pattern of experience."<sup>2</sup> These two fragments give us some limited information about the nature of *logos*: we know that it is eternal, all things happen in accordance with it, human beings are not in agreement with it (though we cannot

---

<sup>1</sup> Notably, Dilcher: "But, enigmatic though his philosophy may be, if Heraclitus had such a new concept in mind, he must at some point have introduced it and stated it explicitly. He certainly would have needed, in order to be comprehensible at all, to explain what sort of thing such a formula or law would be. Then, we would at least expect an indication that he is going to inquire into, or expound, such a formula. Of all this, there is no trace." (*Spudasmata*, 31). This argument is unconvincing because it overlooks Heraclitus' method, which is anything but "explicit". Where in the fragments is there an example of Heraclitus introducing a concept and stating it explicitly? Such a declaration would be extremely uncharacteristic and inconsistent with Heraclitus' style and technique. The fragments as a whole, with the thread of *logos* that runs so prominently through them, *is* the expounding of this formula; the associations and parallels that Heraclitus draws reveal the structure of *logos* in a way that no explicit exposition could.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, 107.

determine the sense of this claim yet), and that *listening* to it would result in a recognition of the unity of all things. Using these enigmatic clues, we can make some deductions.

First of all, if *all things* happen in accordance with the *logos*, then human incomprehension must also happen in accordance with it. The oblivious state that Heraclitus describes must not be a complete departure from *logos*, but is still included within its power. The claim that all things happen in accordance with it is the strongest indication that *logos* is law, though the evidence of fragment 1 does not yet indicate what kind of law this might be. Secondly, the oblivious human beings of fragment one fail to comprehend the *logos* even after they have heard it; we can safely infer from this that “listening” refers to something more complex than the simple hearing of sounds. Just as people do not hear the world around them while they are sleeping, most human beings fail to notice their own “words and deeds”. This is a startling claim, and will be explored in depth in a moment; one last conclusion can be drawn here, using our limited information gleaned from these two fragments: if listening to the *logos* results in a wise recognition that all things are one, then the failure to listen likely corresponds to an inability to see unity. Human beings in a state of alienation, as fragment 1 describes, would be prevented from recognizing unity due to their own isolation; becoming wise would mean ceasing to be *axunetoi*. Wisdom involves some kind of agreement with *logos*, and this agreement can only occur through *listening*. With these observations in mind, I would like to examine the strange and frustrating logic of fragment 1, where Heraclitus invites us into his *logos* by telling us that we have no hope of comprehending it, even once we have heard it.

Much trouble arises with Heraclitus' warning that human beings fail to comprehend even *after* hearing the *logos*; even though they ought to have experience with it, they seem like the "untried". This statement creates a seemingly intractable situation: even if we believe that we understand what Heraclitus is saying, he is warning us that we almost certainly have got it wrong. How are we to proceed under these circumstances? This device that Heraclitus is here employing, which I will examine in a moment, has the effect of creating resentment in the listeners; specifically, it evokes indignation at what appears to be Heraclitus' extraordinary arrogance.<sup>1</sup> These effects are predictable, and they are intended. Essentially, this first fragment turns away those less tenacious listeners, who are unwilling to examine their own incomprehension, and instead project their own arrogance onto Heraclitus. If one actually believes in her own incomprehension, the possibility of someone else possessing a superior understanding is not so remote. In other words, Heraclitus is calling for *humility*.

The dangers of *hubris* are well-attested to in ancient Greek texts, particularly in the tragedies, and Heraclitus himself mentions that it should be put out "quicker than a blazing fire."<sup>2</sup> By explicitly setting us up for failure, he is forcing our attention away from his words and onto our own attitudes and assumptions. Thus what seemed at first to be a negative procedure, since it undermines all attempts at understanding, has a very productive effect; as Dilcher describes "the reader feels that there is something important

---

<sup>1</sup> The opinion that Heraclitus was guilty of both arrogance and misanthropy are very well attested to in the literature; almost every source on Heraclitus mentions this, so a comprehensive list would be tedious. Whatever the real man may have been like, we can be fairly certain that this was a commonly held opinion of Heraclitus' character; we must also keep in mind that the content of the fragments, not only direct acquaintance with the man, must have played a part in this characterization, particularly since Heraclitus was also allegedly unsociable.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn's translation, fragment 43: One must quench *hubris* quicker than a blazing fire.

beyond the immediate reach of his understanding. The effect resembles a dull blow from an unknown power which makes itself felt by its recalcitrant resistance. By being thrown back on himself, the reader will become aware of his own position.”<sup>1</sup> This position is a *limited* one, and this limitation is at least partially the result of an attitude of confidence in one’s own understanding. Heraclitus is very deliberately sabotaging the predictable, habitual response of human beings, and manipulating his audience into a position that is more promising for comprehension of the *logos*. This procedure is very similar to Socrates’ practice of *elenchus*, since these both proceed according to a principle of destabilization, and undermine the certainty of false opinion in order to replace it with a state of not-knowing, of *aporia*.

These techniques, then, are not designed to inquire into the nature of things so much as they are intended to *transform* the awareness of the listener. The real subject of Heraclitus’ fragments is revealed by a close analysis of his method; what is at stake here is the dynamic of *psyche*, the transformation that occurs within the *psyche* of the listener. In using this controversial term, I am following Heraclitus’ use of the word, which will be discussed at length in later chapters; the sense of it is similar to our modern “psyche”, which refers not only to the mind and consciousness, but connotes the person as a whole, thus implying the soul as well. Like his use of *logos*, Heraclitus’ use of *psyche* does not seem to conform to the standard archaic meanings, but appears to be used more broadly; most commentators interpret it as some kind of awareness or principle of awareness.<sup>2</sup> I conform to this convention, and use the untranslated word *psyche*, which does not have

---

<sup>1</sup> Dilcher, *Spudasmata*, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 107, 118, 127; Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, 60-7; Kirk, Raven, Schofield, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 203-6.

the misleading connotations of the word “soul”, keeping in mind that any word we choose will inevitably limit *psyche*, which Heraclitus implies is limitless.

In any case, his techniques all aim at very specific goals: thwarting expectation, undermining all claims at comprehension, and most of all, turning the listener’s own awareness back onto itself. Fragment one tells us that Heraclitus’ words and works, like the *logos*, result in the same incomprehension on the part of mortals. Just as his *logos* accords with the *logos* in saying that all is one (50), he is here implying that his *logos* and the *logos* have the same effect on human beings, (or lack of effect, in this case). This further implies that they have the same origin or character, despite his explicit statement of fragment 50, where he appears to distinguish them. We are faced with a seeming contradiction: his *logos* and the *logos* both agree that “all is one”, which implies that Heraclitus is “speaking with understanding” in agreement (*homologeîn*) with the *logos*; but if it is true that “all is one”, then we are prevented from making any real distinction between his *logos* and the *logos*, which is precisely what he seems to do in fragment 50.

The distinction that Heraclitus appears to make is a deliberate device. His statement “listening not to me but to the *logos*” is specifically intended for those who do not yet recognize this unity, since they would naturally distinguish between Heraclitus’ *logos* and the *logos*. Before we can recognize that his own words are in agreement with the *logos*, we must first listen to *it* rather than to him; Heraclitus very purposefully points away from himself, and directs our attention instead to the *logos*. The trouble is, he leaves us in the dark as to *what* the *logos* is and how we might listen to it. This can only be determined by turning to his other fragments, particularly those that mention *logos* explicitly. Dealing with Heraclitus’ style is somewhat like being on a scavenger hunt,

since he obliges us to follow his invisible thread, using only associative clues that we sometimes have to provide on our own. In the case of *logos*, though, he gives us several leads.

Fragment 2 is an echo of the final line of the first fragment, and characterizes the human condition as a “private” state, like that of sleep.

1: ...But other men are oblivious of what they do awake  
just as what they do asleep escapes them.

2: Although this *logos* is shared, most men live  
as though thinking were a private possession.

Kahn has referred to this state as “epistemic isolation”, where “nothing gets through” despite the obvious and “immediately accessible truth” of the *logos*.<sup>1</sup> This paradoxical condition is precisely what Heraclitus is trying to bring to our awareness; the first fragment, like many others, holds up a mirror. As Dilcher expresses it, “we hear of the relation of men to the *logos* and this is not merely a proclamatory statement, but at the same time the very situation in which the reader will necessarily find himself.”<sup>2</sup> The oblivion that Heraclitus describes is no minor ignorance, but a complete unawareness of “all they do awake”; in other words, what human beings fail to notice is their own existence, their own “words and deeds”. This disturbing statement reveals an essential link between human beings and *logos*; their inability to hear the *logos* is related to their inability to recognize themselves. This relation is made explicit in fragment 116:

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 99, 101.

<sup>2</sup> Dilcher, *Spudasmata*, 15.



116: It belongs to all men to know themselves and think soundly.<sup>1</sup>

Sound thinking is in agreement with *logos*, and here self-recognition is allied with this kind of thinking. In fragment 113, thinking is described as “shared by all”, just as fragment 2 names *logos* as “shared” (*xynos*); both of these fragments pick up the theme initiated in the first fragment: human beings are *axunetoi*.<sup>2</sup> Fragment 116 is an allusion to the Delphic motto “know thyself”, which very literally means “recognize thyself”; this recognition is precisely what Heraclitus describes as lacking in human beings. The alienation that he is describing is complete and total; human beings have no recognition of their own experience, but replace it with their own opinions or “seemings”:

17: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them,  
nor do they recognize what they experience, but believe their own opinions.

As Kahn points out in a footnote, “believe their own opinions” is *heoutoisi dokeousi*, which literally means something like “seem to themselves”, but with the added connotation of *belief*.<sup>3</sup> The realm of *dokein*, seeming or appearance, is now added to the description of human alienation; it is not only that human beings fail to recognize what they experience, but that they substitute their own *opinions* for reality.<sup>4</sup> This problem is inextricable from the theme of shared and private, which appears most explicitly in fragment 2, where “men live as though thinking were a private possession”, despite the

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn’s translation with my replacement of “well” with “soundly” for *sophronein*, in order to pick up the theme of *listening* in fragments 50, 19, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Using Kahn’s translations in *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*; for discussion of *xynos* in these contexts, see 101-2, 119.

<sup>3</sup> Kahn, 29.

<sup>4</sup> See later section “Parmenides and Heraclitus” for an analysis of appearances in both philosopher’s works, and the section entitled “Sleep and Psychosis” for a detailed exploration of this substitution of belief for reality.

shared nature of *logos* (fragments 1, 2, 50) and of thinking (fragment 113). In order to recognize *logos* (shared, public), one must first recognize herself (private), as fragment 101 implies by saying “I went in search of myself.”

This is possible because, for Heraclitus, “the structure of the soul is related to that of the world as a whole.”<sup>1</sup> Wisdom consists of a recognition of unity, and this requires a surrendering of what is *private*; in other words, surrendering one’s own opinions and egoism (humility), and most of all, letting go of the illusory belief in separation. The private world of fragment 89 is of those who are “sleeping”; given Heraclitus’ description of human beings as entirely alienated, “the sleeping” applies to most human beings, even those with the mistaken opinion that they are awake. In order for this private world to be transformed into the shared world, one must “search himself”; the paradox is that once one does this, he realizes that “the lost or hidden self must be precisely *the common*.”<sup>2</sup> Only when the “private” and the “shared” are recognized as a unity, can a human being be called wise; this formula is demonstrated by Heraclitus in fragment 50, where he links his *logos* to the *logos*. “Wisdom or what is wise (*sophon*) consists in just this fitting of the private to the public, or the personal to the universal.”<sup>3</sup> Kirk, Raven and Schofield come to the same conclusion, and argue that, for Heraclitus, “wisdom consists in perception of unity.”<sup>4</sup>

In this context, the phenomenon of *hubris* is very interesting, since it is essentially an absolute egoism that recognizes no limitations; in this sense, it is the opposite of wisdom. This human condition must also happen in accordance with the *logos*, since all

---

<sup>1</sup> Kirk, Raven, Schofield, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 204.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, 118.

<sup>3</sup> Kahn, 131.

<sup>4</sup> KRS, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 202.

things do, which implies that *hubris* is somehow necessary. Wheelwright takes this up in his analysis of conflict in Heraclitus' philosophy; the kind of arrogance that *hubris* represents is a necessary condition for conflict to ensue. Without this conflict, the dynamic process would be impossible; "self-assertion, even flagrant self-assertion, is a universal characteristic; it is what makes possible and inevitable the strife that gives a meaning to existence, and without which all things would cease to be."<sup>1</sup>

The conflict of opposites is a crucial principle in Heraclitus' philosophy, and without the transformations from one thing into its opposite, the cosmos would cease to exist; the everliving fire of fragment 30, the transpositions of mortal and immortal in fragment 62, and the ever-present paradox of life and death are all driven by this logic of opposition. Kahn translates *hubris* as "violence" in fragment 43<sup>2</sup>, which has the effect of linking it to war, strife, and conflict in precisely this way; this kind of violence is entirely necessary for anything to exist at all, according to Heraclitus. Like the *kykeon*, the cosmos would fall apart if it were not "stirred."<sup>3</sup> The recurring image of the bow presents us with the paradox of life and death because, as the Greek name indicates, it means life (*bios*) and yet is an instrument of death. Similarly, fragment 11 observes that "all beasts (*herpeton*) are driven by blows"; these blows are an indication of Zeus' thunderbolt, as the violence that moves the world just as animals are driven to pasture with a stick.<sup>4</sup>

Zeus is mentioned explicitly in fragment 32, and is implied in at least three other fragments; Heraclitus' references to Zeus invoke *law*, particularly divine law that is inexplicable to human beings, from their limited standpoint. The divine law appears to

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 86.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, 75.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment 125: Even the *kykeon* separates unless it is stirred.

<sup>4</sup> Kahn, 65.

human beings as arbitrary or without wisdom, as a child playing a game (fragment 52) or as “a heap of random sweepings” (fragment 124); this *appearance* of the cosmic order corresponds to the human perspective, which cannot recognize divine wisdom although it is pervasive and immediate, like the *logos*. Wheelwright argues, “in judging that the divine intelligence is so utterly different from our everyday intelligence, we are likening it, from our partisan human standpoint, to something vastly indifferent and irresponsible, like a child arbitrarily moving counters in a game.”<sup>1</sup> Human incomprehension of divine intelligence is very similar to human unawareness of the *logos*; it is in this connection that I would like to take up the notion of *logos* as law, and read Heraclitus’ use of *logos* alongside his specific invocations of Zeus and law.

32: The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus.

33: It is law also to obey the counsel of one.

41: The wise is one knowing the plan by which it steers all things through all things.

The counsel of fragment 33 is *boule*, which is associated with the “plan of Zeus” (*Dios boule*) of the *Iliad*<sup>2</sup>; this is matched by the plan of fragment 41, which is *gnome*. These plans are both the law and the insight of Zeus; they represent divine judgment. This plan and judgment are directly contrasted with human insight and purpose in fragment 78, where Heraclitus says that human *ethos* lacks *gnomai*; only the divine has a “set purpose” or plan.<sup>3</sup> Zeus’ instrument is the lightning bolt, which “pilots all things”, according to Heraclitus’ fragment 64. This ability to pilot or steer belongs only to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 73.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, 181.

<sup>3</sup> Kahn, 55.

divine; human beings do not have the requisite insight, and instead, are “driven by blows.” This thunderbolt is a clear allusion to *fire*, which holds such a central role in Heraclitus’ philosophy; Wheelwright has offered a very convincing analysis of fragment 64’s thunderbolt that “pilots” and the “steering” of fragment 41. “Comparison of [these two fragments] strongly suggests that the ideas of fire and intelligence, were, to Heraclitus’ mind, interchangeable or at any rate closely related and mutually coalescent.”<sup>1</sup> In this way, fire takes on aspects of the divine, most notably intelligence and immortality (since fragment 30 names it as “everliving”).

For this reason, Heraclitus describes the danger of *hubris* as a house on fire; *hubris* is a destructive fire that results when the divine power (fire) is not steered by divine intelligence, but is out of control. Without the intelligence of the divine to pilot it, and keep it within *limits*, fire exceeds the boundaries and becomes dangerous and utterly destructive. Yet even this overreaching is kept within bounds by the divine law, as *hubris* inevitably leads to ruin; this contact with the divine law that occurs as a result of *hubris* is the subject of a later chapter.<sup>2</sup>

Fragment 32 offers a seemingly flagrant contradiction: “the wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus.” This paradox can be explained by examining the nature of Zeus himself. Burkert describes him as “the world as a whole, and especially the thinking fire that pervades everything, forms everything, and *holds everything in limits*.”<sup>3</sup> Zeus is a paradox because he is limitless, while holding everything else in limits. The act of *naming* Zeus is to enclose him into a word, and the binder

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, 41.

<sup>2</sup> “Hubris: I and Mined”

<sup>3</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 131.

cannot himself be bound. He is willing to be called by the name of Zeus because it is the name that humans have ascribed to him, but he is also *unwilling* to be identified by any name, since no name could hold him. These observations have bearing on the nature of divine law as *binding*, in the magical sense of the word, particularly when considered alongside Heraclitus' fragments 114 and 44, which connect the law to the city wall:

114: Speaking with understanding, they must hold fast to what is shared by all, as a city holds to its law, and even more firmly. For all human laws are nourished by a divine one. It prevails as it will and suffices for all and is more than enough.

44: The people must fight for their law as for their city wall.

As Wheelwright has pointed out, this reference to the city wall is very significant, particularly when we connect it with Heraclitus' descriptions of Zeus and divine law. "The wall of a city in ancient times was far more than bricks and mortar; it was a kind of magical encirclement, representing and guaranteeing some kind of supernatural protection."<sup>1</sup> The city wall marks the boundaries of the city; it holds the city within limits. This function correlates with law, as the limits of the city (human law) and the limits of the cosmos (divine law). The "encirclement" is a very important element of the city wall, and necessary for the magical protection that the wall provides; the circle is perhaps the most prevalent of magical symbols.<sup>2</sup> The circle, like Zeus, holds limits within itself while being limitless. Since Zeus encircles all, human beings are *bound* to the divine law. Wisdom is recognition of this situation, and *agreement* with the divine law. Wheelwright observes that "the one divine Nomos is not essentially different from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 88.

<sup>2</sup> See "Parmenides Poem" chapter for a discussion of the circle and the magical act of "binding", particularly with reference to speech.

one divine Logos”, although they differ in *connotation*.<sup>1</sup> The most significant difference in connotation is *logos*’ implication of *language*.

The divine *logos* must express the divine *nomos*, although, in both cases, human beings are likely to misunderstand it. This problem brings us back to the one we faced in the very first fragment: how to *listen* to the *logos*. This listening must be done with *psyche*, as fragment 107 makes plain:

107: Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men  
if their souls do not understand the language.

Eyes and ears are associated with the senses, and with the physical world to which they provide access. The failure of human beings is their alienation from the physical world, from the “things they encounter” (fragment 17) and the “things with which they most constantly associate” (fragment 71); as Dilcher has so strikingly put it, “there is a black hole right in the middle of human life.”<sup>2</sup> The problem with human beings is their complete lack of consciousness, that oblivion that so closely resembles sleep. A very conspicuous element of this state is the complete alienation from the physical world; it is a state where “eyes and ears” are completely useless, since the world has become an inner “private world.” Those who awaken from their senseless state will be in a position to recognize that “the world is one and shared”, and thus bound by one divine *nomos*.<sup>3</sup> The divine *nomos* is manifest in the physical world, and the recognition of the invisible *nomos* in the visible world is the “language of the soul” that Heraclitus indicates in fragment 107; it is also the “invisible harmony” of fragment 54. Divine language, which is the

---

<sup>1</sup> Wheelwright, 87.

<sup>2</sup> Dilcher, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment 89: The world of the waking is one and shared, but the sleeping turn aside each to his private world.

provenance of the soul's understanding, *is* the physical world. Heraclitus' insistence on concrete imagery as revealing both physical and psychical truth is evidence of this, as is his declaration that he prefers things that come from "sight, hearing, and learning from experience" (fragment 55).

Fragment 93 is a description of divine language, and informs Heraclitus' own consistent use of oracular language:

93: The Lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither declares nor conceals but gives a sign.

The word *sema* ("sign") is used in Homer as an omen, a mark, or a sign from the gods, and can refer to things heard as well as seen.<sup>1</sup> Just like messages from the oracle, these signs are usually ambiguous, and can be easily misunderstood; the entrance to the oracle warned those who enter to "know themselves." This presents a dilemma because one cannot be sure that the self she recognizes is not merely a projected identity or a fanciful delusion; as Heraclitus says, even the god is named "according to the pleasure of each one" (fragment 76). This warning presents those who enter with the double possibility of doom or salvation: the deciding factor is one's own self-awareness, and in particular, one's humility. Most of all, the inscription warns human beings of their own *hubris*, as Oedipus so tragically demonstrates.

*Hubris* is an identification with the *private* world rather than recognition of the one shared world; one who commits *hubris* does not allow for any meaning beyond the limits of his understanding. For example, when Oedipus hears the fateful oracle, he believes that "father" refers to the man that *he* recognizes as his father, and ignores all other possibilities. In this way, *hubris* is to take as private what is common and shared; it is ignorance of divine law, and thus comes very close to Heraclitus' description of *oblivious* human beings in fragment 1.

---

<sup>1</sup> Liddel and Scott Lexicon.



Fragment 93 is a clever arrangement that demonstrates the technique it is describing, by simultaneously hinting at and withholding the name of Apollo. The gods are known to use disguise, of which this style is a form; in the Homeric literature, gods rarely appear to human beings unless they are clothed in a dream or another person's likeness. Just as the gods cannot appear in their true form, the message of the oracle is neither plainly declared nor concealed, but evidences itself as a *sign*. When Apollo speaks through the oracle, he reveals the secret *by concealing it* in language. Tragedy, especially that associated with the oracle, is the consequence of seeing only the surface dimension of the message when the truth is buried beneath. Even this description of "buried beneath" is misleading; it is not buried because it lies on the surface; it is buried insofar as it requires a certain *depth* of awareness to reach it. The chapter that follows is an exploration of this kind of *encryption* of meaning in language, particularly in poetic language.

## **Crypt and Encryption in Poetic Language**

*I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the hope and the love are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.*

T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets"<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is a study of the image of the *crypt*, with reference to the poetic *encryption* of meaning into language. Tracing the image of the crypt through Hesiod's myth of Pandora and Sophocles' tragic figure of Antigone, the Greek concept of the divine feminine can be linked to the hidden or secret nature of meaning in language, and to oaths, law, and Justice. The double nature of *hope* in Hesiod's Pandora myth reflects the double nature of the Feminine, symbolically manifest in the figure of Pandora, the first woman. Derrida's essay "The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text" will inform this poetic reading, and provide a model of encryption that is useful in elucidating Heraclitus' linguistic method, particularly since Heraclitus explicitly invokes *elpis* twice in his fragments.

Poetic language is imaginative; it does not need to strictly correspond to things in the world and in this regard it is ambiguous and allows multiplicity. The poetic word is thus not bound to any particular, but to a *many* by means of association, connotation, assonance, alliteration, and consonance. This analysis will demonstrate the way in which Heraclitus' use of ambiguous poetic language is an encryption of meaning, and will proceed according to the associative logic of poetry.

---

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Four Quartets", *Complete Poems and Plays*, Harcourt Brace, 1971.

Before expressly invoking Pandora, the concept of hope requires some elucidation. As Dror Post has recently pointed out, hope appears twice in Heraclitus' fragments:<sup>1</sup>

18: If one does not hope, one will not find out the un hoped  
since it is pathless and undiscoverable.<sup>2</sup>

27: There await men at death things they do not hope or imagine.

Hope depends upon memory (*Mnemosyne*, Mother Goddess of the Muses). We can only hope for the possible, because we can only expect or recognize that which is already familiar. The paradox is that we must hope for the *impossible*, and this hope is itself impossible. There is a subtle play here between help, breath, death, and hope: the assonance carried out in our language is there in the Greek sounding of the word: *elpis*. Feel the breath before the spoken word, a waiting, an emptiness, a vacuum. This hope is breath; and that *is* help—divine grace only slips into this open and waiting hole.<sup>3</sup> The impossible is only allowed when we let go of all expectation, when we can release our tight grasp (the graspings of desire named in fragment 10)<sup>4</sup> on all of our hopes. T.S. Eliot

---

<sup>1</sup> Dror Post, Teachers College, Columbia University. "Heraclitus' Hope for the Unhoped", presented at the Ancient Philosophy Society meeting at Boston College, April 12, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Translations of fragments 18 and 27 are cited as they appear in Post's essay.

<sup>3</sup> An invocation of *Khôra*, which, as Edward Casey describes in *The Fate of Place*: "the receptacle [*Khôra*] only *receives* these qualities and *reflects* them: not actually characterized by the qualities it receives, the receptacle is not what it appears to be." Derrida remarks, similarly, that this *Khôra* is "no doubt not *emptiness*...[but names an] opening, abyss, or chasm". Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place*, chapter 2 "The Enuma Elish and Plato's *Timaeus*", University of California Press, 1997, page 36. Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, from the essay "*Khôra*", Stanford University Press, 1995, page 103.

<sup>4</sup> Heraclitus' fragment 10: Graspings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.

recognizes this paradox in beautiful poetic speech: “I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope/ For hope would be hope for the wrong thing.”<sup>1</sup>

This imagery is far from ‘imaginary’; it is experienced. The distance between us and the sound (hope, help) is illusory—and only in making this sound can we hear its nearness. An image: afloat at sea, waves bobbing up and down, no direction and no land, blue sea, blue sky everywhere water-- the last breath bobbing above the water, ελπισ. It sounds as a natural cry, a bubble, a prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Hope is the last of the gifts in Pandora’s “box”, and the only one that remains inside.<sup>3</sup> Dror Post, in his insightful analysis of *elpis*, calls it “double-edged” since it “can either be a good thing or a bad one. It can inspire one into venture and action, but it can also draw one into delusions and idleness; it can console one in times of difficulties, but it can also lead one to irresponsible deeds and disasters.”<sup>4</sup> Post points out that hope is associated with dangerous desire, since Pandora came as a gift between the brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus, literally “Before-thought” and “After-Thought”. Once again, these elements of desire and danger, as mentioned in fragments 67, 85, and 110, reappear.<sup>5</sup> The element of Post’s analysis that I would like to focus on here is his suggestion that “hope contains an element of concealment, a secret, something

---

<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*. Eliot quotes Heraclitus at the beginning of his *Four Quartets*, signaling his trajectory of poetic analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Just out of curiosity, I tried typing this word ‘help’ into another text, using my Apple technology; in Turkish the word ‘help’ was typed this way: tğlp. Even in this language so foreign to me, the same assonance in my example is played out in the pronunciation that I can read as ‘gulp’ (breath, help, hope, death).

<sup>3</sup> “Box” as euphemism for vagina, or womb.

<sup>4</sup> Post

<sup>5</sup> Fragment 10: see above; Fragment 67: The god: day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. It alters, as when mingles with perfumes, it gets named according to the pleasure of each one. Fragment 85: It is hard to fight against passion, for what it wants it buys at the expense of soul.

unknown.”<sup>1</sup> This secret is the unnamed goddess of Parmenides’ poem; she is *Khôra*, Persephone—but none of these names can *contain* her. There is always a remainder that will not be entirely bound by the name, just as Zeus of Heraclitus’ fragment 32 is both “willing and unwilling to be called by the name of Zeus.” The concept of hope, and its double nature, gives us mythical demonstration of the impossible—which is the divine.

In the myth of Pandora, hope is the only thing that stays inside the box; and this hope is both good and bad, it is double. In the context of language, the *word* is the box that holds this secret—ambiguous, light and dark, present and absent; multiple while one. Derrida’s concept of the trace, particularly his analysis of *encryption* in “The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text”, indicates this same double nature.<sup>2</sup> God is often presented in a paradoxical manner in Heraclitus’ fragments, and the divine is usually interpreted as a unifying element in the cosmos. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield offer an analysis of this connection in their reading of fragment 67 (quoted below):

God cannot here be essentially different from Logos; and the Logos is, among other things, the constituent of things that makes them opposed, and that assures that change between opposites will be proportional and balanced overall. God, then, is said to be the common connecting element in all extremes, just as fire is the common element of different vapours (because they were conceived as a compound of fire with different kinds of incense). Change from one to another brings about a total change of name, which is misleading, because only a superficial component has altered and the most important constituent remains. This difficult saying implies that, while each separate pair of contraries forms a continuum, the several continua, also, are connected with each other, though in a different manner. Thus the total plurality of things forms a single, coherent, determinable complex—what Heraclitus called ‘unity’.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Post, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text - Zur Poetik und Politik des Zeugnisses", in Peter Buhrman ed., *Zur Lyrik Paul Celans*. Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 2000.

<sup>3</sup> KRS, *Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, 1957, p. 191.

This explanation helps to contextualize several of Heraclitus' themes with reference to each other; first of all, God and the *logos* are identified as essentially indistinguishable in function. Secondly, names are misleading and illusory, particularly in the case of divine reality, since it is unchanging. As Peter Struck has similarly argued, Heraclitus' "pairs of opposites constitute less a 'naming' than a commentary on naming and its limitations. When it comes to the divine, our language is simply not up to the task."<sup>1</sup> The final observation made in Kirk, Raven, and Schofield's analysis has much bearing on the nature of poetic language, and specifically, Heraclitus' associative method. The pairs of opposites, which are so common in the fragments, are connected not only to one another, but to all the other pairs as well. The "unity" of Heraclitus, as this reading explains, is *associative*; thus the connections between discrete elements of his language (words, images) will follow the associative rules of poetry. In order to approach Heraclitus' work as a whole, especially considering its consistency and internal unity, we must engage him using these techniques. Fragments 67 and 10, replete with opposing pairs, will provide example:

67: The god: day and night, winter and summer, war and peace,  
satiety (*koros*) and hunger (*limos*).

It alters, as when mingled with perfumes, it gets named  
according to the pleasure of each one.

10: Graspings: wholes and not wholes convergent divergent consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.

I pair together these pairing fragments in order to read them according to the laws of poetry—Heraclitus specifically invokes dissonance and consonance as "graspings."

---

<sup>1</sup> Struck, Peter. *Birth of the Symbol*, Princeton University Press, 2004.

These are the graspings of desire, the same desire he names in fragment 67, which causes everything to be named according to pleasure. To name something is to grasp it, to pin it down; the deceptive quality of names is this illusion of containing reality in the name—something always escapes from this grasp. The way in which the nature of things exceeds the name is demonstrated by the *increase* that occurs when opposites are read along with other opposites, as in fragments 67 and 10. The pairing of *koros* and *limos*: *limos* has dissonance with *thumos*, the ι is thin, while the υ is empty and waiting to be filled, an image of longing, of thumos. This *koros* has assonance with *kouros*, the initiate or young man such as the one greeted by the goddess in Parmenides' poem. He is hungry, a seeker who longs to find the secret. There are two paths that he can take: one of them is the way that keeps turning backwards on itself: *palintropos*, the way of desire, and the other is the way of being, fullness and completion.<sup>1</sup> Human desire is of a paradoxical nature; it seeks satiety, but it can never be fully sated, because the nature of the god is of both satiety and hunger. As Heraclitus says in fragment 110, "it is not better for human beings to get what they want. It is disease that makes health sweet and good, hunger satiety, weariness rest."

The double nature that Pandora exhibits is also evident in the connections between certain female divinities in Greek myth, especially the figures of Aphrodite and Persephone. They are juxtaposed with one another as life and death; Aphrodite the laughter-loving queen of mortal mixture (love), and dread Persephone, queen of the cold world of the dead. Aphrodite is associated with laughter, desire, and deception; Persephone with the paradox of fertility and barrenness, like the underworld she inhabits. These goddesses are two faces of the divine feminine, and are, according to the myth-

---

<sup>1</sup> *Palintropos*: fragment 6 of Parmenides' Poem.

logic of opposition, one. Pandora, as the first woman (and thus *ideal* in some sense), should also prove to be an image of this dual nature.

To demonstrate the consistency of this myth-logic, I will also turn to a different text for representation of feminine nature, and demonstrate that the themes coalesce through association. From the Bible, a poetic reading of the feminine in assonance and consonance: when God tells Abraham that his wife Sarah shall bear a son, she is listening from outside the tent, and she hears this and laughs. When the Lord asks Abraham, “why did Sarah laugh?” Sarah lies because she is afraid—she says, “I did not laugh.” But Abraham says, “Yes, you did laugh.”<sup>1</sup> This image of Sarah is one of laughter, lying, and duplicity. Pandora, fashioned by the Gods, has these same qualities:

He bade famous Hephaestus make haste and mix earth with water to put in it the voice and strength of humankind, and fashion a sweet, lovely maiden-shape, like to the immortal goddesses face; and to Athena to teach her needlework and the weaving of the varied web; and golden Aphrodite to shed grace upon her head and cruel longing and cares that weary the limbs. And he charged Hermes, slayer of Argus, to put in her shameless mind a deceitful nature.<sup>2</sup>

Aphrodite gives to Pandora both *grace* and cruel *longing*, the longing of desire, which, if not sated, leads one to the Underworld and the goddess Persephone, the double of Aphrodite. Grace, the product of hope for the impossible, is the only path to the receptacle of Khora, which is an emptiness but *not* an emptiness, the paradox of the “riches” of the Underworld. Sarah is a liar, and she is also the mother of Isaac in her old age, a son (sun) come from seeming impossible barrenness. This son’s birth is precipitated by Sarah’s sneakiness, her laughter, her fear (the terror in the face of the feminine divine), and her lying. Pandora can weave the web, and her shamelessness and

---

<sup>1</sup> The Bible, NIV. Genesis 18:13-15.

<sup>2</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 60-69.



deceit make her a sister to Sarah.<sup>1</sup> Abraham repeats this lie when he tells the people in Garar that Sarah is his sister, rather than his wife.<sup>2</sup> I bring all these images together in an attempt to reveal poetically, which is to say *mythologically*, the secrets in Heraclitus' method: hope, then, in Sarah, is for the impossible son (sun) which will come into the seemingly fallow liar (lair, cave, womb, entrance to the Underworld). This image is the light in the heart of the darkness, which is associated with Apollo and the Underworld; Apollo as god of the sun and also the god of darkness, riddles, and incubation. The hope stays in the "box", secret, as it is kept by Sarah when she lies and as it is kept through the grace of the gods by Pandora. Thus hope can be seen as a quality of the feminine, the secret of the feminine, inside the "box" (crypt).

To draw a link back to fragment 67, where the god is described as the pairings of opposites, there is a direct link between *logos* and divinity. It alters, it changes, as when mingled with perfumes, taking on the flavor according to the pleasure of each one. Heraclitus can speak interchangeably about the *logos* and about the god because these share the same nature, which is *hidden*. As fragment 123 tells us, "nature loves to hide." This *kruptesthai* ("hide") refers to the crypt in which it hides, the way in which it is hidden. As a crypt, it is both on the surface and underground at once; what is on the surface hints at what is below. In "The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text", Derrida implies that the possibility of the secret is evidenced *through* the *impossibility* of its divulgence.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> This "weaving" is a distinctly feminine activity, as is it associated specifically with Athena, and with Odysseus' wife Penelope, as she weaves and unweaves her loom in the absence of her husband Odysseus.

<sup>2</sup> The Bible, NIV, Genesis 20:2

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, "Self-Unsealing Poetic Text"

Hope, in this context, must be for the impossible, although paradoxically, all hope can hope *for* is the possible. To return to the “Four Quartets”, Eliot’s full passage reads:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

Waiting is stillness while thought is movement. Thought always needs an object, while waiting is emptiness, and emptiness is necessary for any thing to be. Waiting without *love* is a resistance to the binding of Aphrodite. The paradoxes that Eliot invokes are familiar ones: darkness and light, stillness and dancing. Poetic language is this paradox, because it carries thought, a movement through the words and the stillness encrypted within these words; this dynamic quality of poetic language makes it in some sense *alive*. The nature of the divine and the nature of logos are paradoxical and contradictory—they are both life and death; they are the place where these opposites meet.

The place where opposites meet in Greek mythology is the Underworld, where Parmenides is carried: “the gates on the pathways of Night and Day, held fast in place between the lintel above and a threshold of stone. They reach right up into the heavens, filled with gigantic doors.”<sup>1</sup> This image, of being carried through the chasm by the opening doors, is explicitly an image of death: moving beyond the realm of the living into the Underworld, the place of death. But this image is also one of birth: he is being carried through the two doors, with the soft and cunning words of the girls—daughters of the sun as midwives.<sup>2</sup> The Daughters of the Sun are virgins, and here they are performing a task

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides’ poem, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*, fragment 1:11-13.

of fertility: birth.<sup>1</sup> It was no “hard fate” (death) that brought the kouros here, but Justice (a goddess).<sup>2</sup> All of his escorts are female—the girls, the mares, and the divinity that greets him: the unnamed Goddess. It is of special significance that Persephone, Goddess of the Underworld, bears this mark: “the unnamed Goddess”: she *is* the impossible, the unnameable, and the unspeakable incarnate.

The crypt, the secret, and hope are all qualities of the feminine divine. This formula is conspicuously present in an other ancient Greek text: Sophocles’ *Antigone*. She, in contrast to her sister Ismene, identifies herself with the divine law rather than the human law. She recognizes herself as responsible for the care of her brother’s (and also her own) soul even if it means sacrificing her life. She promises fidelity to her brother, and is willing to risk her life to uphold her *word*. Her word is so intertwined with her identity that her *oath* promises her *life*—a fatal substitution. Antigone *is* her promise. She takes her word with her into her death, within the crypt where she is entombed alive.

The impossibility of life in death is evident in these female mythological figures: Antigone, Sarah’s barrenness and her son, and Persephone as the daughter of Demeter hidden away in the underworld, the place of secret riches. Coleridge refers to this same figure in *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*, when he says, “the nightmare Life-in-Death was she that thicks man blood with cold.”<sup>3</sup> The beautiful evil of Pandora is the face of hope: it is both enticing and destroying, and the temptation is more than man can bear;

---

<sup>1</sup> The goddess Artemis is a virgin and also goddess of childbirth—life and death are usually linked in this way mythologically.

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter on “Naming and Nomos” for a full account of the goddess Justice and her relation to law.

<sup>3</sup> Coleridge, *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*. It is of special significance that Coleridge is reputed to have written this poem under the influence of *opium*, the workings of *Hypnos*, god of sleep and brother to Thanatos.

his desire for destruction is inescapable, as Freud calls it “the death instinct”. It is interesting that this drive, “Thanatos”, and its complement “Eros”, both have masculine names. Perhaps, in this context, we might consider Persephone and Aphrodite as appropriate referents of these complementary drives, particularly because they are two aspects of the same Goddess, just as Freud’s drives enact the psyche’s precarious and illusory balancing act. Thanatos and Eros, as mythological figures, have no such internal connection of identity.

Jean-Pierre Vernant devotes a chapter to the mythological incidences of the feminine with regard to death in his work *Mortals and Immortals*. As opposed to the masculine figure of Thanatos, who is often depicted as a solemn and noble warrior, the feminine faces of death are ones of terror; they are the unspeakable face of death. He cites the Gorgon, and the figure of Ker as images of this absolute *Other*, a direct confrontation with death. I must quote him at some length to profit from the profundity of his analysis; he writes:

Funerary ritual, the status of the dead, the beautiful dead, the figure of Thanatos—these are all various means by which the living make the dead present, more present even, among the living, than are the living themselves. This is a social strategy that attempts to domesticate death, to civilize it—that is, to deny it as such by transforming the dead, -- and particularly a certain few of the dead, into the very past of the city (a past made continuously present to the group through the mechanisms of collective memory). Gorgo and Ker are not the dead as the living remember, commemorate, and celebrate them; rather, they represent the direct confrontation with death itself. They are death proper, that domain beyond-the-threshold, the gaping aperture of the other side that no gaze can penetrate and no discourse express: they are nothing but the horror of the unspeakable Night.<sup>1</sup>

These feminine figures express the horror of absence, which is death. The masculine characters of Thanatos and his brother Hypnos can only signify a different

---

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, “Feminine Figures of Death”, Princeton University Press, 1991, pages 96-97.

kind of absence, a masculine absence is always still a presence, a fullness; the image is the phallus. These feminine figures, on the other hand, signify an emptiness that is signified by the womb and the vagina, an “aperture” that can be experienced as *chaos*, an entry into the world of Night (Nyx). If we turn to the mythology, we see that Nyx is a trace of the original chaos, and her children are remainders/reminders of this chaos. To be swallowed up by Night or her progeny is to be swallowed up by chaos. It is no accident that Pandora arrives on the scene at the same time as death; prior to Pandora, men did not die. Likewise, in the Bible, Eve is responsible for the Fall, for death; a formula emerges: before woman, no death. Beauty and terror are thus inextricably linked, as the goddess Aphrodite is often paired with the goddess Persephone, and in this regard, these two faces are a dual goddess. Vernant writes, specifically in describing the Sirens, “Death is a threshold. One cannot pass over it and remain alive. Beyond the threshold, from its other side, the beautiful feminine face that attracts you and beckons to you is a face of terror: the unspeakable.”<sup>1</sup>

To return to the figure of Antigone: the divine law is manifest in the feminine Antigone in contrast to the masculine law of Creon. Antigone aligns herself with the divine law, with Justice and the will of Zeus. Dror Post writes “this double-edged characteristic of hope is epitomized by the chorus in *Antigone*:

For far reaching hope [*poluplagtos elpis*] is a boon to many men, but to many a delusion born of thoughtless desires.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 105. I am indebted almost entirely to Vernant for this mythological analysis of death and femininity, and I point the reader to his fascinating work for further elucidation of his analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Post, *Hope for the Unhoped*

The double nature of hope is the duplicitous nature of the feminine. Here, delusion and desire are virtually indistinguishable, and this proves awfully dangerous for human beings. It may seem that the danger is the burden of men, as they are “afflicted” by women, but Aphrodite is the queen of all, men and women alike, and so we share this peril. The mythological places of the Greek goddesses give us insight into the nature of reality: Persephone is the goddess of the Underworld, but the daughter of Demeter; barrenness and fertility are one.

The figure of Antigone offers further insight into the meaning of a promise, or oath. A promise is signified by language, by speech, often ‘swearing by the Gods’. To return once again to the work of Vernant, he shows in his essay “The Figuration of the Invisible and the Psychological Category of the Double” that even the Gods themselves swear oaths to the dread river Styx of the Underworld. If an immortal god breaks his or her oath, he or she is apparently *frozen*, though the gods cannot die. Similarly, the breaking of an oath can be death to mortals. All of these oaths bear some relation to *stone*, as an oath is “sworn ‘by the stone’”.<sup>1</sup> The head of the Gorgon is an instrument of the Underworld, specifically of Persephone, and it turns those who look upon it into stone. Stone is an image of death, as those who die are apparently ‘turned to stone’ by the condition we now name ‘rigor mortis’. The oath of Antigone is her death in the tomb as the stone is rolled over the entrance. Similarly, in Christianity, Jesus is entombed behind the stone, even as he *promises* to rise from the dead.

I bring all these images together to return once again to the nature of language. The crypt is a place of stone, where the dead are entombed. Throughout this analysis, I

---

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among The Greeks*, “The Figuration of the Invisible and the Psychological Category of the Double, 328.

have been considering poetic speech as *encryption*, following Derrida; and I have suggested that Heraclitus, with his cryptic speech, points to the nature of language itself. The very possibility of associating these diverse images of mythology is testament to the common *logos* that Heraclitus continually invokes. Language as encryption is impossibility made manifest; as the divine makes itself present through absence, language signals to us the presence of the invisible, of absence. In the same way, life makes death present; these opposites are dimensions of appearance for *unity*, for the divine. Language, like Antigone's crypt of stone, holds the paradox of life and death precariously within it; it has the power to bind together the opposites that it keeps separate.

**Part Two: Parmenides and Heraclitus**

The Poem of Parmenides  
The Reality of Appearances



## The Poem of Parmenides

The method and technique of Heraclitus' language, and the purpose that he achieves by using it, bears a striking resemblance to the language and method of Parmenides' poem. This chapter will be first and foremost an examination of *method*, and will formulate conclusions about the intended purpose of these poetic texts; despite the apparent differences between the philosophies of Heraclitus and Parmenides, the underlying message of both philosophers is the same: human beings do not know how to use the senses, and in order to be liberated from this condition, they must recognize the realm of illusion that they take to be truth. The use of deception, riddle, and enigma are vital instruments of this procedure, which is a process of *healing*. The healing that takes place occurs through the language of the texts, but the language is most definitely *not* a rational language of argument—it is magical language that deliberately induces certain *experiences* designed to lead, shock, or trick the listener into a different state of awareness. In this sense, these texts are highly esoteric, and if they are not approached as such, they will inevitably be misunderstood.

While little is known about Heraclitus, we do have some evidence about the life of Parmenides; in 1962 an inscription was found in Velia that read "*Parmeneides son of Pyres Ouliades Physikos*". As Peter Kingsley has demonstrated, Parmenides was associated with a tradition of healing and incubation; he was a priest of Apollo, as the word *Ouliades* indicates (literally "son of Apollo").<sup>1</sup> Apollo *Oulis* is a paradoxical figure, because the word refers to Apollo as the 'destroyer', but also means 'he who makes

---

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, Golden Sufi Press, 1999, 140- 9.

whole.<sup>1</sup> Healing is itself this paradox; the disease, whether it is physical or psychological, must be eliminated. Incubation was not only practiced in order to cure sickness; it could also cure human beings of illusion—the sickness of the mind. It is important to remember that what we now consider ‘medicine’ concerns only the body; for the Greeks, there was no rigid separation between the body and the mind—sickness was of the *whole*.

The practice of incubation was very simple. People in need of healing would come, usually to a cave, and lie down. Caves were sacred because they were entrances to the Underworld, which was, paradoxically, the place from which healing came; while it was a place of death, it was also a place of great riches, ‘*plutos*’. The practice of incubation was essentially a journey to the Underworld, dying before you die; it was done in order to initiate contact with the divine for the purposes of healing. The most important element of this practice is the very thing that Parmenides claimed to learn from his teacher: *stillness (hesychia)*.<sup>2</sup> The paradoxes that are involved in this tradition are many and subtle, so they cannot all be revealed here, but one of them has specific bearing on this analysis: the paradox of stillness and motion.

The practice of incubation is itself this paradox: one makes a journey to the Underworld while lying very still. The prologue of Parmenides’ poem is very obviously, once one associates his words with his status as a priest of Apollo, a description of an experience while practicing incubation. There are many, many signs that this is the case; the rhythm and repetition of words (notably ‘carry’) has the character of magical incantation, the spinning of the wheels and the hubs, along with the hissing sound that they make, indicate the presence of Apollo and Asclepius, and are traditional markers of a

---

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, 57; *Reality*, Golden Sufi Press, 2003, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Kingsley, *Reality*, 44-6.

different state of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> For a reader who knows what to look for, these signs are fairly obvious, but to a reader who is hunting for rational arguments of a sort that the “father of logic” is likely to give, they are incomprehensible. For this reason, the prologue has “by and large been brushed aside and dismissed.”<sup>2</sup> In order to understand Parmenides’ message, we must consider the purpose of his poem in the context in which it was written—as a priest of healing and incubation.

Heraclitus’ first fragment and the prologue to Parmenides’ poem have a similar function in preparing the reader for what will follow, but there is a specific technique involved in this preparation—they effectively create a feeling of *alienation* in the reader. As we have seen in analyzing Heraclitus’ fragment 1, the reader is immediately thrown into what seems to be an intractable situation, and in order to proceed, she is forced to let go of her own preconceptions and leave all firm ground behind. Whatever understanding one might believe that she has in approaching Heraclitus is continually pulled out from underneath her; this technique effectively *destroys* the illusion of understanding, and results in an *aporia*. This disorientation is completely necessary for *re-orientation* to proceed.

In her forthcoming article, M. Laura Gemelli Marciano has explored two conspicuous linguistic techniques that Parmenides’ poem exhibits: *alienation* and *binding*. These techniques “are the most powerful means to remove listeners from the ordinary, everyday dimension and way of thinking and put them into a different state of consciousness. Images, repetitions, sequences of words and sounds, supposedly ‘logical’

---

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, incantation: 123, hissing and spinning: 131-5 and in *Reality*, 36.

<sup>2</sup> M. Laura Gemelli Marciano, “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides *Aletheia*”, *Ancient Philosophy* vol. 28 (2008), forthcoming.

arguments all contribute to this end and have a particular meaning and function which surpass conventional human language and ordinary syntactical and semantic relationships.”<sup>1</sup> In the prologue, the imagery and pacing deliberately evoke a dream-like experience, just like that state between waking and sleeping that is associated with incubation. The reader is immediately disoriented, since there is no indication of context or expression of intent—suddenly, the reader finds herself racing along on a chariot towards a mysterious place. The first sights and sounds described in detail are the spinning and hissing, indicating that the usual state of consciousness is being left behind. “It is striking that in the proem there is a great indeterminacy with regard to agents, time and place of action. By contrast, seemingly insignificant details are expounded at great length. All this creates the impression of a dream-like scene which is unfolding at the boundary between reality and dream.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the poem creates a rhythm and repetition by which the reader can actually experience being *carried* along, the language becomes the mares and the chariot, and the poem sweeps the reader up in its inevitable trajectory. In this way, the language of the poem is dynamic and *evocative*.

From a rational standpoint, Parmenides is nothing more than bad poetry obscuring useful logical argument. Jonathan Barnes says “it is hard to excuse Parmenides’ choice of verse as a medium for his philosophy.”<sup>3</sup> Kirk, Raven, and Schofield say, “ancients and moderns alike are agreed upon a low estimation of Parmenides’ gifts as a writer. He has little facility in diction, and the struggle to force novel, difficult, and highly abstract

---

<sup>1</sup> M. Laura Gemelli Marciano, “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides *Aletheia*”, 6.

<sup>2</sup> M. Laura Gemelli Marciano, “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides *Aletheia*”, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cited in M. Laura Gemelli Marciano’s essay “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides’ *Aletheia*”; Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (1982), 155.

philosophical ideas into metrical form frequently results in ineradicable obscurity, especially syntactic obscurity. On the other hand, in the less argumentative passages of the poem he achieves a kind of clumsy grandeur.”<sup>1</sup> The repetition of the word “carry” throughout the prologue is one example of his alleged ‘clumsiness’; the word appears no less than four times in the first few lines of the poem (fragment 1)—no matter how unskilled a poet he is, this repetition cannot be accidental. The obscurity that he is charged with is the same criticism often leveled at Heraclitus; this enigmatic speech is very deliberate and necessary in Parmenides’ poem, just as it is in Heraclitus’ fragments.<sup>2</sup>

As Peter Struck has recently argued in *Birth of the Symbol*, study of poetics since Aristotle has relied on his analytical approach, while earlier “allegorists” held the use of *enigma* in high esteem; Struck names Heraclitus as one of these poets operating according to this older mode: “the implication is that certain topics, especially what we might call the ‘deep structure’ of the cosmos, simply demand oblique modes of discourse.”<sup>3</sup> This kind of “obscure” language is necessary, since the “content” that it carries is itself obscure. Aristotle’s *Poetics* became the standard approach, and clarity became a virtue of poetry, while obscurity began to be viewed as evidence of the poet’s lack of skill; in this way, enigma became distinct from, and inferior to, *metaphor*. Aristotle’s influence on poetics resulted in the common opinion that “the central concept of *ainigma* (which refers to the hidden meaning of the text accessible only with difficulty) was viewed as a purely stylistic device which is to be condemned as a

---

<sup>1</sup> KRS, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 241.

<sup>2</sup> See previous chapter on *logos* in Heraclitus, and the introduction to this dissertation for an argument, following Hölscher, that this enigmatic oracular form is necessary in Heraclitus.

<sup>3</sup> Struck, 156.

mistaken form of poetic speech and replaced with ‘metaphor’. The good poet expresses himself through metaphors, not through enigmas. Metaphor refers to a hidden meaning, but one which can easily be grasped.”<sup>1</sup> In the case of Heraclitus’ fragments, attentive commentators, such as Kahn, have observed that the style is justified and suited to the content at hand; Heraclitus was imitating nature itself, which “loves to hide”, in using enigmatic language. Kahn argues that “it is reality itself that requires close investigation”, and “to speak plainly about such a subject would falsify it in the telling, for no genuine understanding would be communicated.”<sup>2</sup>

Once we accept that the poetic format of these texts is necessary, we can begin to appreciate the poetic devices that Parmenides and Heraclitus employ. One technique common to these fragments is what Mourelatos has called “double-speak” (*amphillogiai*); this kind of language is deceptive, ambiguous, and thoroughly ironic.<sup>3</sup> When the goddess delivers the *doxa*, or opinions of mortals, she issues a statement of warning, telling the young man to listen to her “deceptive kosmos” (*apatelon kosmos*).<sup>4</sup> This speech is deceptive in several ways; first of all, she has openly announced that she is going to deceive the listener, creating an intractable paradox. Secondly, she is about to deliver, despite its alleged error, an account of the “opinions of mortals in which there is nothing that can truthfully be trusted at all.”<sup>5</sup> As Mourelatos argues, perhaps the most deceptive element in her speech is the presupposition of a *double audience*; divine awareness such

---

<sup>1</sup> Marciano, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 124.

<sup>3</sup> Mourelatos, A.P.D., “The Deceptive Words of Parmenides’ Doxa”, *The Presocratics*, Anchor Books (1974), 317.

<sup>4</sup> Parmenides’ Poem, B8:52.

<sup>5</sup> Parmenides’ Poem, fragment 1:28-32, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

as her own, and the limited awareness of mortals.<sup>1</sup> This double audience creates *irony*, and the ambiguity (cf. B6:5 “two-headed”) which is the crucial fault in human *doxai* becomes transformed into dramatic irony on the lips of the goddess.”<sup>2</sup>

The incomprehension on the part of mortals is necessary for this irony to take place, just as the mortals in Heraclitus’ fragment 1 are *axunetoi* in accordance with the *logos*. The technique of double-speak, like that of Parmenides’ poem, is evident in Heraclitus’ fragment 50: “listening not to me but to the logos, it is wise to acknowledge all things as one.”<sup>3</sup> In this case, Heraclitus appears to be directly contradicting the *unity* that he is suggesting, by distinguishing his own *logos* from the *logos*. The presence of a double audience, however, gives this contradiction meaning: for those human beings unacquainted with the *logos*, Heraclitus’ words will naturally *seem* separate from it; for those listeners acquainted with the *logos*, the unity of Heraclitus’ words with the *logos* will be evident. This device has the effect of pointing those *unacquainted* listeners towards the *logos* itself, and away from the seeming “private” *logos* of Heraclitus.

Heraclitus’ consistent use of oracular speech is also a form of double-speak, because oracles and riddles are always treacherously layered in meaning. The enigmatic character of an oracle or riddle is its *hidden* meaning; the danger that they present is a superficial interpretation that does not account for *depth*. As the example of Oedipus demonstrates, a hasty and arrogant appraisal of a riddle was risky and fatal; Heraclitus and Parmenides’ use of this kind of riddling language signals the *seriousness* of their texts. Like the oracle, misinterpretation of them could be a matter of life and death,

---

<sup>1</sup> Mourelatos, A.P.D., “The Deceptive Words of Parmenides’ Doxa”, *The Presocratics*, Anchor Books (1974), 313.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 314.

<sup>3</sup> See previous chapters on *logos* in Heraclitus for a full discussion of this fragment.

particularly in the context of Parmenides' connection with healing and the destructive force of Apollo.

The language of Parmenides' poem is deceptive in yet another way; as Mourelatos observes, when the goddess uses the words "deceptive kosmos" (*apatelon kosmos*), she creates another strange contradiction: "to speak *kata kosmon* is to speak 'truly, properly, and with a due sense of relevance'. Implicit in this tension between *kosmos*, 'order', and *apate*, 'deception', is the warning, not merely that *doxai* are deceptive, but further that the *arrangement* or the context in which the goddess' words appear may assign to them multiple or conflicting meanings."<sup>1</sup> Once again, the poem is *demonstrating* what it is saying with the very words it is using to convey the message; she does not merely *say* how the words will be deceptive, she *shows* the reader precisely how they are deceptive. To demonstrate this device more fully, Mourelatos offers a reading of a line from fragment B14; the line reads: "*nuktiphaes peri gaian aloumenon allotrion phous*".<sup>2</sup> Mourelatos translates this line as "shining in the night, wandering round about the earth, a foreign light." The poetic subtleties of the Greek text imply three things simultaneously, "(a) the moon is a light which is not its own" (b) the face-in-the-moon (*kyklopos*, round-eyed or round-faced, but also the Cyclops) is a wandering stranger (c) "the face-in-the-moon is not himself."<sup>3</sup> This example is demonstrative of the linguistic complexity of Parmenides' poem, and emphasizes the point that someone who claims to be speaking deceptively, *and* uses such skillful linguistic subtlety needs to be read very carefully.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mourelatos, 316.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 314.

<sup>3</sup> Mourelatos, Alexander. "The Deceptive Words of Parmenides' *Doxa*", *The PreSocratics, A Collection of Critical Essays*. Anchor Books, 1974.



The arrangement of the words adds multiple meanings to the text by means of association; the logic of poetic speech is not rational, because it defies linear interpretation. Examples of this sort of ambiguous language, particularly cases of irony, usually come from a divine speaker.<sup>1</sup> The *appearance* of contradiction in this kind of language, particularly double-speak, only appears this way to mortals, who do not have the privileged understanding of the gods. The “twin-heads” that Parmenides describes refers to the irresistible mortal urge to *separate* reality into categories; this process of separation includes the act of *naming* and the use of mortal language in general. In perhaps the most significant line of Parmenides’ poem, the goddess announces, “its name shall be everything—every single name that mortals have invented, convinced they are all true: birth and death, existence, non-existence, change of place, alteration of bright color.”<sup>2</sup> All of the names that mortals invent to describe reality actually refer to only one thing, since there is only one thing—the one being. As Kirk, Raven, and Schofield have argued, “expressions like ‘comes to be’ and ‘changes’ employed by mortals can in fact refer (despite their mistaken intentions) only to complete and changeless reality.”<sup>3</sup> The inability of names to contain divine reality appears in Heraclitus’ fragment 32: “the wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be called by the name of Zeus.”<sup>4</sup>

Just as in Heraclitus’ fragments, wisdom is the ability to perceive *unity*; while twin-headed mortals break everything up into opposites, the divine perspective sees only

---

<sup>1</sup> The oracle’s speech comes from Apollo, and like the goddess in Parmenides’ poem, the message is hidden. The case of double-speak in the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus fools the Cyclops, would be a counterexample, were it not for Athena’s divine aid; the *metis* that Odysseus exhibits, like all *metis*, is a divine quality only occasionally bestowed upon human beings.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 8, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>3</sup> KRS, *Presocratic Philosophers*, 253.

<sup>4</sup> See earlier chapter on *logos* for a more detailed account of this fragment.

*one being*. In contrast to this one being, humans live in a world of conflicting opposites. The word that the goddess uses to describe the *doxa* is *diakosmos*; this word means “battle-formation”, and has the sense of opposing enemies.<sup>1</sup> The image of the twin-heads implies that the battle is within each human being; he is his own enemy. In this way, it is easy to understand how the path that he follows “turns backwards on itself”, since this hostility is internal.<sup>2</sup> It is not the cosmos that is divided, but the awareness of human beings. The healing aimed at by Parmenides’ poem, and the intended effect of Heraclitus’ fragments, is to communicate an *experience* of unity; this experience not only heals the listener of her divided awareness, but initiates contact with divine reality in doing so. While the interpretations of Parmenides’ poem have always acknowledged his insistence on absolute unity of the one being, they have focused on the arguments of the poem, often to the exclusion of these evocative techniques we have been addressing; the effect of Parmenides’ poem, like the effect of Heraclitus’ fragments, is *experiential*.

The effects that these texts were designed to produce were not possible using ordinary mortal language; like the words of the oracle, they were considered to be *divine* language. Heraclitus indicates this in fragment 50, by directing his listeners to the *logos* rather than himself, Parmenides’ poem is very explicitly the message of a goddess, and the enigmatic speech of the oracle was the god Apollo speaking through the sibyl. Human language is limited, and follows a linear model of reference; words correspond to or stand for discrete things. This separation is alien to divine reality, which is *one*, shared, and complete, according to the texts of Heraclitus and Parmenides. Thus divine language is *infinite*; its meanings are as multiple as the associations that can be imagined. A

---

<sup>1</sup> Mourelatos, 318.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 6.

conspicuous clue to the difference between divine and mortal language lies in the description of fragment 1, which mentions truth and mortal opinion in juxtaposition: “And what’s needed is for you to learn all things: both the unshaken heart of persuasive truth and the opinions of mortals in which there is nothing that can truthfully be trusted at all. But even so, this too you will learn—how beliefs based on appearance ought to be believable as they travel all through all there is.”<sup>1</sup> The status of *appearance* will be the subject of the following chapter; here I would like only to examine the description of the truth and the description of the *doxa*—which are, incidentally, the two ‘sections’ of Parmenides’ poem, though the *doxa* remains in much-abbreviated and fragmentary form.

Truth is paired with Persuasion (*Peitho*); but this is not an abstract concept or the rational force of argument, but a powerful divine force:

*Peitho* is a cult goddess who often belongs in the train of Aphrodite in archaic literature and iconography. How forcefully and inexorably this goddess affects the mind of men is illustrated by the passage in Pindar (*Pythian* 4.213-18) where Aphrodite instructs Jason in erotic magic. She gives him the famous magic wheel and teaches him ‘prayers and magic spells’ so that he can take from Medeia her respect for her parents and so that desire for him ‘might shake her under the whip of *Peitho*.’ Here the influence of *Peitho* is directly linked with magical spells.<sup>2</sup>

The force of persuasion is associated with feminine powers, such as *Peitho* and *Aphrodite*; in Parmenides’ poem, there is another example of this power—the Daughters of the Sun. At the gates of night and day, where Parmenides is carried in the chariot, sits the goddess Justice; she is responsible for maintaining this border and keeping the living on one side and the dead on the other. Before the unnamed goddess begins to speak to the young man, we are given a demonstration of the kind of persuasion that she names as

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 1:28-32, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> Marciano, 14.

accompanying truth. The Daughters of the Sun use “soft seductive words” to “cunningly persuade” Justice to push back the bar “just for them” and open the gates.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this demonstration is easily overlooked, but is essential to appreciating the absolute power of *persuasion*; the Daughters of the Sun have just persuaded Justice to make an exception to the law of life and death, which is no small matter. The way in which they managed to do this requires some attention.

This demonstration gives the reader insight into the nature of divine language; the power of divine language is unlimited and able to accomplish the impossible. In other words, divine language is *magical* language. In this scene of the prologue, “first comes an allusion to the power of divine words, because the Daughters of the Sun do not just persuade: they entice the protectress of the gate with ‘soft words’. It can be assumed from the use of these two ‘cue’ expressions *parphamenai* and *malakoisi logoisi* that these words of theirs act like, and indeed are, magical language.”<sup>2</sup> Since Parmenides names *Peitho* as truth’s attendant, it follows that truth is magical language; truth is persuasive *because* it is true—irresistibly. Marciano describes the effect of this kind of language on the listener as “binding”; the goddess methodically rejects every possible form of separation that could lead to non-being, such as movement, division, birth, and death, until there is nothing left but the motionless, indivisible reality of the one being.<sup>3</sup> The language of the poem does not proceed according to rational argument, but instead through a series of tautological statements that are linked together with conjunctions like “for” and “because”; these words create the deceptive appearance of argument, but their

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 1:15-17, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> Marciano, 12. “In Homer, *parphasis*, the ‘seductive talk’ which takes even sensible men’s *noos* away from them, is contained in the magic belt of Aphrodite.” *Iliad*, 14.214.

<sup>3</sup> Marciano, 17-21.

true force is to bind the listener within the circle they are describing. The message of the poem is not an argument, but an experience; the language of the poem deliberately transmits an experience of this state of completion to the listener. The image of the sphere that the goddess conjures in the poem, the fetters and bonds of Necessity, and the structure of the poem itself all reflect this process of *binding*; the *kouros*, like the reader, “in being bound is brought to the same stillness and motionlessness himself.”<sup>1</sup>

The demonstrative or performative aspect of the poem is evident in its circular structure; the message of the poem is *one*, but it is expressed in various guises, creating the *appearance* of motion. When the goddess likens her message to a sphere, she is not simply offering a pleasing metaphor; her demonstration *is* her message. Every ‘piece’ of her message reveals the same truth, just as “every single name mortals have invented” refer to the same one being.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, it is very difficult to explain the logic of Parmenides in a methodical way; as in the case of Heraclitus, an associative method is more appropriate than a linear one. Reaching for a piece of the message of Parmenides, one always comes away with the whole ball at once, for “there is no way you will manage to cut being off from clinging fast to being.”<sup>3</sup> The “argument” appears to move from one point to another, but the illusion is that these are all the same point. As fragment 5 states, “it is a common point from which I start; for there again and again I shall

---

<sup>1</sup> Marciano, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 8, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>3</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 4, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

return.”<sup>1</sup> Like a circle, it does not matter where one begins, for the beginning and the end are the same.<sup>2</sup>

The text of the poem first creates a state of alienation, where the reader becomes disoriented and is placed in unfamiliar territory; then through a methodical process of subversion, all escape routes are closed off, exactly like the “roads” in Parmenides’ poem that turn out to be no roads at all. Thus the process of binding is actually a process of *revealing* the true motionless state of being that one already inhabits—though the illusion of movement is necessary, as it appears to *carry* one to this state. The paradox of motion and stillness that began this analysis of Parmenides will now return here at the conclusion, in keeping with the structure of the poem as a whole—which is of one single point (*being*). The inability to escape is emphasized by the description of human beings that the goddess provides, which echoes the descriptions given by Heraclitus; she is explaining to the *kouros* the alleged “roads” of inquiry:

But then I hold you back as well from the one [way] that mortals fabricate, twin-heads, knowing nothing for helplessness in their chests is what steers their wandering minds as they are carried along in a daze, deaf and blind at the same time: indistinguishable, undistinguishing crowds who reckon that being and non-being are the same and not the same. And, for all of them, the route they follow is a path that keeps turning backwards on itself.<sup>3</sup>

The “helplessness” that the goddess here names is *amechania*, which implies a state much like that of *aporia*; the word literally means “without a ruse.”<sup>4</sup> This state is a precise description of the mortal condition, since human beings are unable to sense or

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 5, translation is Kirk, Raven, and Schofield’s in *The Presocratic Philosophers*.

<sup>2</sup> c.f. Heraclitus fragment 103: the beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of the circle.

<sup>3</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 6, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>4</sup> Kingsley, *Reality*, 91.

understand, they are completely unable to “steer” themselves. This image of steering, which also occurs in Heraclitus,<sup>1</sup> conveys the message that human beings have no *metis*, no faculty of judgment. The logic of Parmenides poem is to bring the reader to a realization of this *bound* state of *amechania*, to a recognition of mortal limitation and utter helplessness. Heraclitus’ fragment one achieves a similar effect, by immediately and entirely rejecting any claims at knowledge of the *logos*, which leaves the reader in this state of *aporia*. It is not the case that the reader *becomes* bound through these texts, rather, the reader has been bound all along and is able to *recognize* this state through the experience that the texts induce. What is really magical about this whole procedure is not the effect of this magical language, but the initial obliviousness of human beings despite the ubiquity and persuasiveness of reality.

The most pressing question that this analysis raises is the *purpose* of this binding. What possible positive effect could the recognition of utter helplessness present? Persuasion, the attendant of truth, has an opposite force to overcome: the force of *habit*. The goddess describes this terrible tyrant immediately after her humorous portrayal of the twin-headed mortals: “and don’t let much experienced habit force you to guide your sightless eye and echoing ear and tongue along this way.”<sup>2</sup> *Habit* drags human beings along unconsciously, completely unaware of their “words and deeds”, as Heraclitus tells us in fragment 1. Rather than warning human beings not to use the senses at all, Parmenides’ goddess “explicitly invites Parmenides to liberate himself from the automatism of perception (not from perceptions *tout court*).”<sup>3</sup> The paradox of “much-

---

<sup>1</sup> Fragments 64 and 41; see chapters on *logos* for a full account of these fragments.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 7, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>3</sup> Marciano, 17.

experienced habit” is the fact that habit is unconscious, and so it is never properly “experienced”; the eyes and ears are just as useless as they are to the men with “barbarian souls” in Heraclitus’ fragment 107.

The transformation that these texts effect is *not* a change in the structure of reality, but a change in *awareness* of reality. For Parmenides and Heraclitus, the nature of reality is paradoxical: it appears to be made up of opposites, but those opposites are paradoxically a unity. The phenomenon of the double audience that Mourelatos invokes is precisely the solution to this seeming contradiction; from the point of view of the divine, reality is one, but for mortals, it takes on many appearances. The apparent conflict of opposites, ever present to twin-headed mortals, hides a deeper unity beneath it, which is the unity of the divine. This theme is present in Heraclitus, where the divine is often the “common connecting element” between opposites,<sup>1</sup> and it is evident in the imagery of the prologue, where Parmenides travels beyond the realm of opposites (through “the gates on the pathways of Night and Day”) to the place where opposites meet, the Underworld. The *healing* that the poem aims at is the unification of the divided awareness of mortals (twin-heads); in order to make them whole, their false preconceptions must first be destroyed.

The purpose of incubation is also paradoxical: what does a journey to the land of the dead have to do with *life*? And yet this journey into death is for the sake of the living; Parmenides does not simply go to the underworld for himself, he is given a message to *carry* back to the world of the living. He is a messenger.<sup>2</sup> After *experiencing* this

---

<sup>1</sup> KRS, 191. See fragments 10, 67, 32, and 41, discussed in the chapter in *logos*.

<sup>2</sup> See Kingsley’s *In the Dark Places of Wisdom and Reality* for a full account of the title *Iatromantis* (“healer-prophet”) and its meaning in the context of ritual.



teaching, Parmenides would be given access to the divine quality of *metis*, the ability to *steer* through the world. The goddess tells him that upon learning *both* the truth and the *doxa*, Parmenides will have insight into the identity between these: “nobody among mortals will ever manage, in practical judgment, to ride on past you.”<sup>1</sup> The stillness of Parmenides’ teaching, as he learned from his teacher, is an *inner* stillness that allows for swift attention to the apparent movement all around in the illusory world. This *metis* is necessary, because the world of appearances may be deceptive and illusory, but it is *real* in the sense that it exists inseparable from truth. The realm of *doxa*, just like the visible world for Heraclitus, allows real insight into truth because it is the visible (apparent or obvious) manifestation of the invisible. The chapter that follows is a close examination of the status of *appearances* in Parmenides and Heraclitus.

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides’ poem, fragment 8:61, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*. This phrase is an allusion to the famous chariot race in the *Iliad*.

## The Reality of Appearances

*ELEATIC STRANGER*: So you're saying that that which is like is not really that which is, if you speak of it as not true.

*THEATETUS*: But it *is*, in a way.

*ELEATIC STRANGER*: But not truly, you say.

*THEATETUS*: No, except that it really is a likeness.

*ELEATIC STRANGER*: So it's not really what is, but it really is what we call a likeness?

*THEATETUS*: Maybe *that which is not* is woven together with *that which is* in some way like that—it's quite bizarre.

Plato, *Sophist* (240b)

But then I hold you back as well from the one [way] that mortals fabricate, twin-heads, knowing nothing for helplessness in their chests is what steers their wandering minds as they are carried along in a daze, deaf and blind at the same time: indistinguishable, undistinguishing crowds who reckon that being and non-being are the same but not the same.

Parmenides

This chapter examines the shift in meaning of *eidolon* that Plato inaugurates in the *Sophist*, and the consequences of this change in ontological status for philosophy, especially with reference to the understanding of *appearances*. Plato's operations in the *Sophist* effectively reformulate Parmenides' philosophy and relegate *doxa* to a realm of non-being, or at least to some shadowy domain of not-quite-being. Understanding of this procedure is a necessary condition for approaching Heraclitus, for whom appearances are still real and viable manifestations of the invisible. The archaic concept of *eidola* is of particular significance for contextualizing Heraclitus' method in the fragments; just as Heraclitus frequently uses language to illustrate the presence of the invisible in the visible, the archaic *eidola* is the ambiguous presence of an absent, invisible thing. Vernant's work of the meaning of the *kolossos*, and the Greek concept of the *double* as it manifests in the *eidola*, will provide a frame for this study. In order to approach Pre-

Socratic thought, particularly Heraclitus and Parmenides, the shift between the archaic *eidola* and Plato's reformulation must be examined because the status and meaning of the visible world is at stake.

In violating Parmenides' logic, that non-being cannot exist, Plato is sweeping away the *paradox* involved in appearances, and denying the necessity of *deception* or illusion.<sup>1</sup> Illusion becomes something to be avoided or denied rather than a necessary component of reality. Plato banishes the poets<sup>2</sup> because they conjure *eidola*, "a term that marks the conjuration of spirits, ghosts, and phantoms. Plato's theory grows out of an anxiety provoked by the appreciation of the power of language to invoke a world—an appreciation not far removed from the idea of language as a magic spell. The *eidolon* theory warns us against the poets' power to delude us through representations, to show us beguiling semblances of things that do not really exist."<sup>3</sup> Parmenides, Plato's object of attack in the *Sophist*, was a poet (despite his characterizations), and the message of his poem was the *impossibility* of non-being. The deep irony of Plato's position becomes evident when we take these factors into account: he breaks Parmenides' logic by subtly implying non-being, while declaiming the poets for doing this very thing. This move is very deliberate; Plato understands the power of language, especially poetic language, and wants it to be regulated by *reason*. As Struck observes, "despite his thorough critique of Gorgianic views in the *Gorgias*, Plato still thinks language has the power to act as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Dodds remarks, in this regard, "any teaching which weakens the conviction that honesty is the best policy he [Plato] feels obliged to prohibit as antisocial." *Greeks and the Irrational*, 224.

<sup>2</sup> *Republic*, Book 10

<sup>3</sup> Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, Princeton (2004), 54.

*pharmakon*. If poetic language was a drug for Gorgias, Plato wants to ensure that it is a prescription drug, carefully regulated and controlled by the state.”<sup>1</sup>

In the *Sophist*, Plato employs the character of the Eleatic Stranger as a patricidal son of Parmenides whose logic only *resembles* that of Parmenides, as his aim is clearly to “lay hands on” the theory of his “father” Parmenides.<sup>2</sup> This *familiar* assassin directs this “dangerous discussion” towards a somewhat contemptuous dismissal of the “childish myths” of his predecessors; he invokes here not only Parmenides, but also Heraclitus and Empedocles.<sup>3</sup> Like the *eidolon* that is the subject of this dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger himself is a shadowy figure, a ghost-like imitation of Parmenides that substitutes for the real man, both a double and a deception. But as Parmenides says, even appearances share in being, and their influence on the opinions of mortals is very real.<sup>4</sup> In the *Sophist*, Plato subtly allows non-being to creep into being in the form of *likeness* or *seeming*; a darker shade of being that nevertheless swings wide the gates and allows *nothing* to flood into being—precisely the natural disaster that Parmenides forecasted.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 53.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Sophist*, 241d for specific mention of patricide and violence; see Kingsley’s *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Golden Sufi Press, 1999) for a full account of Plato’s very deliberate patricide, and the likely reasons for it.

<sup>3</sup> 242c: “They each appear to tell us a myth, as if we were children”; 242d ref. to Parmenides, 242e ref. to Heraclitus and Empedocles, 243a ref. to Empedocles. Plato has the Stranger dismiss these myths at 243b for their alleged obscurity.

<sup>4</sup> At the end of the prologue, Parmenides’ Goddess states: “And what’s needed is for you to learn all things, both the unshaken heart of persuasive truth and the opinions of mortals in which nothing can truthfully be trusted at all. But even so, this too you will learn—*how beliefs based on appearance ought to be believable as they travel all through all there is.*” Fragment 1:28-32, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*, my italics.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of this operation in the *Sophist*, merely outlined here, see Vernant’s essay “The Birth of Images”, *Mortals and Immortals*, Princeton University Press, 1991.

Vernant has argued that, prior to the fifth century B.C., *mimesis* was primarily understood as a performative phenomenon; it indicated an imitative *demonstration* that deceived the spectator.<sup>1</sup> Plato shifts the emphasis from this performative aspect to the *representative* aspect of imitation—he uses *mimesis* to raise the problem of *resemblance* between the imitation and the object imitated. The consequence of this shift is an ontological one: the *eidolon* takes on a lesser status; it is not quite real, not as true as the reality that it imitates. This theory of imitation laid out by Plato may not *seem* such a deviation from earlier ways of thinking, but the effect of his procedure on the meaning of *eidolon* is to deny it any true being, and thus devalue *appearances* as not-real.

This development is a departure from earlier conceptions of *eidola*, which included such concepts as *psyche*, *oneiros*, *skia*, and *phasma*<sup>2</sup>; what these concepts have in common is their *double* character. As Vernant explains, the *eidolon* “exists simultaneously on two contrasting planes: just when it shows itself to be present, it also reveals itself as not of this world and as belonging to some other, inaccessible sphere.”<sup>3</sup> The archaic conception, as opposed to Plato’s, is irrational because the *eidolon* exists in two places simultaneously; Plato’s denial of this possibility signifies adherence to some principle of non-contradiction—which is a departure from the mythological thought he has just criticized as “childish.”<sup>4</sup>

These archaic *eidola* are not merely empty copies of the original, as Plato maintains in the *Sophist*, but seem identical to the so-called original thing in that they

---

<sup>1</sup> J.P. Vernant, “The Birth of Images”, *Mortals and Immortals*, Princeton University Press, 1991, 164- 185.

<sup>2</sup> J.P. Vernant, “The Figuration of the Invisible and the Psychological Category of the Double: the Kolossos”, *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, Zone Books, NY, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>4</sup> *Sophist*, 242c

“incarnate an actual presence” that is also an “irremediable absence”.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the archaic understanding of *eidolon* is not one of representation, but an ambiguous presentation. Plato’s reinterpretation of *eidolon* is a stripping away of otherworldly, irrational elements that formerly haunted encounters of this kind; as Vernant says:

Instead of expressing the irruption of the supernatural into human life, of the invisible into the visible, the play of Same and Other comes to circumscribe the space of the fictive and the illusory between the two poles of being and non-being, between the true and the false.<sup>2</sup>

Deception, whether intentionally created by an imitator or discovered through the senses, is thrown into the category of non-being and is essentially equated with what is “false”. The image, after Plato is done with it, “no longer, as in the case of the archaic *eidolon*, bears the mark of absence, of elsewhere, and of the invisible, but rather the stigma of a really unreal nonbeing.”<sup>3</sup> Prior to Plato’s theory of imitation, the realm of *doxa* was not cut off from the “real”, rather, it signified the visible appearance by which the invisible might be known.

This relationship is implied in Parmenides’ poem; at the end of the prologue, Parmenides’ goddess takes the young man by the hand and tells him that he must learn not only the “truth” but also the “doxa”, the appearance-based opinions of mortals.<sup>4</sup> It may seem on the surface that she is stipulating two *levels* of reality, as Plato does, except that she then adds: “but even so, this too you will learn—how beliefs based on

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, “Kolossos”, 168.

<sup>2</sup> Vernant, “Birth of Images”, 168.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> The “truth” section of the poem has been preserved but the “doxa” is almost entirely lost, since these appearances were abandoned as “not real” by so many influential later thinkers, most notably Plato.

appearance ought to be believable as they travel all through all there is.”<sup>1</sup> The Goddess’ brief remark qualifies the distinction she has just made between truth and doxa, and implies a much more paradoxical relation between them—the doxa, which we so hastily wish to be rid of, is not *separate* from the truth but “travels through all there is.” The manner in which the truth and doxa are united is explicitly given: *appearances*.

As Theatetus says in the opening quote to this chapter, it could seem like being and non-being are woven together here in some “bizarre” way—but Plato here equates the categories of being and non-being with the categories of truth and opinion; which is not the relation found in Parmenides, since non-being cannot exist. Rather than a mere deception, the “false” becomes something essentially *unreal* in the sense of not really existing (non-being). The effect of this move on philosophical method is substantial because it makes illusion something to be *avoided*, rather than something to be moved *through*. The appearance of the truth, for Parmenides, is illusion; only when it is recognized as illusion does one realize that it is the truth—the visible manifestation of the invisible truth is *illusion*. This relation between the visible and the invisible is evident in Heraclitus’ fragment 54, particularly when it is read alongside fragments 55 and 107:

54: The invisible harmony is better than the visible one.

55: Whatever comes from sight, hearing, learning from experience: this I prefer.

107: Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if  
their souls do not understand the language.

The invisible harmony of fragment 54 is *better*, and it is also inextricably linked to the senses; fragment 55 reveals Heraclitus’ reliance on empirical evidence. The

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides Poem, fragment 1:28-32, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

relation between *understanding* and the senses is given in fragment 107; the eyes and ears provide a *language* that the soul must learn to understand. It may be remarked that Heraclitus is here being metaphorical, and we ought not take him literally when he calls the witness of eyes and ears a *language*, but as Cherniss has argued, “Heraclitus did not distinguish between the sign and the thing signified.”<sup>1</sup> The “barbarian souls” of this fragment are the oblivious mortals of fragment one who fail to *hear* the logos; it is plain that this situation in fragment one is a failure to *comprehend* and not only a failure to “hear”. Similarly, as Wheelwright has observed “there is no such thing as the *merely* physical; that is a conceptual abstraction that men have developed as one of the instruments of a technological age.”<sup>2</sup> The visible physical world is not regarded by these Presocratics as something to be transcended in order to reach some “pure” realm of mind, as Plato advocates,<sup>3</sup> but as the actual physical manifestation of the invisible.

The issue at stake here is the status of these *appearances*; according to the rational model of non-contradiction that Plato is subtly following, these appearances cannot be true and false simultaneously. But, like the archaic eidolon, they are a presentation of the invisible; they signify the visible manifestation of something absent that is not merely a *semblance*, but the real appearance of what is hidden or invisible. Plato is right when he has Theatetus observe that there is a weaving together of two categories, but these categories are *not* being and non-being since non-being cannot exist, according to Parmenidean logic and common sense. The weaving together is between truth and opinion; in other words, between the invisible reality and the visible appearances that

---

<sup>1</sup> Cherniss, *Aristotle on the Presocratics*, 381.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, Princeton University Press, 1959, page 81.

<sup>3</sup> *Phaedo*: 66a, 67d for “purification”



make it manifest. According to this Parmenidean model, what Plato designates as “the intelligible” cannot be separated from the sensible.

It is ironic that Plato’s seemingly rational enterprise of distinguishing between truth and mere semblance leads him to perhaps the most irrational conclusion possible—that non-being exists. Though he seems at times to be following, albeit implicitly, the principle of non-contradiction, his conclusions seem to deviate from it substantially. The effect of his work in the *Sophist* is to create a chasm in human experience, to separate human beings from their only source of reality—the senses. Since the senses are subject to deception and seeming, they are rejected as irrational and essentially evil.<sup>1</sup> This is the “devaluation” of the image that Vernant mentions, as a negative value is placed on anything that is not strictly “rational” in the sense of intelligible; “Plato finally pitches the entire realm of the sensible over to the side of the image. Presented as a discouraging play of shadows and reflections, the image veers off to drift away into some distant “elsewhere”, and thus misses out on the entire undertaking of true knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> In pitching the senses overboard, Plato has denied reality to the visible world, while giving reality to non-being; this operation is an absolute reversal of the logic of Parmenides, who maintained that non-being is impossible, and advocated unity rather than separation: “there is no way you will manage to cut being off from clinging fast to being.”<sup>3</sup>

Plato’s sharp tools of separation may seem to have killed his father Parmenides, but Plato’s non-being is merely an *appearance* of being, since “what exists for thinking

---

<sup>1</sup> Plato expressly calls the senses and the body evil: *Phaedo* 66b.

<sup>2</sup> Vernant, “Birth of Images”, 179.

<sup>3</sup> Parmenides Poem, fragment 1, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

and for saying must be”<sup>1</sup>— the thought of non-being must exist in order to be thought, so what appears to be non-being is in fact another deceptive appearance of being. This idea is expressed in Parmenides’ poem when the Goddess says, “its name shall be everything—every single name that mortals have invented convinced they are all true: birth and death, existence, non-existence...”<sup>2</sup> For Parmenides, everything is, though *deceptive*, equally real. All the names that human beings give to things, even to things defined negatively like ‘non-being’, must, in the end, refer to being.

The consequences of Plato’s reformulation extend beyond the understanding of being and non-being; this dualism is pervasive because the category of ‘being’ includes everything. The effects of this dualistic thinking on our understanding of the body and the physical world are dramatic. Since he has located reality proper in an inaccessible and invisible realm (the realm of the Forms), his denigration of the senses also extends to the body as the source of the senses. What he has effectively done is sever physical existence from “real existence”. The psychological import of this move is incalculable, and somewhat terrifying. The physical world, which *seems* to be the most grounded and *real* aspect of our existence, becomes an illusion—and unlike Parmenides, Plato thinks that this illusion is completely deceptive and cannot lead to truth without the exercise of rational thought. In the *Phaedo*, his denunciation of the body is absolute—he makes the body into a repository for everything illusory, evil, or weak. The body, for Plato, “fills us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense, so that, as it is said, in truth and in fact no thought of any kind ever comes to us from the body.”<sup>3</sup> This statement

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides Poem, fragment 6, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides Poem, fragment 8, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Phaedo* 66c.

summarizes the opinion, inaugurated by Plato, that intelligence is identical to rational thought; this idea will be taken up in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> see “Irrationality and the Senses”

**Part Three: Psyche**

Irrationality and the Senses

Conflict of Opposites

Cosmology and Psychoanalysis

The Death Drive

## **Irrationality and the Senses**

*It is absurd to combine the idea that the sender of such dreams should be God with the fact that those to whom he sends them are not the best and wisest, but merely commonplace persons. Aristotle, De Divination Per Somnum*

*28a: What the man who seems most great recognizes and defends is mere imaginings.  
Heraclitus*

*46: Oiesis is a sacred disease and seeing is being deceived.  
Heraclitus*

In attempting to give an account of irrationality, one is immediately faced with a seemingly intractable paradox: any “account” given will itself be *rational*, and thus by its very nature, it may exclude certain elements that it intends to contain. In this way, irrationality is always an *excess*. The aspects of human nature that have often been called irrational are those aspects that cannot be entirely brought under control; they resist all attempts at domestication and categorization. The passions, the senses, religious and magical practices, and dreams are all examples of this kind. Historically, the development of rationality corresponds to an abandonment of mythical, magical, and religious beliefs and practices; rationality defined and shaped itself in accordance with a *rejection* of these ways of thinking and experiencing.<sup>1</sup> This new rationalism was believed, prior to such influential studies as Cornford’s *From Religion to Philosophy*, to have sprung magically into existence, like Athena from the head of Zeus. As Vernant has argued, “the arrival of the *logos* is thus held to have introduced a radical discontinuity into history. Philosophy

---

<sup>1</sup> See E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1951; J.P. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, “The Reason of Myth”, Zone Books, 1988; also *Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, “The Formation of Positivist Thought in Archaic Greece” and “The Origins of Philosophy”, Zone Books, 2006.

is seen as a traveler arriving without luggage, entering the world without a past.”<sup>1</sup> This miraculous phenomenon is a fantasy, since rationalism developed out of its historical context, and originated from the mythical model. The existence of this widely-held view is evidence of the character of rationality; it is an insight into the rational attitude’s perception of itself: rootless, superior, and self-justifying.

Consideration of this development, both its meaning and its effects, is crucial for approaching the writings of the Presocratics without imposing rational conditions and prejudices upon them. In particular, the meaning of the senses and those other elements considered to be *irrational* is at stake in this analysis. Since the senses were separated from the “rational part” of human nature,<sup>2</sup> they could not share in the superior intelligence that reason afforded; earlier models, where the senses were genuine organs of *understanding*, were discarded.<sup>3</sup> This tendency is evident first in Plato, and becomes even more pronounced in the writings of Aristotle. Thinking in accordance with reason becomes the only human activity capable of apprehending truth; in other words, thought becomes identical with *rational* thought; any other kind of thinking (including mythological, magical) is merely a confusion or inferior ancestor of rational thought. In this way, the rational attitude need not seriously consider the content of these mythological or magical modes of thinking, since they are considered to be false *a priori*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, “Formation of Positivist Thought in Archaic Greece”, 371.

<sup>2</sup> See Plato’s *Republic* Book IV; *Phaedo* 66a, etc.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of the misinterpretation of Presocratic texts by Plato and Aristotle, see Cherniss, *Aristotle on the Presocratics*, Johns Hopkins Press, 1935; Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, Oxford, 1995.

According to the rational model, understanding does not rely upon the senses—in fact, the senses become obstacles to truth. As E.R. Dodds has remarked, “in the theory of knowledge, a rationalist is opposed to an empiricist: he is one who believes that reason and not the senses provide the *archai*, the first principles on which science is built. That Plato was a rationalist in this sense is evident.”<sup>1</sup> The question that lurks behind the scenes in this discussion remains: is the cosmos itself rational? In other words, does the nature of the world conform to a rational structure? If it does, then rationality would clearly be an improvement over earlier mythological thought; but if it does not, then a rational outlook would necessarily exclude some part or mode of existence, an *excess* will remain unobserved and unobservable.

This need not necessarily be a choice between two mutually exclusive perspectives, especially because the *logic* of the mythological model allows for conflicting opposites—the rational model, on the other hand, follows a strict law of non-contradiction. As Vernant has observed:

“Rational” thought tends to ignore the ambivalent or extreme notions that play so important a part in myth. Rational thought avoids the associations by means of contrast and does not couple or unite opposites or proceed through a series of upheavals. On the principle of non-contradiction and unanimity, it condemns all modes that proceed from an ambiguous or equivocal basis.<sup>2</sup>

It may even be the case that the earlier *empirical* standpoint that Dodds mentions is abandoned because the empirical observations themselves break this law; perception and experience yield evidence of paradox and contradiction. If this is so, then the cosmos,

---

<sup>1</sup> Dodds, E.R. “Plato and the Irrational”, *Journal of Hellenistic Studies*, Vol. 65, 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Vernant, “The Reason of Myth”, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, Zone Books, 1980,

or at least our own observation of it, is not rational. These points are all speculative, but in the realm that we are dealing with, they are so out of necessity; the historical development does not itself provide us with the psychological underpinnings of this transformation of perspective, as it is evidenced in the texts. These changes in thought also transformed *experience*; the earlier models of growth (*phusis*) were replaced with mechanical models (*techne*).<sup>1</sup> This shift in understanding affects perception as well; what was once an experience of Zeus' wrath becomes an experience of the atmospheric discharge of electricity. While these descriptions may indeed describe the same phenomenon, the *experience* of the phenomenon is conditioned by our understanding of it. For this reason, choosing the language of science and rationality over the language of myth has wide-ranging effects that are far more than semantic.

The determination of whether or not the cosmos is rational is not the subject of this study; I emphasize this question because it directly influenced the philosophies of the Presocratics and those who followed them, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Even before Plato and Aristotle presented *reason* as a formal and explicit idea, Presocratic thought was already transforming earlier divine entities into what appear to be abstract concepts or principles.<sup>2</sup> Abstract ideas have their origin in perception; as Seligman has argued, all metaphysical ideas must begin with a concrete presentation.<sup>3</sup> The role of the senses is thus a metaphysical question as well as an epistemological one; both levels of this inquiry will be present in this discussion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, "The Formation of Positivist Thought in Archaic Greece", 378.

<sup>2</sup> Vernant, "The Formation of Positivist Thought in Archaic Greece", 380; Seligman, Paul, *The Apeiron of Anaximander*, Athlone Press, 1962, 6-8, 61.

<sup>3</sup> Seligman, *The Apeiron of Anaximander*, 145.



For Pre-Socratic thinkers such as Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles, the mortal condition is a state of *senselessness*; by the time of Aristotle, sense experience becomes a straightforward, obvious, and transparent phenomenon that must be transcended in order to reach truth. This belief in the transparency of the senses is one of the most significant effects of the new rational attitude; it is in direct opposition to the mythological model, which regards the physical world as manifestation of the divine, and thus of truth.<sup>1</sup> The “oblivion” of human beings that Heraclitus names is a lack of *perception*; he frequently describes mortals as deaf or *asleep*. Thus before Plato and Aristotle, the problem is not escaping the illusions of the senses through thought, but escaping the illusory private world (thinking detached from perception) in order to properly *use* the senses.

The discoveries of psychoanalysis, specifically those of Freud and Jung, allow us to once again confront the irrational elements of existence that Plato and Aristotle tried so hard to expel from philosophy and from the soul. Plato and Aristotle’s rational arguments seem to aim at proving, or sometimes simply *stating*, that these irrational things are not *truly* of the nature of soul, but merely corruptions, taints, and removable blemishes. Like a physician, Plato has diagnosed the disease of the soul: the physical body, and all the sensations that it carries. The method of healing prescribed is a purification that consists in disassociating oneself from the body and the senses, and retreating into a domain of “pure reasoning”, which is identified as the true nature of the soul.<sup>2</sup> The “practice for dying” that Plato recommends is a cauterization of these irrational parts, in order to keep them from infecting the healthy rational soul. This practice seems very different from that

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, “The Formation of Positivist Thought in Archaic Greece”, 380.

<sup>2</sup> *Phaedo*: 66a, though this doctrine runs through the entire dialogue.

of his teacher, Socrates, who went to his death at the command of the god Apollo and his sacred riddling oracle; Socrates' remarks to this end in the *Apology* are distinctly *irrational*.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting that Kahn<sup>2</sup>, as a consistently rational interpreter of Heraclitus, denies the authenticity of fragment 46 (above), but does not provide any reasons for his disagreement with Diels, Wheelwright<sup>3</sup>, and others who consider the fragment to be genuine. *Oiesis* can be translated as “conceit”, as Kahn does, or “bigotry” as Wheelwright does; these translations both reveal that *thinking* or conjecture is the means by which one is bigoted or conceited. This reading is very consistent with other fragments that criticize human thinking, especially fragments 28a and 17.<sup>4</sup> The most important element of fragment 46 is not Heraclitus' criticism of conceited human thinking, but his implication of its *necessity*. Since “*all things* happen in accordance with this logos” (fragment one), the conceit and illusion of mortal opinion must happen by necessity. The passage at the end of the prologue of Parmenides poem also expresses the necessity of *doxa*: “how beliefs based on appearances ought to be believable as they travel all through all there is.”<sup>5</sup> Fragment 46 implies that *doxa* is of divine origin (“sacred”), and serves some kind of sacred purpose. This notion is in direct opposition to Plato's doctrine of the Forms as divine in contrast with *doxa*.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Apology*, for Socrates' service to the riddling god Apollo: 21b, 22a, 38a, 40b. For Socrates as “charmer”, see *Phaedo* 78a.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge, 1979, page 289.

<sup>3</sup> Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, Princeton University Press, 1959.

<sup>4</sup> 28a: What the man who seems most great recognizes and defends is mere imaginings.  
17: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize their own experience, but imagine for themselves.

<sup>5</sup> Parmenides poem, fragment Kingsley's translation in *Reality*.

In Plato's dialogues, but especially in the *Phaedo* where the emphasis is explicitly *reasoning*, what counts as "reasonable" is usually whatever proposition Plato is currently trying to establish. This interlocution method has the effect of creating the illusion of sense and agreement, whether or not Plato's statements are logically consistent. As Cherniss has noted, the opinions of Plato's interlocutors are very purposefully intended to aid him in the developments of his own conclusions. Aristotle's judgments sometimes reveal premises based on preference rather than logic, as the quote from *De Divinatione Per Somnum* that begins this chapter illustrates; what appears to be a rational statement is in fact based in several untenable assumptions: the identity of the "best and wisest", the attitude of the divine towards these alleged "commonplace persons", and Aristotle's own capacity for making these determinations. These assumptions are nowhere called into question, and Aristotle refers to this opinionated statement later in this essay as a "*special proof*" that dreams cannot have their source in the divine.<sup>1</sup> He goes on to dismiss the alleged prophecy as coincidence and chance, relying on the "gambler's maxim"<sup>2</sup> as though this common saying were an argument. Presumably, for Aristotle, the category of the "best and the wisest" includes Aristotle himself; it is very possible that the underlying motivation for this argument is simple egoism—finding no evidence for divine dreams in his own experience, he denies their existence altogether. These examples, especially

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *De Divinatione Per Somnum*, 463b15-20: "A special proof [of their not having been sent by God] is this: the power of foreseeing the future and of having vivid dreams is found in persons of an inferior type, which implies that God does not send their dreams; but merely that all those whose physical temperament is, as it were, garrulous and excitable, see sights of all descriptions; for, inasmuch as they experience many movements of every kind, they just chance to have visions resembling objective facts, their luck in these matters being merely like that of persons who play at even and odd."

<sup>2</sup> Ibid: "If you make many throws your luck must change."

because they come from such rational sources, demonstrate the ease with which irrational elements can disguise themselves as rational.

A demonstration of this masquerade in Aristotle's writings is provided by a circular and fallacious argument that he gives in *De Anima*. Aristotle offers this argument as an objection to the belief in panpsychism, the idea that "soul is intermingled in the whole universe", as many of his Presocratic predecessors believed.<sup>1</sup> While Aristotle appears to make short work of this proposal, the belief that soul is not all-pervasive but located only in animals is a significant diversion from the ideas of his predecessors, and has an incalculably significant effect on his philosophy.<sup>2</sup> This belief in panpsychism "presents some difficulties", says Aristotle, and he goes on to explain the problem:

Why does the soul, when it resides in air or fire, not form an animal...?  
Both possible ways of replying to the former question lead to absurdity or paradox;  
for it is beyond paradox to say that fire or air is an animal,  
and it is absurd to refuse the name of animal to what has soul in it.<sup>3</sup>

This passage reveals Aristotle's preemptive definition of soul as *a thing that forms animals wherever it resides*; this definition already precludes the possibility of panpsychism. Aristotle is not really entertaining the notion that soul is intermingled in the whole universe—he is merely creating the appearance of consideration, followed by dismissal. This appearance, however, is crucial—he is able, through this clever charade, to pretend as though an opinion has been adequately debunked without even approaching the real argument he is claiming to disprove. His definition of soul commits the "persuasive definition" fallacy, and the argument has a circularity to it that is easily

---

<sup>1</sup> For this quote and the argument that follows, see *De Anima* 411a5-16.

<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, in particular

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima*, 411a5-16.

mistaken for sense.<sup>1</sup> In order to reveal the underlying structure, I would like to pair this argument with a passage from the logician Lewis Carroll's great work:

"But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.  
"Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."  
"How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.  
"You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."<sup>2</sup>

The Cheshire Cat's statements reveal an underlying premise—his definition of madness as universally applicable to anyone *here*. His response to Alice has an *obvious* quality to it, a tone of finality that is strangely convincing despite the circular character of his position. As the context of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* implies, the Cat's trick is not a *rational* one, but a *magical* one; the Cat has created the illusion of clarity—his answer, in its inclusiveness of all the former elements of the equation, provides a sense of satisfying completion. The seeming logic of his statement is very convincing, and not only to little girls.

These examples demonstrate that nonsense has a habit of mimicking sense, of sounding infinitely patient and reasonable, of disguising itself in the dress of certainty.<sup>3</sup> Certainty is an illusion because it relies on *uncertain* human methods. Rationality is a fantasy disguised as the dissolution of fantasy. The systematic thought of Aristotle offers us a calculated promise of tidiness and clarity—all the glitches, chasms, and terrors are smoothed over, as though reality's mysteries were nothing but arbitrary wrinkles in the fabric. But as Socrates and Kierkegaard have wisely reminded us, the only certainty available to us is *uncertainty*; any true rationality must accept *this* as its first principle.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on Parmenides' poem for a discussion of *binding* as a technique of magical speech.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Random House, NY, 1982, page 40.

The matter-of-fact tone that Aristotle often adopts conceals an avoidance of the mysterious, paradoxical, and sometimes terrifying irrationality of human existence. There is a very soothing aspect to Aristotle's style, as he confidently lays down the bricks of his system—but we might bear in mind the fate that Oedipus suffered as he tried to “made dark things plain”.<sup>1</sup> The Presocratics that preceded him often used poetic or oracular speech as the vehicle for their message; this style was very deliberate and necessary. Aristotle's writings do not signify a mere shift in literary style, but reveal either his ignorance of or ambivalence towards the *obscure* nature of truth and reality. What Aristotle takes to be incompetence and “stammering”<sup>2</sup> attempts to describe reality are complex statements designed to *demonstrate* reality rather than merely describe it.<sup>3</sup>

A conspicuous example of Aristotle's preference for clarity over obscurity is his appraisal of poetic language.<sup>4</sup> Earlier views prized obscurity and enigma as marks of skill, but Aristotle rejects these in favor of clarity; this shift in the understanding of poetry was both dramatic and influential.<sup>5</sup> His approach to the philosophy of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles was surely conditioned by this desire for *clarity*, as well as his rejection of poetry as a proper philosophical medium. Poetry that is clear does not require imagination; perhaps rationality's injunction against the senses also applies to

---

<sup>1</sup> Sophocles' "Oedipus the King". Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. *Seven Famous Greek Plays*. Modern Library edition, 1950, p126.

<sup>2</sup> Cherniss, 348: "He [Aristotle] felt that all previous theories were "stammering" attempts to express his own system". Cherniss cites the following passages: *De Caelo* 270b16-10, *Meteorol.* 339b27-30, *Politics* 1329b25-30. See also Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 3-4, 18, 48, 174, 208-10, 386-8.

<sup>3</sup> See earlier chapters on logos in Heraclitus, and "Cosmology and Psychoanalysis".

<sup>4</sup> This opinion of poetry began with Plato; E.R. Dodds notes that Plato's attack on poetry as irrational begins in the *Apology* (22a), and also occurs in the *Timaeus* (72a) and throughout the *Republic*. Cited in Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 230.

<sup>5</sup> Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, Princeton, 2004.

imagination. This seems likely when one considers the resemblance between mythological and imaginative thought; they both proceed according to a model of association.

Perhaps the most important premise of rationality is the belief that rational thinking is the only human activity that is capable of grasping truth.<sup>1</sup> This premise is so embedded in philosophy since Plato that it seems absurd to question it. Underlying this premise is the assumption that truth must take a “rational” form—in other words, truth is only manifest in *language*. While this may very well be the case, it is not the case that “language” must necessarily refer only words and speech, especially not for Heraclitus. The senses themselves speak a language; this is the language of *physical existence*. As fragment 107 claims, the soul must understand these sensations *as* a language. Nowhere does Heraclitus imply that thought can operate without reliance on sensation and the physical world. Intelligence, for Heraclitus, is rooted in the senses. The trouble with human beings is not that they are deceived by the senses, but that they are deceived by their *thinking*—specifically when their thinking is not in accord with sense experience:

17: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them,  
nor do they recognize what they experience, but imagine for themselves.

Deception is itself irrational, since it always involves some kind of ambiguity; Plato disregards the deceptive nature of thought because he hopes to quarantine deception in the territory of the body and the senses, and allow thought to rise and separate from

---

<sup>1</sup> By “rational thinking” I mean thinking according to the principles of logic (such as the principle of non-contradiction, etc) and to distinguish it from mythological, magical, or other kinds of thinking that proceed “irrationally” (associatively, sympathetically, etc).

deception as the soul allegedly separates from the body at death. This hope of immortality, and specifically, immortality that does *not* include the irrational parts of human existence, appears at times to be Plato's motivation for his arguments, particularly in the *Phaedo*, where the immortality of the soul is the focus of his discussion. This observation makes it distinctly possible that Plato's doctrine of the Forms could have its basis in the fear of mortality; specifically, in the fear of being identified with the seeming disorder and irrationality of the physical world. In this way, his self-consciously *rational* arguments are steeped in fear and dread—very irrational motivations, though perhaps not unwarranted. While these speculations cannot ever be demonstrated as true or false, any theory that rests upon the nature and meaning of death also remains speculative, given the mystery and uncertainty of death.<sup>1</sup>

Plato's opinion that intelligence is identical to rational thought runs counter to the tradition of mythological thought that preceded it. Many of the "irrational" modes of thought that were stripped away by Plato and Aristotle have returned as theories of psychoanalysis; the idea of the unconscious is perhaps the most striking reversion to this irrationality. As Dodds makes very plain in his excellent study, Greek experience prior to the fifth century was, by modern standards, highly irrational: dreams, religious magic, prophetic madness, and the participation of the gods in mortal life were all common occurrences.<sup>2</sup> As Dodds points out, these kinds of "primitive" elements were excluded from classical scholarship based on the prejudicial supposition that "the Greeks were not savages", but have more recently been acknowledged as genuine components of Ancient

---

<sup>1</sup> In the case of the Forms, "death" is understood as the event in which the body and the soul separate, *Phaedo*, 83d.

<sup>2</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1951.



Greek thought and culture.<sup>1</sup> As Cherniss has argued, the philosophy of Aristotle, particularly his misinterpretation of Presocratic thought, has greatly contributed to this rational bias. In order to contextualize the *return* of the irrational that occurs with the advent of psychoanalytic thought, I would like to focus on a few specific ancient examples of irrationality that Dodds explores, beginning with the strange phenomenon known as *ate*.

In his analysis of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles that begins Homer's *Iliad*, Dodds describes *ate* as "a state of mind—a temporary clouding or bewildering of normal consciousness."<sup>2</sup> *Ate* is a case of what we might call divine intervention; it is the incursion of a seemingly foreign agency into one's thoughts and behavior. As Dodds observes, this description bears an interesting resemblance to the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious; "un-systematized, nonrational impulses, and the acts resulting from them, tend to be excluded from the self and ascribed to an alien origin."<sup>3</sup> In the Homeric literature, and in the tragedies of Sophocles, these forces are "endowed with a life and energy of their own, and so can force a man, as it were from the outside, into conduct foreign to him."<sup>4</sup> This type of *daemonic* agency, which is clearly supernatural in the earlier Greek texts, is completely transformed by Plato in the *Timaeus* when he identifies this *daemonic* element of the soul with "the element of pure reason in man."<sup>5</sup> The mysterious phenomenon of *ate*, believed by the Ancients to be sent by Zeus as a *deception*, is rationalized as a simple evasion of responsibility—but, as Dodds

---

<sup>1</sup> Dodds, viii. The works of Vernant and Kingsley also emphasize this point.

<sup>2</sup> Dodds, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Dodds, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Dodds, 41. There is a close parallel between this description and what Freud classifies as "the psychopathology of everyday life".

<sup>5</sup> Dodds, 42-3. *Timaeus* 90a-c.

observes, both Agamemnon *and* Achilles consider Agamemnon's irrational behavior as ordained by Zeus and yet still entirely Agamemnon's responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

Another very prominent example of the irrational in Greek experience is the nature of dreams, and their alleged supernatural origin. Dodds devotes a chapter of his book to this dream-experience, and anyone acquainted with the Homeric literature is familiar with the prominent place of dreams in the lives of the Ancients; prophetic dreams, visitations from divinities, and dream-oracles were common. The practice of incubation, which is associated with Parmenides as an *iatromantis*, and with the cult of Asclepius in general, reveals a strong connection between dreams and healing. While this is now a recognized element of psychoanalytic treatment, this understanding was seemingly lost for thousands of years, covered over by the tendency to privilege rationality and deny the irrational parts of the human psyche. The works of Aristotle, regarded as a long-awaited departure from the earlier "primitive" views, are largely responsible for the dismissal of these earlier modes of thinking, particularly in the realm of dreams.

In his work "On Dreams", Aristotle begins with an assumption about the nature of intelligence—the same assumption that Plato made in separating reason from the senses.

Aristotle begins this essay by asking to which of the faculties of the soul dreams present

---

<sup>1</sup> Dodds, 3: Achilles says, in Book 9, "Let the son of Atreus go to his doom and not disturb me, for Zeus the counselor took away his understanding"; therefore it is "Achilles' view of the matter as much as Agamemnon's; and in the famous words which introduce the story of the Wrath—"the plan of Zeus was fulfilled"—we have a strong hint that it is also the poet's view." Dodds offers convincing evidence that this is no mere figure of speech, but is a realistic portrayal of commonly held opinions on the nature of such "psychic interventions" as *ate* and *menos*.

themselves, whether to “the faculty of intelligence *or* the faculty of sense-perception.”<sup>1</sup> This same assumption begins his Book Alpha of the *Metaphysics*, where he concludes “clearly, then, wisdom is rational knowledge concerning certain basic factors and principles”.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle’s argument against the intelligence of the senses is the same argument that he used to deny the divine origin of dreams: “sense perception is common to all, and therefore easy, and not a mark of the wise man.”<sup>3</sup> There is a very important difference between *wisdom* and intelligence; only rational intelligence separates human beings from other animals.<sup>4</sup> This kind of intelligence is seemingly, for Aristotle, the only kind deserving of serious inquiry, he considers sense perception to be self-evident in that no one can see without recognizing that he is seeing, or hear without recognizing that he is hearing.<sup>5</sup> But as we have seen in Heraclitus’ fragments,<sup>6</sup> human beings do not necessarily use the senses properly in that what is “obvious” is often mistaken or missed entirely. This is not a mere lack of attention or perceptual illusion, but a failure to recognize that sensation must be *learned*—when Heraclitus speaks of “listening” he does not mean this only metaphorically, he also means it literally. The shift that occurs between the Presocratics on the one hand, and Plato and Aristotle on the other, has been described as a movement from *muthos* to *logos*, from a mythological understanding of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *De Somniis*, 458b.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a11-13.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980b21: “all animals except man live by what they perceive”.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170a30: “someone who sees perceives that he sees; one who hears perceives that he hears...so that is we are perceiving, we perceive that we are perceiving, and if we are understanding, we perceive that we are understanding.”

<sup>6</sup> See especially fragments 1, 17, 56, 71-3, and 107.

world to a rational one; an important element of this change is the shift of emphasis from the senses to thought.<sup>1</sup>

In order to examine this historical movement from the mythological to the rational, we must begin with some observations about the nature of intelligence. Our epistemological premises will determine our conclusions. If we define intelligence as the capacity for understanding, and understanding as only possible through rational thought (like Aristotle), then we will naturally conclude that the senses have no intelligence, but only seem to reflect intelligence when thought is added to them. In other words, the senses are not conscious, according to the rational model. After all, we share them with animals, who have only become conscious, in human estimation, fairly recently. Our identification with *thinking* as consciousness becomes, even more drastically, an identification of thinking with the *self*; but we must keep in mind that as modern thinkers, we are conditioned by Descartes' *cogito* in a way that Presocratic thinkers were not.

Since thought relies on language for its content; according to this model, intelligence is only possible in creatures with language—thus intelligence is strictly *rational*. Awareness—at least awareness with any *intelligent* purpose—is considered, beginning with Aristotle, as purely dependent upon the ability to reason. This judgment excludes non-human animals, children, and “inferior persons” from a share of intelligence; this opinion is common in the writings of Aristotle. The minds of “commonplace persons”, says Aristotle, are “not given to thinking, but, as it were, [are] derelict, or totally vacant.”<sup>2</sup> This model of intelligence is precisely the one ascribed to by

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially Vernant, “The Reason Of Myth”, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, Zone Books, NY, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *De Divinatione Per Somnum*, 464a20-24.

Aristotle, in opposition to the beliefs of many of his predecessors, who believed, like Empedocles, that “everything has a share in awareness.”<sup>1</sup>

The concept of “consciousness” has developed out of this privileging of *thought* as the sole bearer of intelligence, and is very strategically applied to the awareness of human beings, but may not be scientifically ascribed to any other form of life. As Freud has pointed out, this prejudice is somewhat hypocritical, since, after all, we only ascribe consciousness to other human beings as an *inference* from our own experience. In his essay “The Unconsciousness”, Freud describes this process of inference; his careful phenomenology provides us insight into the nature of understanding:

“Without any special reflection we impute to everyone else our own constitution and therefore also our consciousness, and that this identification is a necessary condition of understanding in us. This conclusion—or identification—was formerly extended by the ego to other human beings, to animals, plants, inanimate matter and to the world at large... Today, our judgment is already in doubt on the question of consciousness in animals; we refuse to admit it in plants and we relegate to mysticism the assumption of its existence in inanimate matter. But even where the original tendency to identification has withstood criticism—that is, when the non-ego is our fellow man—the assumption of a consciousness in him rests upon an inference and cannot share the direct certainty we have of our own consciousness.”<sup>2</sup>

I have quoted Freud at some length because there are several points of interest in his analysis, that have direct bearing on this discussion of rationality, particularly the questions raised about the nature of intelligence. First of all, he has here demonstrated that the belief in panpsychism is no less rational than the belief that only human beings are conscious since both of these beliefs are based upon the same inference. The difference between them is merely the identification that occurs between the thinking subject and her world; if she cannot identify with an animal, plant, or inanimate matter,

---

<sup>1</sup> Empedocles, fragment 110, Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, “The Unconscious”, *General Psychological Theory*, 121.

then she will not ascribe consciousness to them. This model also illustrates the reason that a sociopath would not understand that other people are also conscious, presumably due to her inability to identify with other persons. The inferences undertaken in this thought process rest on this identification, which is not strictly rational, although the conclusions that result from the inference are passed off as such. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Aristotle considered the “wisest” to consist of men that he could identify with, those who were most like himself.<sup>1</sup>

Another important element of this analysis is Freud’s observation that “we impute to everyone else our own constitution”; this is precisely the description offered by Cherniss for many of Aristotle’s misreadings of the Presocratics—he only referred to them in order to find his own theories within their ideas.<sup>2</sup> “This attitude, though often unconscious and never so openly stated, can be parallel in philosophers of all ages”<sup>3</sup>; though this attitude cannot be entirely avoided, one might guard against its grosser effects by becoming consciously aware of this human tendency. This attitude on the part of Aristotle is conspicuously evident in his appraisal of the divine origin of dreams; it is dismissed because his own experience does not offer evidence for the divine origin of dreams. Similarly, his description of the “wisest” person is ostensibly a self-description: “these, then, are the assumptions we entertain concerning wisdom and the wise. But, of the traits specified, that of knowing totally must be his whose knowledge forms a systematic whole; for in a way he knows something about any given subject.”<sup>4</sup> This

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Metaphysics* 982a25, 982b15, discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Cherniss, *Aristotle on the Presocratics*, 348-9.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a.

procedure of knowing about “any given subject” is demonstrated by his corpus to be that of Aristotle himself, as he thought of himself as a wise man.

The effect of his arguments about the nature of knowledge in *Metaphysics* Alpha is to locate wisdom as far from the senses as possible; before men became true philosophers, they were first occupied with “difficulties close at hand”, and as they *progressed*, they began to study more “difficult” subjects that “are farthest removed from the senses.”<sup>1</sup> We are confronted here with what appears to be a rational argument, but if we look closely at his assumed premises, we see that underlying his determinations about the nature of intelligence is a blatant anthropomorphism and effected superiority to other forms of life, including “inferior persons”.<sup>2</sup> This attitude has historically been expressed in many forms, both scientific and religious<sup>3</sup>; Freud’s concept of the human “instincts” was initially distasteful because it implied that human beings and animals shared some attributes of consciousness, bringing humans down to the level of “brutes”.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Aristotle’s description of human beings as “rational animals”, implying our monopoly on *language*, has been invalidated by recent studies that demonstrably prove complex animal language patterns.<sup>5</sup> Of course, these studies are met with the response

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 982a25, 982b15.

<sup>2</sup> *Meta.* 982a; Women: *NE* 1162a19-27; Slaves: *Politics* 4-7, 13, and *NE* 1095b19, 1118a25, 1126a8, 1128a21, 1177a8, 1179b10; Children: *NE* 1100a1, *Rhet.* 1384b23

<sup>3</sup> Compare the Book of Genesis’ proscribed dominion over the earth, which has been frequently used as an argument for cruelty and irresponsibility towards other forms of life; this argument is an extrapolation from Genesis 2:15, NIV *Bible*.

<sup>4</sup> Developments in what is now called “cognitive ethology” address this question, and the anthropomorphic attitudes that have generally accompanied scientific research in this area; see especially Donald R. Griffin, *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness*, University of Chicago, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Dolphins: Herman, L. M., Richards, D. G. & Wolz, J. P. (1984), Rendell, L. & Whitehead, H. (2001), Sayigh, L.S., Tyack, P.L., Wells, R.S. & Scott, M.D. (1990),

that surely these *animal* languages are not as complex as that of humans; this predictable attitude is motivated by the terror caused by the simple realization that human beings are animals, despite all of our disguises and dressings. The avoidance of this simple truth is evident in the human fear and avoidance of *irrationality*, and accounts for the division of the soul along these lines, particularly in Plato and Aristotle.<sup>1</sup> Irrational elements of the world and of human nature are those that are perceived as resistant to human control. They bring human beings into contact with forces that seem more powerful than themselves. This division of the soul into rational and irrational is only possible if the senses, along with the body, are sundered from the realm of thought and reason. Ironically, this *rational* division may be motivated by *fear*, a distinctly irrational human experience.

The misunderstanding of Presocratic ideas caused by Aristotle's assumption that human beings are *aware* of their own sensation is quite substantial, and rests largely on his opinion that the faculties of sensation are of a *lower* order than intellectual faculties. As Cherniss has argued, "the use to which in his writings Aristotle has put the Presocratic theories has not only perverted details but has also obliterated the problems these theories had to meet and obscured the relationship of the doctrines to one another."<sup>2</sup> The fragments of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles share one prevalent theme: human beings do not know how to use their senses. The incomprehension associated with this senseless state implies that the senses themselves provide some kind of *intelligence*, at

---

Schusterman, R. J. & Gisiner, R. (1988); Birds: Pepperberg, I.M. (1999); Primates: Plooj, F.X. (1978), Lenneberg, E.H. (1971), Rumbaugh Duane M. (1980).

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Republic*, Bk IV, especially 439b-440a; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1144a1, 1145a3, 1166a16, 1168b30, 1178a2.

<sup>2</sup> Cherniss, *Aristotle on the Presocratics*, 404.



least insofar as one who uses the senses is *aware* rather than *oblivious*. Aristotle's overconfidence in this regard has concealed the radical disconnection from reality described by these thinkers as the mortal condition. While Aristotle turns our attention to that which is "farthest removed" from the senses, these Presocratic thinkers were continually directing our attention to them.

Our failure to recognize the true nature of the senses results in alienation; it is the deaf and blind daze that Parmenides describes, and is the paradoxical absence in presence that Heraclitus' fragment 34 names.<sup>1</sup> In this state, akin to *sleep* for Heraclitus, human beings are helpless to *reason* about anything and their claims to knowledge are somewhat ridiculous. They are *akrita phula*; "indistinguishable undistinguishing crowds", as Parmenides describes.<sup>2</sup> Empedocles also addresses this helpless mortal oblivion; since human beings do not open their *palms* but allow them to remain "narrow and closed in".<sup>3</sup> The *reason* that human beings imagine that they are using is merely their own preference for familiarity. In the words of Empedocles:

During their lifetimes they see such a little part of life and then they are off: short-lived, flying up and away like smoke; totally persuaded by whatever each of them happened to bump into while being driven one way, another way, all over the place. And they claim in vain that they have found the whole. Like this, there is no way that people can see or hear or consciously grasp the things I have to teach. But as for you, because you have come aside here, you will learn: mortal metis can manage no more.<sup>4</sup>

"Rational" arguments can have their source in human motivations that are transparently irrational or egoistic, as the examples in this chapter demonstrate. The *conceit* of imagining that one has found the whole results in devastation, or at the very

---

<sup>1</sup> 34: Uncomprehending, they hear like the deaf. The saying is their witness: absent while present.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides' poem, Kingsley's translation in *Reality*.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment 2, Kingsley's translation in *Reality*.

<sup>4</sup> Fragment 2, Kingsley's translation in *Reality*.

least, disappointment; in this regard, the *sense* that human beings believe they possess is literally *nonsense*. If human beings are “totally persuaded by whatever each of them happened to bump into”; the conclusions reached by such creatures would be arbitrary and irrational. Empedocles prescribes a “coming aside”, which implies giving up this destructive mortal *conceit*. Even so, Heraclitus and Parmenides seem to imply that these flawed human opinions are *necessary*; as hubris leads to justice, the illusions of *doxa* present truth.

## **Conflict of Opposites**

*They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow or the lyre.*

*Heraclitus*

*Consciousness requires as its necessary counterpart a dark, latent, non-manifest side, the unconscious, whose presence can be known only by the light of consciousness.*

*Carl Jung*

*“Rational” thought tends to ignore the ambivalent or extreme notions that play so important a part in myth. Rational thought avoids the associations by means of contrast and does not couple or unite opposites or proceed through a series of upheavals. On the principle of non-contradiction and unanimity, it condemns all modes that proceed from an ambiguous or equivocal basis.*

*J.P. Vernant*

*For anyone accustomed to the world of the Presocratics and also to the world of modern science and cosmology, it is difficult not to notice how the second of these realms appears to be moving closer and closer to the first with its increasing appeal to bold paradox, to the simple but also the enigmatic and –dare one say it—the mythological.*

*Peter Kingsley*

The conflict of opposites holds an essential place in the works of Heraclitus, and this chapter will be an analysis of this structure and its relation to the psyche. Throughout the fragments, Heraclitus draws parallels between the psychic and the physical world, and implies that these share the same structure. Comparing the archaic uses of psyche dating back to Homer with modern psychoanalytic models of the psyche, this chapter will demonstrate that *tension*—such a central idea to Heraclitus—is the glue that holds the psyche, as it holds the opposites, together. The nature of *paradox*, which is so consistently evident in Heraclitus’ fragments, is this tension between opposing forces; following this analysis, the psyche and the physical world must share a paradoxical structure. In this case, mythological modes of thinking, that do not reject paradox and

apparent contradiction, will prove to be more appropriately applied to Heraclitus' thought than rational modes.

Although his fragments seem to repel any certain categorization or grouping, commentators usually assemble Heraclitus' fragments into clusters, according to topic. This practice is extremely misleading because it isolates Heraclitus' sayings into a kind of box-formation, while the underlying structure of his fragments more closely resembles a web. Several thoughtful commentators, such as Charles Kahn, recognize this topical grouping as arbitrary, but this categorization, nonetheless, has an effect on the reader. The groupings that any commentator decides upon are not arbitrary at all; they reflect the associative patterns of the commentator's own psyche.

Given the nature of language and especially the divisive nature of rationality, this kind of patterning is inevitable; we can, however, become conscious of this process. Heraclitus' fragments are a means of reflecting the psyche back onto itself, and this process of categorization is one of the ways in which this is done. I would like to begin this discussion of psyche by examining once more the issue of Heraclitus' subject: he seems at times to be describing the physical world, the cosmos, while in other places he appears to be commenting on human nature or the psyche. This appearance has created the biggest schism in the traditional categorization of Heraclitus' work. Just as Empedocles has been considered to have his "scientific poem" and his "religious poem", kept carefully separate by traditional scholarship, Heraclitus is imagined to be remarking here on the psyche, and there on the physical world. This misunderstanding might be better corrected after a brief foray into the strange world of alchemy.

Carl Jung recognized in the alchemical tradition some of the very same images that he encountered in his psychoanalytic practice; the symbols that appear in alchemy are symbols that he had become quite familiar with as archetypes of the collective unconscious. Whether or not the practitioners of alchemy were conscious of the full meaning of their art, alchemy and its symbols present a very cogent reflection of the psyche. As Jung points out, alchemy seemed on the surface to be concerned with matter and the physical world, which is why it was so persistently misunderstood as a foolish attempt at making gold. Careful study of the works of some known alchemists would very quickly correct this assumption, for example, through the scientific thought of Francis Bacon, or Goethe's *Faust*. In order to understand Heraclitus' fragments, particularly his emphasis on the conflict of opposites, we must investigate the relation of the psyche to the physical world.

The conflict of opposites seemed to Jung to be such a fundamental structure of the psyche, that he devoted an entire study to this phenomenon. In this work, *Mysterium Coniunctionis, An Inquiry Into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy*, Jung remarks "despite the complete absence of any psychology, the alchemical projections sketch a picture of certain fundamental psychological facts and, as it were, reflect them in matter. One of these fundamental facts is the primary pair of opposites, consciousness and unconsciousness, whose symbols are Sol and Luna."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the psyche is reflected back to itself by appearing to be manifest in matter; in this way, alchemists and scientists alike can proceed as though they are studying matter, while they are actually studying psychic structure and process (inseparable and indistinguishable

---

<sup>1</sup> Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, Collected Works of Jung, Princeton University Press, 1970, p.106.

from matter).<sup>1</sup> This formulation does not only apply to the art of alchemy, but also to the practices of modern science; to this end, Jung repeatedly compares the study of psychic process to the study of physics, revealing the consistently analogous theoretical methods between physics and psychoanalysis. In the time of Heraclitus, no argument would have been needed to bridge these disciplines.

If the study of the physical world reveals the psyche through reflection, then the relation between the psyche and the world is one of *projection*. Although this relation has been noticed by several thinkers, such as Feuerbach, Freud and Emerson, the extent of this projection has not been understood. Jung is suggesting that the experience of reality, and of the ego, consists of projections that originate in the unconscious. This idea has precedent in Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles; these Pre-Socratic thinkers all claimed that human beings did not know how to use their senses, and that what humans call perception is in fact projection:

Heraclitus: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize their own experience, but imagine for themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Parmenides: But then I hold you back as well from the one [path] that mortals fabricate, twin-heads, knowing nothing for helplessness in their chests is what steers their wandering minds as they are carried along in a daze, deaf and blind at the same time: indistinguishable, undistinguishing crowds who reckon that being and non-being are the same but not the same...  
And don't let much-experienced habit force you to guide your sightless eye and echoing ear and tongue along this way...<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The so-called problem of the observer, so integral to the study of physics, has its source in this original relation. This problem is essentially one of psychic influence—the omnipresence of psyche. In order for any scientific study to take place, however, this problem is essentially bracketed; consequently, no observations can be rightfully called 'objective', since no observation lacks psyche.

<sup>2</sup> Fragment 17

<sup>3</sup> Parmenides' poem, fragment 6, Kingsley's translation.

Empedocles: Palms—so narrow and closed in—have been poured over people’s limbs.  
But countless worthless things keep crashing in, blunting their cares.  
During their lifetimes they see such a little part of life and then they are off: short-lived,  
flying up and away like smoke, totally persuaded by whatever each of them happen to  
bump into while being driven one way, another way, all over the place.<sup>1</sup>

In Heraclitus’ fragment 17, thinking and experience are mere imagining, *dokein*;  
all that most human beings are capable of is *seeming*. Thus what mortals perceive to be  
physical reality takes on the dimension of *imagination*. This idea is vividly present in  
Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, but Aristotle’s blunt certainty of his own awareness of  
sensation persuaded us that we are already out of the cave. He states:

Now someone who sees perceives that he sees; one who hears perceives that he hears;  
one who walks perceives that he walks; and similarly in the other cases also there is some  
[element] that perceives that we are active; so that is we are perceiving, we perceive that  
we are perceiving, and if we are understanding, we perceive that we are understanding.<sup>2</sup>

There is no longer any question regarding our own awareness of sensation; it is  
taken as completely obvious and requiring no further investigation—but what seems  
*obvious* to human beings is precisely what these Presocratics are warning us about.

Parmenides mentions the “fabrication” of mortals who are deaf, blind, and  
undistinguishing; these mortals are being *forced* by habit, helpless in their senseless state.  
Empedocles echoes this passage when he says that mortals are being *driven* all over the  
place—but instead of the force described by Parmenides, Empedocles mentions  
*persuasion*. These parallel passages reveal a subtle play between Empedocles’ and  
Parmenides’ poems; force and persuasion are opposite forces, masculine and feminine  
powers, respectively. And just as Parmenides invokes the famous chariot race in the Iliad,

---

<sup>1</sup> Empedocles, Fragment 2.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170a30.

Empedocles here offers an image of a chariot out of control, being driven all over the place, indiscriminately bumping into things.<sup>1</sup> I will take up these ideas of force and persuasion in the context of Aphrodite in the chapter that follows.

All of these texts have in common a very specific picture of mortal perception; human beings do not know how to use the senses, but only imagine that they do. Heraclitus' repeated use of the image of *sleep* reveals this same mortal state, of one who is asleep yet dreaming he is awake. As I will explore in more detail later, this description will provide a parallel to the language of Freud and psychoanalysis, which describes the world of the Unconscious as a substitution of psychic for external reality, and *sleep* as analogous to psychosis, in the absence of sense perception. The world of sleep and of the Unconscious is irrational, and Presocratic thought recognized this dimension as integral to the psyche of human beings.

The rationality inaugurated by Aristotle has had a tremendous effect on the transmission and understanding of Pre-Socratic texts; until very recently, with the advent of quantum physics, Aristotelian logic was the unquestioned ground of scientific thought. This tendency affected many other disciplines of study, culminating in our modern belief that *only* scientific thought is valid. The ancient understanding of the coincidence between matter and psyche was dismissed as primitive and inferior to the modern Cartesian conception of mind and body. One problem that the hyper-specialization of our modern disciplines has created is the lack of communication between fields; while

---

<sup>1</sup> For Parmenides' Homeric reference to the chariot race, Kingsley, *Reality*, 221- 224. The poem of Empedocles, with its epic structure, contains many other Homeric parallels; these are all annotated in Diels' edition of Empedocles. For a study of this Homeric language in Empedocles, see Kingsley's *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, especially 26- 8, 42- 5, 52- 3, 223- 4, and 247.



modern physics may be amending its former dualistic theories, philosophical thought (including psychology) lags behind. As Peter Kingsley has observed:

There is no excusing classical scholars today for ignoring the developments in scientific theory and practice throughout the twentieth century, and continuing to pursue their own specialized interests apparently unaware of the fact that many people at the forefront of contemporary science are no longer able to accept that distinguishing between mind and matter represents a genuine approach to reality—let alone an achievement—or that the basic Aristotelian dictum of the ‘excluded middle’ (that something either is x or is not x, but cannot be both simultaneously) necessarily holds good. For anyone accustomed to the world of the Presocratics and also to the world of modern science and cosmology, it is difficult not to notice how the second of these realms appears to be moving closer and closer to the first with its increasing appeal to bold paradox, to the simple but also the enigmatic and –dare one say it—the mythological.<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind, I would like to begin approaching Heraclitus’ use of *psyche* by examining the older Homeric uses of the word.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 8-9.

## Psyche in Ancient Greek Thought—from Homer to Heraclitus

The concept of *psyche* is problematic because it describes, in Homer, the part of the human that leaves after death, like a wraith or a ghost.<sup>1</sup> Before the time of Plato, it is used to describe the self, or one's life; Dodds writes, "the psyche is spoken of as the seat of courage, of passion, of pity, of anxiety, of animal appetite, but before Plato seldom if ever as the seat of reason; its range is broadly that of the Homeric *thumos*."<sup>2</sup> To view the *psyche* as the soul, distinct from the body, carries along a lot of modern conceptual baggage; post-Platonic philosophy asks what the relation of the soul is to the body, or to the mind, while this division was not evident in Presocratic thought.

Heraclitus' use of *psyche* is confusing because he treats it alternately as an element of cosmology, as a human capacity for language, and on at least one occasion, as a faculty of *smell*. The meaning of *psyche*, then, is not bound to be a plain and direct definition, but an ambiguous interplay of elements. While the term *psyche* seems to have had a more specific meaning in the Homeric literature, Heraclitus' use of the word *psyche* is just as diverse as his use of *logos*. These four fragments demonstrate the breadth of the concept of *psyche*, as it is found in the fragments:

36: For it is death to souls to become water, and death to water to become earth. But water comes from earth; and from water, soul.

45: You will not find out the limits of the soul by going even if you travel over every way so deep is its logos.

98: Souls smell in Hades.

107: Eyes and ears are poor witnesses for men if their souls do not understand the language.

---

<sup>1</sup> Onians, R.B., *The Origins of European Thought*, Cambridge, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 139.

The oldest references to psyche, found in Homer and Hesiod, characterize it as a *ghost*, or phantom. This is significant because it invokes the guest, or the stranger; which, as both modern psychoanalytic and ancient texts agree, is the appearance of the same in the disguise of the other. Uncanny experiences or experiences of doubling are associated with ghosts, since they seem to manifest a substitute or reflection of the real, or living person. Burnet remarks that psyche “remains something mysterious and uncanny, quite apart from normal consciousness.”<sup>1</sup> While Dodds is hesitant to accept this description, he does say that the psyche often “is credited with a kind of non-rational intuition.”<sup>2</sup>

Vernant studies this phenomenon of the double in some detail in his essay “The Figuration of the Invisible and the Psychological Category of the Double: the Kolossos”. The kolossos is a double of a human being, used either for burial purposes or the swearing of oaths. In the case of burial, it is an unshaped stone used in place of the dead person’s missing body, and has the effect of binding the person’s psyche to that place. In the swearing of oaths, the kolossoi are made of wax and thrown into a fire; the breaker of his oath swears to be liquefied, along with all of his descendants. “In both cases, however, the kolossos—as a double—appears to be associated with the *psyche*. It is one of the forms that the *psyche*—as a power from beyond—can adopt when it makes itself visible to human beings.”<sup>3</sup> After this description of the uses of kolossoi and their relation to the psyche, Vernant makes a very significant observation about the category of the double in Greek thought and experience. I quote him at some length to profit from the full import of his analysis:

---

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 139.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> J.P. Vernant, *Myth and Thought Among the Ancient Greeks*, Zone Books, NY, 2006, page 325.

For the Greeks, therefore, the kolossos and the psyche are closely related. They fall within a category of very clearly defined phenomena to which the term *eidola* was applied. As well as the psyche, which is a shade, and the kolossos, which is a crudely formed idol, this category includes the dream-image (*oneiros*), the shade (*skia*), and the supernatural apparition (*phasma*). These phenomena, which seem to us so disparate, are unified in the sense that within the cultural context of archaic Greece they are all apprehended in the same way by the mind and thus take on a similar significance. It is therefore justifiable, where they are concerned, to speak of a true psychological category—the double—which presupposes a different mental organization from our own. A double is completely different from an image. It is not a “natural” object, nor is it simply a product of the mind. It is not an imitation of a real object, an illusion of the mind, or a creation of thought. For the person who sees it, the double is an external reality, but one whose peculiar character, in its very appearance, sets it in opposition to familiar objects and to the ordinary surroundings of life. It exists simultaneously on two contrasting planes: just when it shows itself to be present, it also reveals itself to be not of this world and as belonging to some other, inaccessible sphere.<sup>1</sup>

This “different mental organization from our own” is distinctly irrational. For anything to be in two places at once, or to be two things simultaneously, is to break the first and most foundational rule of rationality—the principle of non-contradiction. The very existence of psyche is evidence of the ambiguity and paradox at the heart of early Greek thought. This idea of the double was later transformed by Plato, particularly in the *Sophist*, where he makes the image into an *imitation*, excluding it from the status of reality; this dualism presents us with two distinct *levels* of reality: being and seeming.<sup>2</sup> I doing so, Plato is breaking the logical law set down by Parmenides—that there is no such thing as non-being, and anything that can be thought or spoken of must exist. In essence, Plato makes what was once merely *other* into something *unreal*. His conflation of *mimesis* with *eidola* results in the disappearance of this category of the double, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid

<sup>2</sup> For a complete discussion of this transformation, see Vernant, “The Birth of Images”, *Mortals and Immortals*, Princeton University Press, 1991.

accounts for subsequent importations of rationality into what was originally a mythological understanding.<sup>1</sup>

This description of the double, particularly in its relation to psyche, bears an interesting resemblance to the nature of language. Just as the psyche is a ghost or phantom, language appears as *trace*; Derrida's concept of *differance* attests to this phenomenon. It is significant that Derrida cites Heraclitus when clarifying this concept—he mentions the “one differing from itself” in Heraclitus' fragment 51.<sup>2</sup> Language, like psyche, has an ambiguous presence—it manifests as the presence of absence. Heraclitus himself links psyche to logos explicitly in fragment 45, and implicitly in fragment 107 (above); this relation of soul to language is the crux of this dissertation. Language constitutes the bridge, or medium that soul pervades. Soul can be described as a kind of *ether*, because it is all-pervasive and takes on the form of every thing; it is the formless.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For Plato's consistent replacement of mythological ideas with rational ones, see his comments in the *Timaeus* about the “teller of myths”, his criticism of the “pure imitators” in the *Sophist*, and his general denigration of myth and mimesis throughout the *Republic* (597e, 598d2-6, 599a2-3, 601b11, etc.) See also Kingsley's *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* for an account of the blatant dismissal and covering-over of mythological premises by Aristotle.

<sup>2</sup> 51: They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow or the lyre. Derrida makes reference to the “one differing from itself” in “Differance”, *Margins of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> For a very interesting parallel to this idea in the language of physics, see Einstein's essay *Ether and the Theory of Relativity*, where he describes the essential mystery of physics: how do the gravitational field and the electromagnetic field coexist; and specifically, is the existence of the electromagnetic field *necessary* or contingent and arbitrary? The conceptual problem is essentially one of reconciling an apparent dualism with the observed unity of the physical field. In this essay, Einstein demonstrates how the existence of *ether* is the only viable explanation that is able to explain the behavior of light, and explains how this discovery caused modern physics to abandon a mechanical theory of action at a distance. The *ether* is essentially a medium that *allows* matter to have weight, and the smallest particles to carry an electrical charge.

In this way, soul is divine; divinity, like soul, is the coincidence of opposites. As Heraclitus says in fragment 67:

67: The god: day and night winter and summer war and peace satiety and hunger.  
It alters, as when mixed with perfumes,  
it gets named according to the pleasure of each one.

But Heraclitus also says “it is death for souls to become water” and his poetic play upon the word *ginesthai* in fragment 36 implies that death and birth are linked by the soul; we could very roughly read this line as “it is death for souls to birth water”.<sup>1</sup> The speech-act is “birthing water” in that it seems to initiate a flow or a channel between two apparently disparate points; language is a *bridge*, which is why it is commonly conceived of as the means of communication. But once this speech-act happens, once the words are spoken, they seem to die; they seem to dissolve in the air. In this way, speech is a stand-in or a substitute for my own death. Speech is the activity of mortality *deferring* its own mortality.<sup>2</sup> Soul is thus both mortal and immortal, since its own activity is the bridging of these two poles.

Words seem to dissolve after they are spoken. But this dissolution is only apparent, for language is carried through the ether as electricity is carried through a conductor. Like lightning, language is carried through the ether with the swiftness of Apollo’s arrows. The epithet for Apollo, “far-shooter”, is the Greek *Hekatatois*; language is the link between Apollo, god of oracles, and Hekate, the goddess who oversees the transmissions between the divine and mortals. This *ether*, or world-soul, as in the *Timaeus*, is the receptacle, the medium, the sibyl and the divine Feminine united in

---

<sup>1</sup> For another example of Heraclitus’ play on *ginesthai*, see fragments 20 and 76.

<sup>2</sup> In “Differance”, Derrida uses both senses of this word: differ and defer.

Hekate.<sup>1</sup> In this way, language is inseparable from psyche, since the *logos* is both all-pervasive and treacherously ambiguous. The *doubling* that Heraclitus consistently invokes through his use of language belongs to this “psychological category of the double” observed by Vernant. Heraclitus’ strange and seemingly inconsistent use of the term *psyche* becomes comprehensible when we take this “different mental organization” into account; mythological and irrational thought are not *illogical*, they merely lack the rationality that we mistakenly equate with logic. The source of modern logic is Parmenides, and he belonged to this mythological mode of thought, as the poetic and epic nature of his poem clearly attest. In order to approach the works of these Presocratics, then, we must enter the domain of irrationality—what modern psychoanalysis calls the Unconscious.

---

<sup>1</sup> See “Conclusions”.

## Psychoanalysis and Psyche

*The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes perfect harmony, and all things come to pass through conflict.*

*Heraclitus*

Since the psyche is the *place* of all awareness and experience, the encounter of the self with its other is precisely this tension of the conscious mind encountering the Unconscious. This encounter with the other has appeared in various forms; as Vernant outlined in his essay on the *double*, psyche itself contains the presence of the other. In modern philosophy, it has been described as an encounter with *other people* (Sartre), or as an encounter with the divine, a realm that is wholly other (Levinas). If conscious experience consists in large part of projection and imagination, and all experience is mediated through psyche, then the *other* that consciousness encounters is always an unrecognized part of itself. Freud calls this phenomenon “the uncanny”, since it is at once familiar and alien; Kristeva develops this in more detail in her work *Strangers to Ourselves*. I will be examining this phenomenon as the continual *event* of the psyche encountering itself, using the works of Heraclitus and his repeated observations about mortal obliviousness in the face of immediately accessible reality. Following Heraclitus, I will also explore the role of language in this encounter.

Just as Derrida uses the concept of *differance* to demonstrate the play of presence and absence, which is the *between* of the conscious and the unconscious; the alterity of the unconscious is never made present as itself, but *deferred*. Freud calls this an “economic detour”, and it is also a relation to this impossible presence, the death



instinct.<sup>1</sup> The pleasure principle and the reality principle enact this postponement of satisfaction by transferring the insatiable into an object, externalizing it. The unconscious is only present as *trace*, and Derrida marks Heraclitus' fragment 51, as the *hen diapheron heautoi*, the one differing from itself.<sup>2</sup> The one differing from itself, the stranger, is the Unconscious.

This analysis will be both mythological in nature and psychological in character, following Jung and his discovery of the collective unconscious. Rather than asserting the collective unconscious as a purely abstract or 'spiritual' idea, Jung describes it as a pattern (logos) of psychic experience that is integral to human life; it is, in this sense, *biological*. According to this model, images find their source in mythology and in modern culture because these both have their origin in the unconscious mind, the realm of the invisible psyche. The consistency of mythological themes, motifs, and images despite significant differences in time and culture provide ample and convincing evidence for the collective unconscious as a *model*.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, comparative readings and analysis of archetypal images from disparate places are not anachronistic, but provide a deeper meaning owing to their consistency, particularly in the study of the psyche.

The conscious and the unconscious realms are conceived as a unity because they exist within an individual; conceptually, they must be a unity, or we would no longer be able to call a person an 'individual'. However, if Jung is right in describing certain

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Differance", page 19.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 22.

<sup>3</sup> As Jung often cautions, we cannot know the unconscious directly, and our mediated experiences with it provide only enough to inform a theoretical model. We cannot know what the unconscious *is*, but we can observe its effects in consciousness. For a detailed discussion of this, see the supplement to his essay "On the Nature of the Psyche", where Jung describes the construction of models as a technique in physics as analogous to that of psychology, Vol. 8, pgs. 226-224.

psychic elements as ‘collective’, then the concept of the individual and the unity of the self become intricately complicated. The ‘self’ that is experienced by the individual is called the ego, basically designating consciousness, but the unconscious psyche poses a problem for the unity of the self because it seems to be both self and other simultaneously. While belonging in some sense to me, the unconscious intrudes into my conscious world like a stranger. Symptoms, anxiety, dreams, phobias, and all the irrational splinters of human behavior disrupt conscious activity, and their cumulative affect can even appear to be some *other* invisible ego, directing and obstructing my conscious activity from beneath, from the shadows.<sup>1</sup> Given the experienced nature of the unconscious, the psyche seems to be *multiple*. I will return to this significant observation later.

The way in which these seemingly opposite forces of conscious and unconscious interrelate is often the focus of psychoanalytic study; I would like to turn to a few remarks that Jung made to this end. In his essay “Psychological Factors in Human Behavior”, Jung observes that it makes a great deal of difference whether an individual functions mainly consciously or unconsciously. A psyche that operates consciously exhibits rational behavior that lacks instinctive force, and the psyche of a mainly unconscious person behaves in this way: “the happenings within the psyche are then contradictory and proceed in terms of alternating, non-logical antitheses.”<sup>2</sup> These “alternating, non-logical antitheses” are a kind of formula that Jung often returns to in his

---

<sup>1</sup> Jung discusses this problem of considering the unconscious as something like a second ego at some length in his essay “On the Nature of the Psyche”, in *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, Vol. 8 of the Collected Works, Princeton University Press, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Jung, Vol. 8, 119.

descriptions of psychic functioning, referring to it as polarity, or tension, or conflict of opposites. In the above-mentioned essay, Jung says this in his conclusion: “It is my belief that the problem of opposites, here merely hinted at, should be made the basis for a critical psychology.”<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus’ fragments are an ancient example of just this kind of psych-ology.

Heraclitus’ seeming alternation between describing cosmos and psyche is both deliberate and consistent. Using Jung’s model of the psyche, and keeping in mind the observations gleaned from alchemical relations, Heraclitus’ subject as *both* cosmos and psyche is made intelligible. The notion that the logos is a physical principle is not so absurd in light of this consideration. As Jung says, “since psyche and matter are contained in one and the same world, and moreover are in continuous contact with one another and ultimately rest on irrepresentable, transcendental factors, it is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of the same thing.”<sup>2</sup>

All experiences of the physical world are mediated through the psyche, and so it becomes impossible to separate psyche from world with any degree of certainty. With this ambiguity in mind, we might consider the psyche as a *place*, though we cannot demarcate anything resembling a final and accurate topography, since we inhabit this place. In describing psychic phenomena, we must rely on the metaphors and images available to us, and so we often describe psychic phenomena using language that refers to the physical world: I feel *down*, my heart is *heavy*, my dreams are *dark*. The efficacy of

---

<sup>1</sup> Jung, Vol. 8, 125.

<sup>2</sup> Jung, Vol 8, “On the Nature of Psyche”, 215. This idea is also a theme of Emerson’s thought, particularly in his essay “Nature”.

using these physical adjectives to express psychic conditions is further evidence of the continuity between the psyche and the physical world; in the case of panpsychism, this continuity is better described as *identity*.

In Parmenides, this unity between psyche and world is demonstrated by the goddess when she says, “see how it is that things far away are firmly present to your mind. For however much you want to, there is no way you will manage to cut being off from clinging fast to being.”<sup>1</sup> The second sentence directly states the continuous nature of reality; whether or not we ascribe the mortal names “self” and “world” to aspects of our experience, we cannot by will alone (however much we *want* to) separate psyche from world.<sup>2</sup> The first sentence of this quote is a demonstration offered to the reader as experiential evidence of this truth; ‘*see how it is*’ challenges us to do just that—examine the way in which *things far away* are present in our awareness.

‘Things far away’ is deliberately ambiguous because it refers to anything that we might designate as a ‘thing far away’; whatever we can think of that fits this description is a valid example. This includes things distant in space or in time; it refers to anything that we *believe* is distant. If I think of my first day of school, or the aroma of my grandmother’s kitchen, or the Köln cathedral, it is firmly present in my awareness, defying the illusion of distance. If space and time are (albeit necessary and real) illusions, then movement is also an illusion, and there is only one *place* where everything

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides’ Poem, Peter Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> As I will discuss in a later chapter, this is precisely what rational consciousness attempts to do; beginning with Plato, and culminating in Cartesian dualism, reason has convinced itself that the mind and body are separate.

“happens”: psyche. The absence of separation, in terms of psychic experience, points to Jung’s *collective* unconscious, since these contents are shared.<sup>1</sup>

Jung refers to the contents of the collective unconscious as archetypes, which are revealed through “primordial images”, though their inaccessible character makes any description of them speculative. The relation of the conscious mind to these archetypes is Platonic in nature since, like the Forms, we cannot ever encounter them in their essence; like the prisoners in the cave, we see the shadows that they cast in our conscious experience. This parallel demonstrates the divine nature that is sometimes attributed to the unconscious, as a realm that is free from time and space as we consciously experience it. Freud, in his essay “The Unconscious”, designates timelessness as one of the essential qualities of unconscious processes, as well as “substitution of psychic for external reality”<sup>2</sup>.

Similarly, Jung discusses this question at some length in his essay “The Soul and Death”, where he is investigating the reaches of the psyche into obscurity. He writes, “the unconscious psyche appears to possess qualities which throw a most peculiar light on its relation to space and time...The limitation of consciousness in space and time is such an overwhelming reality that every occasion when this fundamental truth is broken through must rank as an event of the highest theoretical significance, for it would prove that the

---

<sup>1</sup> The abolition of distance in time and space has a curious effect on the relation between presence and absence. On the one hand, it implies absolute presence—*nothing* can be absent, because everything is equally present. Yet paradoxically, Parmenides and Heraclitus consistently describe mortals as absent, since they are deaf and blind, out of sync with the logos, and lost in their own imaginings. This paradox results because the realm of illusion, or seeming (*dokein*) is no less *real* than the realm of “truth”. Only with Plato does the realm of *doxa* become somehow “less real.” See Vernant’s essay “The Birth of Images” in *Mortals and Immortals* for a full account of this development.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, “The Unconscious”, 135.

space-time barrier can be annulled. The annulling factor would then be the psyche, since space-time would attach to it at most as a relative and conditioned quality.”<sup>1</sup>

The language of psychoanalysis refers to psychic processes as phenomena of *energy*, and the movement of this energy creates the experience of psyche. The movement of psychic energy seems to be generated according to a specific formula; the *tension* created by the polarity of opposites is the ongoing conflict between conscious and unconscious, which is also experienced as the conflict between psyche and world. The tension, as Freud describes it, is a *counter-tension*, which effectively binds the psyche together. The unconscious (which is the *repressed*, for Freud), “exercises a continuous straining in the direction of consciousness, so that the balance has to be kept by means of a steady counter-pressure.”<sup>2</sup> Harmony, for the psyche, requires a balancing of opposing forces; this balance is the task of the ego, and as Freud often describes it, the ego must mediate the demands of the unconscious with the strict governance of the reality principle. The drives and principles of Freudian psychoanalysis will be taken up in the next chapter.

The “steady counter-pressure” named by Freud is the coincidence of opposites, which he is here locating within the psyche. Jung offers an even more striking parallel to Heraclitus’ conflict of opposites when he describes the specifically human *reflexive instinct*; he describes this as a “turning inwards” that results in the instinctive action creating manifold derivative states in the psyche—this instinct accounts for art, speech, abstract thought, and all of human expression.<sup>3</sup> The word *reflexio* means “bending back”,

---

<sup>1</sup> Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol 8, 412-413.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, “Repression”, 109.

<sup>3</sup> Jung, Vol. 8, 117.

and since expression and thought are the most distinguishing characteristics of human beings, the human psyche's most conspicuous activity appears to be bending back upon itself. The effect that this reflection has upon the psyche is the creation of an unpredictable succession of derivative states; this is what we would typically call imagination or a "train of thought". Jung says, "the richness of the human psyche and its essential character are probably determined by this reflexive instinct."<sup>1</sup>

What Jung is here calling an instinct is the essential activity of soul—increasing itself. Heraclitus explicitly gives us this formula in fragment 115:

115: To the soul belongs a logos that increases itself.

An interesting association comes to light here, when this formula is paired with Heraclitus' various mentions of *fire*; he is traditionally understood as equating soul with fire. I would like to conclude this discussion of *psyche* with some remarks about this claim. When we think of something that is self-increasing, fire seems to be the most obvious association. Heraclitus is believed to have thought of the soul, or all of reality, as "everliving fire" owing most notably to fragment 30:

30: Kosmos, the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and ever will be: everliving fire, kindled in measures and in measures going out.

The activity of fire, as described here, bears a striking resemblance to another activity that we are intimately familiar with, that of respiration. The measured quality, consisting of an in/out or on/off formula resembles the act of breathing; this is especially significant because of the attention given to respiration by Empedocles, since both

---

<sup>1</sup> Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, 117.

Heraclitus and Empedocles exhibit Pythagorean ideas in their fragments.<sup>1</sup> This cycle of respiration accounts for the “everliving” quality of the fire, since the death of fire is simply the precursor to its rekindling. The daily extinguishing of consciousness during sleep and the final extinguishing known as death are both “measures” of this respiratory cycle.

Aside from this possibility of associating fire with respiration, fire is also associated very obviously with the sun, and the sun holds an interesting place in Greek thought, beginning at least as early as the Pythagoreans. From the study of western Pythagorean thought, as well as the explicit mention in the *Phaedo* myth, is a central fire at the center of the earth.<sup>2</sup> Just as in the later alchemical texts<sup>3</sup>, there is a symbolic relation between blood and fire —the heart, as the center of the body, is analogous to the sun as the center of the cosmos. The blood is circulated through the body by the fire of the heart. In this way, the significance of *fire* in Heraclitus’ cosmology is to provide a link between the cosmos and the psyche.

---

<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus’ conflict of opposites, a theme integral to Pythagorean philosophy, is an obvious example. For Pythagorean ideas in Empedocles, see Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and the Pythagorean Tradition*, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Kingsley, *APMM*, 49- 68 and 172- 194.

<sup>3</sup> Jung writes, in explaining the transformation of the personality, “through her active participation the patient merges herself in the unconscious processes, and she gains possession of them by allowing them to possess her. In this way she joins the conscious to the unconscious. The result is the ascension in the flame, the transmutation in the alchemical heat, the genesis of the “subtle spirit”. That is the transcendent function born of the union of opposites.” *Collected Works*, “The Technique of Differentiation”, Vol. 7, 223.



## Cosmology and Psychoanalysis

*They are purified in vain with blood, those polluted by blood, as if someone stepped in mud should try and wash himself with mud. Anyone who noticed him doing this would think he is mad. And they pray to those images as if they were chatting with houses, not recognizing what the gods or even heroes are like.*

*Heraclitus*

This chapter is an exploration of the Pre-Socratic cosmologies of Empedocles and Heraclitus, and the relations they bear to the psychoanalytic theory of Freud. For both of these cosmologies, the symbol and physical fact of *blood* signifies the condition of mortality as one of *mixture* and impurity, and the reversals of opposing forces drive the dynamics of the cosmic cycle. In Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the forces of Eros and the death instinct play the same roles as Empedocles' Love and Strife, constituting a tension between opposing forces that effectively binds the psyche together. Through a close reading of certain Freudian concepts, including the death instinct, Eros, and aggressivity, I will draw parallels to some Greek concepts, particularly *thumos* and *amechania* in order to demonstrate the similarities in structure between these cosmological models and the psychoanalytic ones outlined by Freud.

Blood indicates mortality, and the mortal state is frequently characterized as a state of *mixture*. The various elemental theories of Pre-Socratic philosophy attest to this physical understanding, as do the later Platonic ideas regarding the mixture of the soul with the body. Blood is usually invisible, hidden within the human body; the presence of visible blood causes terror because it means that a limit has been transgressed, a border has been crossed.<sup>1</sup> In the Homeric literature, particularly in the *Iliad*, it is made very clear

---

<sup>1</sup> See Julia Kristeva's work on abjection for a thorough examination of this experience, from a psychoanalytic perspective, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia, NY, 1982.

that the gods do not bleed; when Aphrodite is wounded in battle, her wound seeps *ichor* rather than blood.<sup>1</sup>

Blood is also usually associated with *thumos*; interestingly, desire and anger, especially battle-rage, are the most common occurrences of *thumos*<sup>2</sup>—this pair is echoed in Empedocles’ cosmology, where Love and Strife are the two dynamic forces giving rise to creation. I would like to begin with a close study of this cosmology, particularly the roles played by the forces of Love and Strife, in order to explore the parallels between this Pre-Socratic cosmology and the *psych*-ology of Freud’s sex drive and death drive.

In Empedocles’ cosmology, the mixture of the mortal state is the work of Aphrodite; she draws all the elements into a unity that only begins to disintegrate when it has become completely mixed, at which point Strife begins tearing them apart. There is no final outcome to these reversals, rather, it is a cycle that endlessly repeats itself; in other words, this happens in eternity rather than in time. This bloody reign of Aphrodite is what mortals experience as life:

In the oceans of throbbing blood,  
this is where you will find what is called awareness by humans.  
For consciousness, the consciousness of humans,  
is the blood around the heart.<sup>3</sup>

The heart as the traditional site of *love* within the human body also signals Aphrodite; *thumos* always rises up in the *chest*.<sup>4</sup> As R.B. Onians has demonstrated, there

---

<sup>1</sup> Iliad, V, 339f.

<sup>2</sup> R.B. Onians, *Origins of European Thought*, especially Part One on “The Stuff of Consciousness”. On page 49, of Homer, he writes, “it is the *thumos* that is most often mentioned when the poet is describing emotion.”

<sup>3</sup> Empedocles, fragment 105, Peter Kingsley’s translation. All Empedocles translations from Kingsley, *Reality*, Golden Sufi Press, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Usually, the organ associated with *thumos* is called *Phrenes*, though Empedocles also associates it with the *Prapides*; these may refer to the lungs and diaphragm and both of

has been much controversy over the “stuff of consciousness”, as some sources seem to indicate breath or air, while others, like Empedocles, seem to associate mortal consciousness with blood. Perhaps the biggest obstacle in understanding this problem is the fact that there is no ancient Greek word for “consciousness”; in describing awareness, they included both sensation *and* thought, whereas philosophy after Aristotle privileges thought. The prevalent ancient belief in panpsychism is testament to this; contemporary philosophy would hardly attribute “consciousness” to all things, as Heraclitus and Empedocles do. As Empedocles says:

For you need to know that all things have intelligence  
and a share of awareness.<sup>1</sup>

This apparently primitive belief in panpsychism is completely in accord with Empedocles’ cosmology, since everything that exists is *mixture*, making it impossible to localize awareness, finding it here as opposed to there. For Empedocles, every living thing that exists is a *mixture* of the four elements, and this mixture *is* blood because blood is mortality.<sup>2</sup> The elements, when in mixture, have fallen into a mortal state; they are themselves divine and await Strife’s hate to release them once again. Given this cosmology, it does not make sense to ask which element represents consciousness, since all of the elements are mixed into one solution—blood is the image, and physical fact, of this mixture—which is *unconsciousness*.

---

these organs are believed to be in the chest. See R.B. Onians, *Origins of European Thought*, Part 1, Cambridge, 1951.

<sup>1</sup> Empedocles, fragment 110, trans. Kingsley.

<sup>2</sup> This mixture of blood, has also the consistency of *flesh*, which provides an interesting approach to Merleau-Ponty’s ideas. Peter Kingsley, *Reality*, p. 354.

Empedocles' cosmology includes a "double fall", similar to the later Christian idea: first, the divine "roots" are seduced by Aphrodite and are mixed into daimones. This is the first fall, where they begin to become mixed through the power of seduction. Once this happens, the inevitable spilling of blood creates ever more mixture, until all the elements are entirely mixed, and Strife returns to separate them. The way in which this spilling of blood occurs is made clear—it is through the breaking of an oath. The semi-divine daimones become mortal by spilling blood and thus breaking their oath. Blood is essential to the oath; in swearing an oath, one swears *herself* to her words. She becomes bound to those words, and they, as in the case of Antigone, stand in for her life. Whether we acknowledge it or not, every oath is a "blood oath". The oath that these semi-divine beings break is essentially a promise not to murder<sup>1</sup>, thus the spilling of blood *is* the breaking of the oath. Since this action is part of the cosmic cycle, it is inevitable and pre-ordained; this breaking of the oath is necessary for the reign of Love to come to completion, inaugurating the rule of Strife.

The spilling of blood and eating of animals is an *act* of mixture, by doing so, a being *becomes* this mixture.<sup>2</sup> Not only does the actual spilling of the blood instantiate mixture, but the being who spills the blood is polluted through the breaking of her word; when she breaks her word, *her own blood* is spilled, since her words were standing in for her. Thus blood signifies not only the impurity of the mortal state, but is the *way* in which a divine being is corrupted and becomes impure. Empedocles remarks upon the obliviousness of mortals in slaughtering and eating one another; since they do not realize that they are in this state of mixture, they fail to recognize their own kind. This state of

---

<sup>1</sup> This makes the strict vegetarianism common among the Pythagoreans intelligible.

<sup>2</sup> For a colloquial version of this truth: "you are what you eat."

mixture, the reign of Aphrodite, is a state of terror to those who become aware of what is really happening: blind murder and cannibalism, or as Peter Kingsley calls it, “a cosmic bloodbath.”<sup>1</sup> This image recalls the uroboros, a creature eating itself. Two passages from Empedocles’ poem best address this state of mixture and terror:

Can’t you hear the terrible sounds of your slaughter? Don’t you see how you are  
devouring one another in your careless mindlessness?<sup>2</sup>

Father raises dear son—shape changed—  
and slays him with a pious prayer, the big fool.<sup>3</sup>

The religious act in this second passage is ironically an act of terrible murder, but the murderer falsely believes that he is acting piously; this kind of deception is the signature of Aphrodite. This case demonstrates the way in which mortals have got things completely backwards: their perceived acts of piety are in fact the worst impiety. In the same way, our ideas about the nature of Love and Strife are naïve and biased. Strife is the force that releases these divine elements from their bound mixture; this is why Empedocles says he puts his trust in “mad Strife”. The common opinion of mortals that equates the reign of Love with an idyllic paradise is demonstrative of the obliviousness that Empedocles is describing; the spell of love is intoxicating and nearly irresistible.

Mortals consider Strife to be a terrible or evil force because it means death to the mortal mixture, but it is the force that frees the divine from its mortal state. Mortal opinions concerning Strife (and Love) are the consequence of Aphrodite’s powerful spell; mortals naturally believe that Love is good and Strife is evil. As with any apparently simple duality, the reversibility of these opposites is both necessary and paradoxical,

---

<sup>1</sup> Kingsley, *Reality*, 354.

<sup>2</sup> Empedocles, fragment 136.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment 137. Both passages from Kingsley’s translation in *Reality*.

particularly in a cosmology with two powerful forces.<sup>1</sup> Empedocles describes this power of Aphrodite and her effect on mortals:

Watch her with your consciousness!  
Don't just sit there in a daze staring blankly with your eyes!  
Even mortals acknowledge her as implanted in their members, as she through  
whom they think thoughts of love and perform their acts of joining.  
They call her Delight and Aphrodite. But actually to perceive her spinning around  
in the mid-parts: this is something no mortal has ever done.  
As for you, though, listen to the undeceptive arrangement of my words.<sup>2</sup>

This passage gives us insight into several elements of the mortal condition, and its relation to blood and Aphrodite; first, we are given a description of her effect on mortals—she puts mortals into a daze, staring blankly. This account echoes Parmenides' picture of mortal beings as wandering around in a daze, deaf and blind at the same time; Empedocles is here telling us the source of this mortal condition—Aphrodite. Her spell over all of creation is what allows for the atrocities of murder and violence, which are, ironically, usually attributed to Strife. Mortals are only able to be aware of Aphrodite as *delight*; her terror remains hidden by this intoxicating effect. The word that Empedocles uses to describe Aphrodite's action is *spinning*, and a moment later he contrasts his own *undeceptive* words, implying her deception. When viewed together, all of these images result in one picture: Aphrodite deceives through *spinning*, and the result is dazed, blank, unseeing mortals.

Spinning is associated with divine feminine power; the Fates spin the lives of mortals in Plato's *Myth of Er*, and the magical devices of Hecate, Queen of the Ghosts,

---

<sup>1</sup> See Freud's comments on the reversibility of love and hate, below.

<sup>2</sup> Empedocles, fragment 17, Kingsley's translation.

are also described as “spinning tops.”<sup>1</sup> Spinning also has the obvious association with *weaving*; the raw material must first be spun into stronger threads, and then woven into cloth. In this way, Aphrodite spins the mixture to make the fabric of mortal reality. The reality of her reign is a fabric where everything is completely interwoven with everything else, making it impossible to distinguish “parts” or “pieces” of reality. Given this scenario, it is especially ridiculous for mortals to imagine themselves as separate or autonomous; these beliefs are the opium of Aphrodite. The experience of constant spinning creates a very strange sensation; it is completely disorienting, but once one becomes accustomed to it, the spinning is no longer perceived. For example, the earth is spinning, though this is imperceptible to us because it is our constant state. There are some Sufis who practice spinning meditation that mimics the spinning of celestial bodies and electrons; this meditation is a way of acknowledging and performing the spinning that is already part of the mortal condition, it is a *surrender* to the divine through recognition of mortal helplessness.<sup>2</sup>

Aphrodite’s spell is so powerful and so complete that even the most intelligent of mortals can unknowingly commit atrocities, murdering his own kin because they *appear* differently to him. These appearances are illusions; they are the workings of Aphrodite’s magic. Her power over mortals is to induce absolute obliviousness; like marionettes, their limbs can be moved to her will, and if one of these mortals can become aware, by some miracle, of what he is doing, he will predictably insist that his actions are the result of his own will. The only possible escape from this state of horror is complete humility, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Johnston, *Hecate Soteira*.

<sup>2</sup> “Islam” means *surrender*. See Kingsley’s *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* for Empedocles’ link to Islam, specifically to Sufism.

recognition of our utter helplessness. Parmenides calls this state of helplessness *amechania*, which literally means “without a ruse”; Empedocles also describes the completely helpless state of mortals in this way:

Palms – so narrow and closed in – have been poured over people’s limbs. But countless worthless things keep crashing in, blunting their cares. During their lifetimes they see such a little part of life and then they are off: short-lived, flying up and away like smoke, totally persuaded by whatever each of them happened to bump into while being driven one way, another way, all over the place. And they claim in vain to have found the whole. Like this, there is no way one can see or hear or consciously grasp the things I have to teach. But as for you – because you have come aside here, you will learn.  
Mortal resourcefulness (*metis*) can manage no more.<sup>1</sup>

This “coming aside” that Empedocles mentions is the recognition of helplessness that is required in order for any real learning or awareness to occur. Without this humility, mortal hubris convinces us that we understand reality, no matter how narrow our experience or how constricted our perception. These short-lived beings are “being driven” all over the place; their movement (or apparent movement) is not the result of their own will, since they are at the whim of Aphrodite. This image of being driven is an echo of the passage in Parmenides’ poem: “don’t let much-experienced habit *force* you to guide your echoing ear and tongue along this way”.<sup>2</sup> Mortals imagine that they act freely, and that their thoughts and beliefs have their source in their own free will, but these passages from Empedocles and Parmenides warn human beings that they are bound and *forced* by powers outside of their control: *love* in Empedocles and *habit* in Parmenides. Even more distressingly, it appears that mortals have no control at all.

This idea is apparent in the “mortal resourcefulness” that Empedocles names; he is describing mortal *metis*. But *metis* is not usually considered an attribute of mortals; it is

---

<sup>1</sup> Empedocles, fragment 2, Kingsley’s translation.

<sup>2</sup> Parmenides Poem, Kingsley’s translation, in *Reality*.



a divine gift that is sometimes given to mortals by a divinity. Odysseus, for example, is often assisted by the goddess Athena, and his superb craftiness is the mark of Athena's patronage.<sup>1</sup> With this short line, Empedocles is subtly hinting that divine help is necessary; mortals are helpless without divine assistance. Empedocles announces that he has realized his divinity, and so he is in a position to transmit this teaching to mortals—but only to those mortals willing to “come aside”. This act of coming aside is the realization of *amechania*; utter helplessness must be admitted before the teacher can begin to help the student. If this condition is not met, the student will continue to falsely believe that he knows, making any real transformation impossible; Empedocles calls this deceptive arrogance “the rush of assurance toward the seat of their awareness”, which “has become so very troublesome: so undesired.”<sup>2</sup> The state of not-knowing is precisely the state that Socrates was attempting to create through his practice of elenchus, and is the state prescribed by Taoism as the only possible wisdom.

Empedocles' description of the mortal condition appears on the surface to be hopelessly bleak, if one does not consider that he is offering divine help. Essential to his message is the absolute vanity of mortal striving, since all that mortals can “manage” is to be swept about like leaves by the wind. Thus the actions that mortals believe to be pious, or the rituals associated with purification, are vain and futile. Heraclitus' fragments 5 and 15 address the nature of mortal purification rights, and draw a very strange parallel between Dionysus and Hades:

---

<sup>1</sup> For a full account of *metis*, see Vernant and Detienne's book *Les Ruses de l'intelligence: La Mètis des Grecs*, (Paris, 1974) and Peter Kingsley's book *Reality*.

<sup>2</sup> Empedocles, fragment 114.

5: They are purified in vain with blood, those polluted by blood  
as if someone stepped in mud should try and wash himself with mud.  
Anyone who noticed him doing this would think he is mad.  
And they pray to those images as if they were chatting with houses,  
not recognizing what the gods or even heroes are like.

15: If it were not Dionysus for whom they march in procession and  
chant the hymn to the phallus, their action would be most shameless.  
But Hades and Dionysus are the same,  
him for whom they rave and celebrate Lenaia.

Blood is an essential element in fragment 5, as Heraclitus' use of *aimati* refers both to the preceding "are purified" and the following "polluted".<sup>1</sup> This observation reveals the similarity to Empedocles' cosmology, where blood is the agent and the effect of pollution. These religious rituals that aim at purification are ridiculous precisely because of this mortal state of *mixture*; in this sense, purity is impossible and its attempt by mortals absurd. Heraclitus is revealing the irony of purification through *blood*, since blood is the very symbol of impurity. More precisely, blood is not even the *symbol* of impurity because it is the physical manifestation of impurity; it is the *form* of mortality. Aphrodite, or Love, is specifically indicated as the force that creates this mixture; this is very significant because of the meaning and results of sex—human beings, animals, and even plants, come together and *mix* with one another, bringing into the world *more mixture* in their progeny. This false mortality is also addressed by Heraclitus in his fragment 20:

20: Once born they want to live and have their portions;  
and they leave children behind born to become their dooms.

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 266.

The language of this fragment plays upon the double meaning of *moiros*, both as “portion” or “fate” and as “death” or “doom”. What this fragment highlights is the identity between birth and death, since the children are born to their dooms—and this doom is shared between the parents and the children. The attempt to escape death by procreation is a doomed one; mortality is merely extended rather than transcended.

The force that drives these couplings of procreation is what we call *love*, even if we do not scientifically ascribe such seemingly human motivations to other forms of life; we might describe this phenomenon scientifically<sup>1</sup> as a biological drive to preserve the life of the species. Blood is associated with sex and procreation, and the irresistible force that drives this phenomenon; sexual arousal, is the “rising of the blood”, also associated with warmth, as our slang reveals in referring to attractive people as “hot”. This “rising of the blood” is a description of an erect phallus, also essential to the Dionysian cult. This sexual drive creates in mortals what can easily be described as a kind of madness; it is a physical intoxication. Thus the rites associated with Dionysus, as a god of sex and madness, are rituals of intoxication (wine) and raving. Blood is thus related to sex as well as death, and this relation is echoed in Heraclitus’ statement that Hades and Dionysus are the same in fragment 15.

There are several characteristic linguistic tricks in fragment 5, the most obvious being Heraclitus’ play on *miainomenoi* (polluted) and *mainesthai* (mad); here a witty analogy is made between the mortal state as pollution and the mortal state as madness. The kind of madness caused by the Dionysian ritual is a cathartic madness, and so it was believed to *cure* the pollution; Heraclitus is here reversing this equation. It is also interesting that he mentions that these mortals do not recognize what the gods or even

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud speaks of this in terms of both the species and the individual, see below.

*heroes* are like; heroes belong to the realm of the *dead* and are linked to cult practices. E.R. Dodds, in his chapter “The Blessings of Madness”, discusses the divine powers that were considered to cause mental disturbances and madness. The comprehensive list, from various sources, includes Hecate, Cybele, Pan, Poseidon, Apollo Nomios, Ares “as well as the “heroes”, who are here simply the unquiet dead associated with Hecate.”<sup>1</sup> In saying that mortals fail to recognize gods and heroes, and specifically pointing out that they fail to recognize the connection between Dionysus and Hades, Heraclitus is implying that mortals do not understand life and death. The relevance of Hecate, and the divine feminine’s relation to sex and death, will be taken up later in this chapter.

Kahn makes the connection between Hades and Dionysus an identity between sex and death; he says, “this riddle reformulates the equivalence (i.e. interchangeability) of life and death expressed in D. 62 and D. 88.”<sup>2</sup> The riddle only hints at this interchangeability that is made much more explicit in the related fragments that Kahn cites here, but the question remains unanswered: what does it mean to say life and death are interchangeable? There is, as Kahn notes, an interesting connection implied by this fragment between fertility and insanity, though Kahn does not take up this connection in any greater detail.

I propose that the connection between fertility and insanity is *blood*. The madness of blood is the overpowering *thumos*; this force is the irrational force of passion that can overpower men—it can incite battle and cause them to engage in sex. The drive to sex and the drive to kill have the same origin in *thumos*. Blood bears an interesting relation to

---

<sup>1</sup> Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational*, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 264. 62: Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others’ death, dead in the others’ life. 88: The same...living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old. For these transposed are those, and those transposed again are these.

female fertility; the presence of blood signifies fertility, while the absence of it, paradoxically, signifies pregnancy. This physical clue demonstrates the strange reversibility inherent in opposites: if blood signifies fertility, how could the supreme evidence of fertility—pregnancy—be the *absence* of blood? Once again, we are confronted with the strange paradox of presence and absence, which Hades himself personifies as the god of *riches* (fertility) while his domain is the land of the dead. Persephone is example of this same paradox, as she is both queen of the Underworld and the daughter of Demeter, queen of fertility.

The link between the two goddesses Aphrodite and Persephone reveals this same interchangeability of sex and death; but this paradox does not explain this equivalence, it merely demonstrates it. In the next section, I will explore the “interchangeability” of sex and death as a *reversibility*. Life and death are not “identical” in the strict sense of the word, rather, they indicate a pattern of *reversal*—the same pattern that Heraclitus names as the “reversals of fire” in fragment 31A. Kahn gives two common meanings for this kind of reversal from Homeric literature: the moment when an army turns and runs the other way, or the moment when the sun begins moving back in the opposite direction.<sup>1</sup> These reversals thus signify the moment when opposites turn into on another or switch places—birth and death are examples of this kind of reversal. In Empedocles’ cosmology, Love gives over to Strife at the moment when everything becomes completely mixed, just as Strife recedes when everything becomes completely separated.

Heraclitus calls this pattern the “reversals of fire”, and recalls fragment 30’s everliving fire, that is “kindled in measures and in measures going out”. This pattern of

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, 140.

reversal can be linked, in the case of fragment 30, with respiration; thus the cosmic pattern of reversal is manifest in the microcosmic. It is perhaps worthwhile to note here that Empedocles also mentions respiration very specifically in his description of a little girl playing with the clepsydra, which seems to be like a straw. In placing her hand over the end, the water is held inside; in taking her hand away, the water rushes out.<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting association here between Empedocles' description of this little girl, since what she is doing matches this cosmological pattern we are calling "respiration", and Heraclitus' fragment 52, where the aeon is a "child at play, moving pieces in a game." Both of these fragments express the cosmological pattern in terms of play, and their mention of children lends an innocence and a *simplicity* to the matter—a simplicity incomprehensible to complicated adult minds, particularly to a rational or scientific mind. On that note, I would like to turn to the work of Freud in order to situate these mythological themes in his "drive theory", where he names Eros (the life instinct) as in opposition to the mysterious death instinct.

---

<sup>1</sup> Empedocles, Fragment 100, trans. Brad Inwood, University of Toronto, 2001, p. 261.

## The Death Drive

Freud's theory of instincts shows an interesting parallel to Empedocles' cosmology, a fact that Freud claims to have noticed only later, years after he had produced his drive theory. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was published in 1920, and it was not until his much later essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (1937) that he admits his (merely *possible*) indebtedness to Empedocles. He says, "I am very ready to give up the prestige of originality for the sake of such a confirmation, especially as I can never be certain, I view of the wide extent of my reading in the early years, whether what I took for a new creation might not be an effect of cryptomnesia."<sup>1</sup> So far as this cryptomnesia is concerned, Richard Armstrong, in his careful study of Freud's "compulsion for antiquity", points out a very significant biographical fact: "Freud had visited Empedocles' birthplace of Agrigento in 1910 and had remarked on how well preserved the Greek past is in Sicily: "infantile reminiscences that make it possible to infer the nuclear complex".<sup>2</sup> In "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", Freud uses these very words to refer to Empedocles' "nuclear truth".<sup>3</sup> Armstrong makes a convincing case for Freud's consistent avoidance of recognizing some of his influences, and argues that Freud identified with Empedocles as a figure who united science and mysticism—something Freud himself did not accomplish nearly as completely as his student, Carl Jung.

In any case, Freud makes a very telling blunder that reveals his tendency to omit the Feminine from his theories by saying: "the two fundamental principles of

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", SE Volume XXIII, pg. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Richard H. Armstrong, *A Compulsion for Antiquity*, Cornell University Press, 2005, pages 95-6. Freud's quote cited by Armstrong from McGuire 1974, 353.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable", SE Volume XXIII, 247.

Empedocles—*philia* and *neikos*—are, both in name and function, the same as our two primal instincts, Eros and destructiveness”.<sup>1</sup> First of all, Love and Strife are not identical to “life” and “death”; Freud glosses this over in his enthusiasm to use Empedocles to bolster his own theory—he even refers to his “death instinct” as “destructiveness”, which was merely a quality of this drive, not its name. Aside from this minor problem, Freud fails to realize that Empedocles consistently refers to Love as Aphrodite—and there is a very fundamental difference between Eros and Aphrodite—Aphrodite is a goddess, while Eros is distinctly masculine. Likewise, though Empedocles does not distinctly refer to her name, Strife is also a feminine power, and traditionally a goddess.

Freud’s constant blindness and misrepresentation of the Feminine, most marked in his sometimes ridiculous sexual theories<sup>2</sup>, has been noticed and challenged by too many competent theorists for me to expand upon this point now—Irigaray’s work is perhaps the best source for this critique.<sup>3</sup> What matters to this inquiry is Freud’s equating of these cosmic principles with the masculine, which is a fundamental divergence not only from Empedocles’ cosmology, but from Greek notions of sexuality and death in general. Were Freud to make a conscious modification of these theories, this alteration might be permissible, but owing to the evidence of his typical misogynistic theories, it is an unconscious betrayal of his own blindness.

J.P. Vernant devotes several essays to the Greek conceptions of the Feminine in its relation to sexuality and to death, most notably “Feminine Figures of Death in

---

<sup>1</sup> “Analysis Terminable and Interminable”, 246.

<sup>2</sup> I.e. the clitoris as “truncated penis”, the alleged phenomenon of “penis envy”, the notion of “hysteria”, the supposed perception of little girls of their own bodies as “castrated”—these all exhibit the same tendency of unconscious identification with the masculine—which Freud universally applied to both sexes.

<sup>3</sup> Irigaray, Luce. *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, Cornell University Press, 1985.



Greece”, “Death in the Eyes: Gorgo, Figure of the Other”, and “In the Mirror of Medusa”.<sup>1</sup> Since Hesiod’s myth of Pandora, women have been associated not only with sexuality and love, but with death—as we have seen in an earlier chapter, Pandora brought with her the advent of mortality. The masculine title of death, Thanatos, is described by Vernant: “there is nothing terrifying and even less that is monstrous about this figure of Thanatos, whose role is not to kill but to receive the dead...the masculine figure of Thanatos therefore does not seem to incarnate the terrible *destructive* force that descends on human beings to destroy them” (italics mine).<sup>2</sup> Although Freud did not himself name the death drive Thanatos, his followers were consistent with his teachings in giving this force a masculine name, like its counterpart, Eros. As I have examined in some depth in an earlier chapter, the horror of the Feminine lies in its double aspect—seduction and destruction. The identification of Thanatos with death, as Vernant has shown, is the mortal attempt to “domesticate death”, while the feminine figures of Gorgo and Ker “represent the direct confrontation with death itself.”<sup>3</sup>

Freud notes that love and hate are inextricable from one another, and that one often turns into the other.<sup>4</sup> This kind of reversal happens not only on this individual scale, but also on the cosmic, as Empedocles’ cosmology maintains. Like Empedocles, Freud argues that the life instinct, Eros, always tends towards a greater cohesion or unity, while the death instinct pushes towards an inanimate state and is thus destructive. In his essay “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”, Freud outlines what he considers to be three

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, Princeton University Press, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Vernant, “Feminine Figures of Death”, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 97. It is instructive to notice that Ker is also associated with drinking *blood*, i.e. mortality, life.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes”, *General Psychological Theory*, 97.

fundamental polarities: subject/object, active/passive, and pleasure/pain; he identifies the active with the masculine and the passive with the feminine, respectively. These pairs of opposites shed much light on psychic process, and so they are methodologically justified, if only in terms of a model. I will return to these important distinctions in a moment, but would first like to examine the context in which Freud first posits the existence of the “death instinct.”

All mental processes are governed by what he calls “the nirvana principle”; which is the tendency towards stability or balance. This principle belongs to the death instinct, though it is “modified” by libido when it comes into contact with life and transformed into the pleasure principle, which is in turn modified by the reality principle.<sup>1</sup> In examining the phenomenon of masochism, Freud was confronted with a challenging problem: if the pleasure principle governs all activity, why are acts associated with *unpleasure* sought, and even more distressingly, *repeated*? This compulsion to repeat painful activities or events was especially confusing, given Freud’s theoretical structure.

The example that Freud uses in his solution is of a little boy playing the game “fort/da”, in which he throws his toy into a hidden space and pulls it back in on a reel. Freud connects this activity with the little boy’s helplessness at his mother leaving the room, and considers this game to be a re-enactment that gives the boy pleasure because he can take on the *active* part, i.e. sending the mother away, instead of the painful *passive* experience of the mother leaving him, which he is helpless to effect. This need for control is very important for the masculine aspect of the ego, masculine because it involves the *active* role, and a refusal of receptivity. Strangely, Freud does not comment upon this

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, “The Economic Problem in Masochism”, *General Psychological Theory*, 191.

phenomenon in terms of masculine and feminine, although he consistently equates the active/passive distinction with the masculine/feminine one.

From these observations, Freud must posit the death instinct in order to account for masochism—the life instinct alone cannot explain such obviously self-destructive impulses. He even goes so far as to say that the death instinct is, though inexactly, identical with masochism.<sup>1</sup> By far the most interesting relation to Empedocles' cosmology is supplied by Freud's explanation of the interaction between the life instinct and the death instinct; he says that the death instinct must be “rendered harmless” by the libido, and the way that the libido accomplishes this is by directing the death instinct onto the outside world rather than inwards.<sup>2</sup> Turned outwards in this way, the death instinct becomes sadism and aggressivity; this is the will to power. Two things are accomplished here: on the one hand, the death instinct is essentially “distracted” from its work in destroying the organism itself by turning its attention to the outside world, and on the other hand, the death instinct is here made *active*—since it is projected onto things outside of the organism—rather than passive, or turned inwards towards itself.

Aggressivity is thus the *active* form of the death instinct; this behavior is distinctly masculine in character, using Freud's own distinctions, and those of the Greeks. *Thumos*, as we have previously noticed, is associated with battle-rage and with sexual desire—both masculine instantiations of this “death instinct”, both *active*. The parallel to battle and killing is obvious; the link to the sexual act is more implicit—Freud himself compares the post-orgasmic state as a state of “pure death instinct”, since the life instinct has been entirely satisfied. Thus, paradoxically, in order to achieve its own satisfaction,

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 195.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 194.

the death instinct has to work through the life instinct—at least in this masculine formulation.

Since Eros works to neutralize the death instinct by turning it *outwards*, the aggressivity that results is *not* an effect of the death instinct, but the work of Eros. Similarly, in Empedocles' cosmology, the spell of Aphrodite causes mortals to commit the worst atrocities and murders; this kind of violence is usually attributed to Strife—here we have a corollary to this idea, as it is Eros that creates aggressivity, not the death instinct. Freud still traced aggressivity to the death instinct, even though his own formulation demonstrates that it is not the death instinct itself but its *diversion* by the libido that creates the violence associated with aggressivity. This is once again a need for *control* on the part of libido, because it cannot bear to be the *passive* object of destruction. Here we may turn once more to Freud's consistent habit of overlooking the feminine counterpart to some of his masculine formulations—it this need for control and aggressivity *always* the case? To put this in our Greek language, does *thumos* always take this violent form of active sexual conquest and murderous violence?

The answer is emphatically *no*. As the “fort/da” game of the little boy illustrates, aggressivity is an active reversal of the passivity experienced as *helplessness*. We have encountered this helplessness before, the *amechania* that must be acknowledged in order to receive divine help—this idea is present in the poetry of Parmenides and Empedocles. True helplessness can either be raged against—the active response of aggressivity, or it can be *endured*, which is the passive, or “feminine” response. Parmenides' poem names in the very first line the force that led him to the Underworld, which is an entirely *feminine* place—he is escorted there by mares and the daughters of the sun, until he

reaches the unnamed Goddess. This force is *longing*—a translation of *thumos*. Unlike the masculine heroes of tradition, Parmenides does not run crashing through the gates of the Underworld, sword drawn. He is *carried* there—the repetition of this word in the poem is especially significant in highlighting his *receptive* part in this journey, as is his role as messenger rather than speaker. This is the feminine counterpart of *thumos*.

This observation serves to further muddy the distinction between the life instinct and the death instinct; since it is here not death, but the force traditionally associated with life—*thumos*—that carries the journeyer *into death*. This points back to Freud’s observation that we are often dealing with a “fusion” between the life and the death instinct, and it recalls the formula of *reversal* that is so evident in Heraclitus and Empedocles.<sup>1</sup> This raises an interesting question: if the death instinct were not diverted into aggressivity by the libido, what would it accomplish? In other words, what *satisfaction* is the death instinct pursuing? The superficial answer to this is death in the form of suicide—but, like the life instinct, the satisfaction of its impulses may be more complicated—after all, the satisfaction of the life instinct is not merely “life” but the creation of more life through procreation. The death instinct, in wishing for death, may signify something more than simple biological destruction—the death of the ego, the seat of limited mortal awareness.

The death instinct is entirely associated with the unconscious for Freud; he admits that we cannot even see it directly but must rely on evidence that consciousness yields. Parmenides’ journey to the Underworld was a journey *into death*, but paradoxically, he is still alive after this journey—what has died is not his biological self, but a portion of it—

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 195.

what psychoanalysis has named the *ego*. The practice of dying before you die is prevalent not only in ancient Greece, but in shamanic traditions throughout the world, and the effect of such a transformation is very specific—to leave mortality behind and realize divinity, sometimes temporarily through the work of theurgy or sympathetic magic, and sometimes entirely—as Empedocles claims to have done.

Especially in light of the Presocratic cosmologies, where we have seen these “reversals” as the fundamental underlying structure of reality, this switch from mortality to divinity should not be so shocking. Heraclitus very precisely invokes this in his fragments 62 and 88:

62: Immortals are mortal, mortals immortal, living the others’ death,  
dead in the others’ life.

88: The same... living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old. For these transposed are those, and those transposed again are these.

If this conflict of opposites, and their reversals into one another, does provide an accurate picture of physical *and* psychological reality—which Freud’s independent confirmation of Empedocles’ cosmology implies, then it would not be very unusual for mortal beings to contain within themselves a seed of divinity that can lead them out of the mortal state, which is precisely the idea found in Empedocles and the Pythagoreans that preceded him.<sup>1</sup> In fact, something of this kind would be biologically necessary in order for the cycle of life and death, certainly as these Greeks understood it, to continue.

Freud’s omission of a passive counterpart to the masculine trends of control, mastery, and aggressivity is not surprising; the feminine, as Vernant has very

---

<sup>1</sup> See Kingsley’s *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*. For this idea in Gnosticism, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*; in Sufism, see Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light In Iranian Sufism*.

convincingly demonstrated, was just as terrifying to Greeks as it remains now. The terror associated with the feminine is evidenced in myriad mythological figures and concepts, including the persistence of womb, egg, and vagina images in modern horror films, and the theme of being *devoured*.<sup>1</sup> Thumos can either take the form of a masculine or a feminine will; as the masculine will it *seizes*, grasps, and attempts to contain in order to fill or *sate* the experienced emptiness. In the context of my reading of the Cyclops and Oedipus in a later chapter, it is the will *to eat*. As the feminine, thumos is an emptiness that *waits*, that does not reach externally to grab or catch, but allows the passion to ache with a certain passivity, that is not docility, but *receptivity*. It is the will to *be eaten*. These oppositions are not so disparate as they may seem, however, since there is an alignment between Dionysus and Hades in Heraclitus: Dionysus, who is *consumed* and *ripped apart* is not so different from the dissolution into invisibility of Hades.<sup>2</sup>

This identification of the Feminine with the fear of being devoured is comprehensible, since the womb is one's place of origin; this fear is the real source of Freud's castration anxiety—the vagina dentata. Naturally, this fear must be overcome in the case of a heterosexual man, and is a likely candidate for repression, given the somewhat embarrassing identification made by the man between his sexual partner and his mother. Strong emotions regarding the complexes associated with parental figures are very consistently objects of repression throughout the psychoanalytic literature, and this case is unlikely to be an exception. This fear of the Feminine has been predictably

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous Feminine*, London, Routledge, 1993. Obvious examples of horror films of this type include *Alien*, and more recently, *Slither*.

<sup>2</sup> See Heraclitus' identification of Hades and Dionysus in fragment 15.

transformed into aggression against it, since it cannot be controlled. Freud's example of the little boy's game—"fort/da"—provides an excellent example of this tendency.

The aggressivity that is evident in the little boy's attempt at mastery is a wonderful demonstration because it is not the only possible masculine response to helplessness but precisely what it appears to be on the surface—the response of a *little boy*. A *man*, particularly a *heroic man*, would not engender this immature and infantile response. Heraclitus mentions this heroic ideal in a thinly veiled reference to Achilles—who chose, unlike “most of them”, immortal glory rather than “sating himself like cattle”. In the *Iliad*, Achilles famously refuses to eat, despite the promptings of his comrades and even his mother, because he feels he must avenge the death of his closest friend, Patroclus. He is fully aware of his own impending death, and does not shrink from it in helplessness, nor does he lash out in senseless rage; he *fasts* and contemplates his fate—ultimately choosing a heroic death and the riches of Hades over the false riches of the world. Heraclitus' fragment 29:

29: For even the best of them choose one thing above all others, immortal glory among mortals, while most of them are gluttoned like beasts.

Here, satiety, satisfaction, is shown to be the result of hubris<sup>1</sup>, of the insolence of most men. Achilles is a hero who chose immortal glory, swift death rather than the satiety of the visible world of riches. He knows he is going to die, and he has two ways before him: one is the way of mortal satiety, he can go home and be rich, as opposed to the other way, where he can go *home* to the house of Hades and have immortal riches (*plutos*). The heroic, paradoxically, is given here as the submission to the Fates, and the will of Zeus; recognizing the plan of the one over the plan of mortals, for as Heraclitus tells us in

---

<sup>1</sup> See later chapter “Hubris: I and Mined” for a full discussion



fragment 78, “human nature has no *ethos*, but the divine has” and submission to Zeus is the law in fragment 33: “it is law also to obey the counsel of one.”

Achilles, undoubtedly a figure of true masculinity and honor, is here *submitting* and *surrendering* to powers beyond his own—the will of the gods. This kind of receptivity requires true strength, despite the usual denigration of “passivity” to the role of women; it seems that the heroic ideal also shares in this humble recognition of one’s own mortal limitations—the acceptance of *amechania*. The example of Achilles may be an alternate acting out of the death instinct, distinct from aggressivity, since it includes a surrender that is more like receptivity.

The difference between Achilles and the little boy who plays “fort/da” is remarkably evident from these examples, but why have these other possible *sublimations* of the death instinct been omitted from Freudian theory? One possibility is the widespread *repression* of the Feminine—not only in the case of individuals, but as a societal pathology. The origin of human life is *visibly* (and so symbolically, i.e. “mother earth”) the female body, just as plant and animal life is dependent on the earth. This natural fact did not escape our ancient ancestors, who practiced goddess-worship and performed rituals associated with fertility, even as late as the Hellenistic period, when deities such as Hera, Demeter, and Persephone were still worshipped. It is interesting that Freud suggested “penis envy” as a universal complex among women, but did not consider “womb envy” as a possible candidate for a male corollary to this complex—especially given the obvious fact that only women are able to bear life into this world. In this regard, it is predictable resentment that causes Aristotle, and many men with him, to theorize that the male sperm contained all the seeds of life, for which women were merely the placid container—in the *Generation of Animals* he describes woman as merely “an infertile

male”.<sup>1</sup> The inconsistency of Freud’s thought, following his own structure of polarities (particularly that of active/passive) reveals the unconscious denial and subsequent blindness towards the feminine counterparts in his own theories.<sup>2</sup> Particularly in the case of active/passive, the role of the feminine takes on a role that is no role at all; *receptivity* is a far better term for the counterpart to “active”.<sup>3</sup>

This bias against the feminine is also evident as a bias against anything dark, mysterious, or terrifying—the Platonic vilification of the body, and the outright denial of the existence of the Unconscious are two prominent examples. Thus a culture that is predominantly masculine in its judgments places a moral value on the forces of the unconscious; like death, the inexorable pull of the unconscious into darkness is experienced as *evil*. Jung writes, in *The Archetypes of The Collective Unconscious*:

There is no consciousness without discrimination of opposites. This is the paternal principle, Logos, which eternally struggles to extricate itself from the primal warmth and primal darkness of the maternal womb; in a word, from unconsciousness. Divine curiosity yearns to be born and does not shrink from conflict, suffering, or sin. Unconsciousness is the primal sin, evil itself, for the Logos. Therefore its first creative act of liberation is matricide.<sup>4</sup>

The unconscious and all the fruits of its womb are hereby declared *evil*, impure, contaminated. What could cure this impurity? At bottom, the resistance to the unconscious is the terror of life mixed with death, the mortal condition of impurity; though life and death, to the unconscious, are one force that ebbs and flows like tides in

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, tr. Peck, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963, page 103.

<sup>2</sup> Irigaray has tackled this inconsistency in her works, particularly in *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, where she traces the male-centric omissions of psychoanalysis back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle.

<sup>3</sup> A good corollary is the Chinese concepts of *yin* and *yang*; this pairing does not denigrate one or the other as inferior.

<sup>4</sup> Jung, Vol. 9 I, 96.

the sea. It is no accident that the death instinct is entirely “located” in the Unconscious, since it is itself this pull into darkness that we call death. A culture that fears and denigrates the Feminine, such as ours, is diseased because it does not recognize the Unconscious, nor the meaning of death, and attempts to put both of these mysterious forces into the control of the tyrannical conscious ego. The double nature of love and hate, and the persistence of their *reversibility*, points towards the double goddess Aphrodite/Persephone: goddess of love and goddess of death, frequently understood as one goddess with two faces. Vernant writes: “Death is a threshold. One cannot pass over it and remain alive. Beyond the threshold, from the other side, the beautiful feminine face that attracts you and beckons to you is a face of terror: the unspeakable.”<sup>1</sup> From one side of the threshold, the world of the living, this face is the alluring and seductive face of beautiful Aphrodite—across the threshold, in the world of the dead, the terrible face of Persephone, queen of the dead. The repression of the feminine, like the repression of death, has succeeded in sanitizing and rationalizing this horror into the agreeable figures of Eros and Thanatos—a “civilized” version of the truth. Like any repression, the thin and tenuous veil will be breached—if not now—certainly at the moment of death.

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, *Feminine Figures of Death*, 105.

## **Part Four: Psychological Blindness**

Hubris: I and Mined  
Sleep and Psychosis

## **Hubris: I and Mined**

The enigma derives from the fact that my body simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the “other side” of its power of looking.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*

What one looks for can be caught, only that which is not watched escapes.

The Oracle, *Oedipus Tyrannus*

Heraclitus Fragment 16: How can one hide from that which never sets?

This chapter examines the Greek understanding of *hubris*, drawing from Sophocles’ tragic figure of Oedipus Rex, and Odysseus’ encounter with the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*. Hubris, for the Greeks, was a necessary component of the mortal condition, and inevitably leads to a confrontation with *law* and Justice; in this way, it is both a disease and its cure. In both of these texts, hubris is demonstrated to be a kind of psychological blindness, which is then transposed into physical blindness upon encountering the *law*.

This law is divine, and referred to in these texts, as well as most of the literature of the time, as *Zeus*. This formula is also present throughout the fragments of Heraclitus, which frequently name or imply Zeus as the ultimate divine law. The condition of mortality is one of *limit*, and in the case of hubris, it is the limit of mortal vision—both physical and symbolic. In this way, the *eye* that sees becomes the *I* that sees, the physical and psychological condition of mortality are the same condition, expressed in two modes. The homonym (eye/I) expresses the consistency and unity of the cosmos as it is expressed in poetic language; the physical and the psychological both agree with the same *logos* and can thus be spoken the same (*homolegein*). In this chapter, I will link together many of the

themes that have recurred throughout this dissertation, specifically, hubris, limit, law, the senses, and divine language.

Vision is a unique phenomenon because it unites the seemingly separate realms of the seer and the seen, as Merleau-Ponty has well described. While vision is certainly a physical phenomena, it is also a *psychical* one, as “blindness” can refer to a condition far more dangerous than lack of usual eye-function. The condition of *hubris* is the self-inflicted blindness of the mortal condition, which is a dangerous lack of humility; human beings must *recognize* the limited vision inherent in the mortal condition, or utter ruin swiftly follows.

As Merleau-Ponty remarks in *Eye and Mind*, “the *idios kosmos* opens by way of vision upon a *koinos kosmos*”.<sup>1</sup> Vision is the power that *unites* inner and outer, allowing the seer to recognize the continuity of the self with the world. The *idios kosmos*, the experience of a “private world”, is an important element in Heraclitus’ description of the mortal condition, and signifies a self-inflicted separation from the shared *logos*. This theme is echoed throughout his sayings, but is perhaps most present in fragment 2:

2: Although this *logos* is shared, most men live  
as though their thinking were a private possession.

The belief in this private world, which is expressed as a state of “incomprehension” (*axunetoi*) in fragment one amounts to a kind of blindness, since one fails to see the shared nature of reality, whether this reality is expressed as *logos* or as *kosmos*. In this case, the blindness is not merely physical, but psychical; the effect is analogous to physical blindness because it is a failure to recognize that which is

---

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, from the *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, Northwestern University, 1993, page 128.

immediately accessible. Throughout Heraclitus' fragments, the mortal condition is described as a state of blindness, sleep, or oblivion; this state is often juxtaposed with that of the divine.<sup>1</sup> The blindness of human beings results from a limited access to reality, essentially a restricted access to one's own experience—an image of this is the state of sleep, where human beings exist in a private, disconnected world. This state is further complicated because the human being inordinately takes this private world for the shared one, thus the world experienced by the human being is a world of *imaginings*. Fragments 17 and 89 address this:

17: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them,  
nor do they recognize what they experience, but imagine for themselves.

89: The world of the waking is one and shared,  
but the sleeping turn aside each to his private world.

The subtle trick in fragment 89 is the identity of “the sleeping”; on the surface, Heraclitus seems to be making a rather obvious statement about the nature of sleep. Before hastily naming ourselves as “the waking”, we might consider that mortals who exist in an *idios kosmos* exist in what Heraclitus calls “sleep”. Hubris, in this context, is the mortal tendency to mistake imaginings for awareness, like mistaking dreams as wakefulness. While vision *is* a uniting phenomenon, human beings falsely believe that they are seeing when their eyes are still closed; the problem is not merely the *idios kosmos*, but that mortals are convinced that this private world is the *koinos kosmos*. This mistake is often illustrated in Greek literature as that dangerous lack of humility called hubris.

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially Fragment 78: Human nature has no ethos but the divine has; Fragment 79: A man is found foolish by a god as a child by a man; also 102, 70, and 82-3.

In the mythology of Hesiod, Justice's mortal enemy is Hubris.<sup>1</sup> This mythological formulation offers insight into the conflict between hubris and justice, specifically as the conflict between mortal life and the divine law. In Parmenides' Poem, Justice holds the keys, which both open *and* lock, an image of *double possibility*. She, like her instruments, has the power to free *and* to bind. Freedom and bondage, like reward and punishment, are two aspects of the same divine power personified by Justice. She dwells on the *borderland* between mortals and immortals, assuring the difference between the living and the dead, between gods and mortals. Hubris is her enemy precisely because it transgresses this boundary; mortals liken themselves to the gods, and are put back in their proper place.

The concept of hubris is inextricably linked to mortality because it is a condition of *limit*; the divine, in contrast, is limitless and infinite. Hubris is insolence, wantonness, and outrage; the impious suitors that infest Odysseus' home in his absence are a good example.<sup>2</sup> These illustrations of hubris are juxtaposed with the law-abiding *men who eat bread* in Homer; *eating bread is following law*, often specifically the law of hospitality. As Margo Kitts observes, the conventions of eating bread "coincide with conventions of guest-friendship and suppliance championed by Zeus."<sup>3</sup> The importance of this law cannot be overstated; it is Zeus himself who can appear at any time in the guise of a stranger, and lack of hospitality towards strangers is a direct affront to the god.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, 901.

<sup>2</sup> Hubris grows rank and wild, over the boundaries ( $\upsilon\beta\rho\iota\zeta\omega$ , in plants); see the Liddell and Scott lexicon for a full list of examples.

<sup>3</sup> See Margo Kitts' article "Two Expressions for Human Mortality in the Epics of Homer", *History of Religions*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Nov., 1994), pp. 132-151



In the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops in the *Odyssey*, the interplay between the distinct but related words *nomos* and *nomas* invites analysis. *Nomas* means “roaming for pasture”, and later came to mean custom, habit, or law. *Nomos* refers to common usage or custom, as well as law, but also interestingly means “place of pasturage”.<sup>1</sup> There is a distinct relation between the *roaming* for pasture and finally reaching the *place* of pasturage, and these complementary words provide context for understanding the relation between lawlessness and law, or hubris and justice. In the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops and in the tragedy of Oedipus, the place of Law is only discovered through *wandering*; in other words, Justice requires straying from the law for its illustration. Heraclitus’ fragment 23:

23: If it were not for these things, they would not have known the name of Justice.

Kahn invokes the “conceptual dependence of justice upon the existence of injustice” in his reading of this fragment, but marks that “the thought is expressed not in terms of judgments but in terms of names by which Justice is known. If there were no judgments or penalties, men could not know or understand the word *Dike* that denotes them. But then they would not know the name of Justice.”<sup>2</sup> If Heraclitus has elsewhere demonstrated the coincidence of opposites and their reciprocal necessity, why belabor the point here, and explicitly invoke *name*? Why would he not simply say: “they would not know Justice”? There is more to this fragment than mere redundancy.

The problem begins with the ambiguous “these things” that Heraclitus loosely indicates in the fragment; Kahn takes these to be “acts of injustice, violations of the law,

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott-Liddell lexicon.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge University Press, 1979, page 185.

with their resulting penalties and punishments”, and reads a characteristically ambiguous reference very literally, filling in the intentional gap with an obvious assumption. Kahn acknowledges the uncertainty of this assumption by saying, ““these things’ *probably* refer to acts of injustice.”<sup>1</sup> To equate the ambiguous “these things” with acts of injustice is to miss the depth of Heraclitus’ statement; “these things” are left ambiguously nameless precisely because he is referring to *things* that can be given a *mortal* name.<sup>2</sup>

Heraclitus is indicating that *names* are involved in the injustice; the act of (mortal) naming *is* an injustice because it determines the undeterminable, names the unnameable. Fragment 32 invokes Zeus by *name* in precisely this context:

32: The wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.

Heraclitus uses the word “name” (*onoma*) very explicitly because he is calling attention to the relation of the divine to names; the name cannot entirely contain the god that it names.<sup>3</sup> The *limit* of the name cannot apply to Zeus, since he is the limitless; a name is a kind of *bond*, and the Zeus cannot be bound. While the activity of naming is certainly necessary for any discourse to take place, its paradoxical transgression must be remembered in order for any real *law* or justice to manifest; a space must be left open and *nameless*, since mortal judgment is inherently limited, just as language is itself *limit*. In this way, the understanding of irrationality as *excess* may be related to the divine excess that resists being bound by the name. Irrationality, in this sense, corresponds with the divine. One salient quality that all elements deemed “irrational” share is their inability to

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kahn, my italics.

<sup>2</sup> See Parmenides’ poem for a parallel: “Its name shall be everything/every single name mortals have invented convinced they are all true...”

<sup>3</sup> Compare the *Tao Te Ching*: “the Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.” Chapter 1, Stephen Mitchell’s translation (1988).

be controlled by human beings—“the divine” could refer to precisely this category of things, particularly as it is experienced as a force superior in power to human beings.

Hubris, in this context, is the assumption that mortal names can express the divine. The clever scheme of Odysseus in escaping certain death by *naming* himself as “Nobody”, in contrast, illustrates mortal humility. In the *Odyssey*, the Cyclops is described as “a monstrous man” who is “obedient to no law” and “not like a man that lives by bread.”<sup>1</sup> To meet the Cyclops, Odysseus brings divine wine with him because he intuits that it will be needed in confronting a savage man. When the Cyclops returns from *pasturing*, he addresses Odysseus and his comrades as *strangers*, thus indicating the law of hospitality that he will soon breach. Odysseus appeals to him as suppliants of Zeus, as wandering strangers, and the Cyclops replies, in an obvious illustration of hubris:

You are a fool, stranger, or have come from afar, seeing that you bid me either to fear or to avoid the gods. For the Cyclopes pay no heed to Zeus, who bears the aegis, nor to the blessed gods, since truly we are better far than they. Nor would I, to shun the wrath of Zeus, spare either you or your comrades, unless my own heart should bid me.<sup>2</sup>

Upon saying this, the Cyclops demonstrates his insolence by eating several of Odysseus’ comrades.

The Cyclops has only one eye; this is significant because it implies that he cannot see the double nature of seemingly opposite things, such as men and gods, and consequentially he has no respect for the gods (or men). His demonstration of this is symbolically revealing: he fails to “see” the invisible gods within the strangers as suppliants of Zeus, and the visible men that he does see, he swallows up. The law of hospitality requires that civilized human beings treat strangers *as if* they are gods in

---

<sup>1</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, Loeb, 9:245- 505.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, Loeb, 9:274-280.

disguise; this practice demonstrates the humility of lawful human beings since they are essentially acknowledging their *limited* powers of recognition.<sup>1</sup> The Cyclops commits hubris most blatantly through his failure to *see*, as the images of his monstrous eye and subsequent blinding attest.

By eating the men, he assimilates them into his one enormous I/eye; instead of following the law like men who eat bread, the lawless Cyclops perversely eats men *as* bread. The Cyclops is monstrous because he believes he is as a god while he is mortal, and, having only one eye (I), he believes that he is separate from both gods and men. This mythological demonstration provides a telling image of hubris; the Cyclops is an image of what psychoanalysis has named “the ego”, since he assimilates everything into his own I/Eye, disregarding the invisible forces of the gods, or alternately, of the unconscious. The Cyclops signifies the monstrosity that mortal beings become in committing hubris, since he mimes the ego’s assimilation of the world to the “*mine*”; the hubris of the ego is its blindness of limits, which is at the same time an ignorance of law.<sup>2</sup>

The initial weapon that Odysseus uses against the Cyclops is the divine wine, which the Cyclops unthinkingly drinks. In this way, he is filled up with the invisible divine that he arrogantly defies, which leads to his destruction. The wine is a visible means of *disguise* for the invisible that slips or sneaks into consciousness, corresponding to Freud’s observation that the unconscious often *tricks* its way into consciousness, using disguise, just as the Homeric gods often do when they appear to mortals—further

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Odyssey* affords many examples of the relation between hospitality and recognition; for a full account of this theme, see Sheila Murnagham’s book *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey*, Princeton University Press, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> See earlier chapter “Logos, Limit, and Law”.

evidence of mortal's weak capacity for *recognition*.<sup>1</sup> Just as the unconscious is able to exceed its boundaries and escape into consciousness in disguise, the gods, being *limitless*, are able to move between the human and the divine world with ease. Mortals, on the other hand, are restricted to the mortal world, and to consciousness.

After the Cyclops greedily asks for the drink three times, Odysseus tells him his name is Nobody (*outis*). The Cyclops *falls asleep* from this tricky drink, signifying both his lack of consciousness and the presence of the invisible forces characteristic of sleep (alternately, the gods or the unconscious). Since it is caused by the divine wine, this state is one of divine possession; it is while the Cyclops is in this state that Odysseus blinds him, *as Nobody*. The significance of *Nobody* is its opposition to *I*; while the insolent Cyclops takes himself as the divine (everybody), Odysseus plays his opposite, his *Nemesis* (nobody).<sup>2</sup> When one plays the role of everybody, "nobody" is a stranger. The anonymity of the stranger is thus instantiated in Odysseus' choice of name; contact with a stranger is contact with the *Other*. Odysseus' *blinding* of the Cyclops is an illustration of this confrontation with the *Other*, since the strangeness of the Other is not recognized, but immediately assimilated, or "eaten up". When Odysseus blinds the Cyclops, he is *literally* making the Cyclops into what he already was all along: a blind monster.

While Odysseus himself is a wanderer, the I/Eye of the Cyclops is also *nomadic*; the I/Eye *wanders* as the ever-present private perception of mortal existence. Wandering is the mortal condition of movement both in time and in place, of which the *Odyssey* is itself a demonstration. This movement is illusory, for the end of Odysseus' journey, like

---

<sup>1</sup> See especially Freud's essays "The Psychopathology of Everyday Life", "Repression" and "The Unconscious"

<sup>2</sup> The goddess Nemesis is a daughter of night (*Nyx*), and the punisher of hubris.

all journeys, is in the place it began. Parmenides also makes this observation in his description of “the path that mortals fabricate”, which is one that “keeps turning backwards on itself”.<sup>1</sup> The I/Eye itself does not need to move, since it can wander infinitely in its own orbit, creating the appearance of constant motion.<sup>2</sup> The nomadic quality of mortal awareness is its intransience; as the experience of the “I” itself is intransient, always seeming to move from one moment in time and space to another, as a stream of consciousness, like Heraclitus’ river fragment describes. But just as the eye can swivel endlessly in its orbit and stay in the same *place*, the experience of myself as the “I” remains in place, centered amidst the teeming of perception.

How does wandering for pasture (*nomas*) finally come to a place of pasturage (*nomos*)? For the Cyclops, it is his confrontation with his *other*, his *Nemesis*, Nobody. Since *Nobody* blinds him, the Cyclops’ blindness must be self-inflicted. The *justice* in this is that the Cyclops’ blindness was invisible prior to his conflict with Nobody, and Odysseus makes the invisible visible—he makes the blindness physical and literal, he embodies it, by putting the blindness into the body of the Cyclops. The physical form of the Cyclops, when seen in contrast with the normal mortal body, provides an image: the two eyes of a mortal always contain some ‘*between*’ the two gazes, which are then unified into one visual plane. As Merleau-Ponty remarks in *Eye and Mind*, “what would vision be without eye movement?”<sup>3</sup> We see one world, with no interruption, although our eyes are technically showing us two worlds; this is the origin of *depth*. The Cyclops is monstrous because he has eradicated depth. Hubris, as the condition of mortal beings, is

---

<sup>1</sup> Parmenides Poem, fragment 6, Kingsley’s translation.

<sup>2</sup> The name “Cyclops” implies circular movement; see Liddel and Scott lexicon.

<sup>3</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 124.

the denial of indeterminacy, the refusal of uncertainty, the terror of depth. The blindness of the Cyclops is his cure; he has made his one *eye/I see* (I see), and now he is made to see nothing.

Although Odysseus' *metis*, as a divine gift, allows him to *escape* the limits of the cave, he cannot escape hubris. In his pride, he cannot leave the act as anonymous, but feels that he must be given credit for what was, after all, the act of *nobody*. As he and his men are about to escape the terrible island of the Cyclops, he calls out, despite the admonitions of his comrades:

Cyclops, if any one of mortal men shall ask you about the shameful blinding of your eye, say that Odysseus, the sacker of cities, blinded it, the son of Laertes, whose home is in Ithaca.<sup>1</sup>

The Cyclops then reveals that he had been warned of Odysseus by an oracle, but that he was taken by surprise because he “always looked for some tall and handsome man to come here, clothed in great strength” and did not expect “one that is puny, a no-good and a weakling” to get him drunk and blind him.<sup>2</sup> The punishment inflicted on him, like that of Oedipus, was not expected because of a misinterpreted oracle, it came in *disguise*. The remaining books of the *Odyssey* bear testament to the egregious nature of Odysseus' arrogant mistake, as Odysseus is made to *wander* even longer, due to Poseidon's vengeance.

Another famous image of self-inflicted blindness in Greek literature is the pitiable figure of Oedipus. Both the nomadic and the concept of the *watcher* are present in this *mythos*: Oedipus is abandoned by his parents, in fear of the oracle. The nomadic appears as his ankles being tied, when he is brought out to the *pastures* as a baby, unable to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Odyssey*, 9:502-505

<sup>2</sup> *Odyssey*, 9:513-17.

navigate his way through the world. The word *nomas* is explicitly used at the end of the tragedy, when Oedipus says, “A curse upon the shepherd who released me from the cruel fetters of my feet, and saved me from death, and preserved me, doing me no kindness!”<sup>1</sup> This proclamation bears witness to the double possibility of Justice’s keys, as the instruments of both binding and release; his *release* from the ankle-bonds is at the same time his *binding* to his fate.

The watcher is named when Creon first returns with the oracle’s cryptic message to Oedipus: “What one looks for can be caught; only that which is not watched escapes.”<sup>2</sup> Oedipus’ immediate reply is very literal; he asks *where* this crime occurred, the movement of the dialogue shifts suddenly from the obscurity of the oracle’s sayings to the literal place or site of the crime. Oedipus, with his limited sight, does not mark the riddling “that which is not watched” because he *is* precisely the *watcher*; he cannot see his own *Eye/I*.

The chorus, in response to Oedipus’ failure to heed the oracle, says: “O ruler, if you are rightly thus called Zeus, lord of all, may this not *escape* you.”<sup>3</sup> Heraclitus addresses this impossibility of escape in fragment 16:

16: How can one hide from that which never sets?

The word *lathoi* echoes back to the mortal condition described in the first fragment: oblivious, unable to see or grasp the *logos* (or *law* of Zeus), and yet unable to *escape* it though it is *forgotten*.<sup>4</sup> “That which never sets” is the heart of the riddle, here explicitly given as a question. Kahn describes the customary association that would be

---

<sup>1</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Loeb, 1349-1352.

<sup>2</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Loeb, 110-111.

<sup>3</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Loeb, 198-200.

<sup>4</sup> This is a parallel to Heraclitus’ Fragment One.



made by the Greek mind; the star that never sets is the constellation of the *Bear* (*arktos*), the *watcher*.<sup>1</sup> This is also traditionally associated with the eye of Zeus, and it is the place of orientation—to figure out where you are, you must orient yourself to the unmoving eye, the center. Just as there is no place to go and escape the watcher, the psyche has no limits and so it cannot be escaped or moved, it can only wander and oscillate in its own circular orbit.<sup>2</sup>

The inevitable self-inflicted blinding of Oedipus is his encounter with his *other*: he as hubris and she as justice: *nobody* blinds Oedipus because he blinds himself. He recognizes his mortal condition of blindness, of hubris, and, as Odysseus does to the Cyclops, he makes the invisible visible by physically blinding himself. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the blinding figure of the invisible gods is the oracle, the *other* that Oedipus is inattentive of; in the story of the Cyclops, it is Odysseus. Oedipus is destroyed because he takes the oracle literally, just as Polyphemus' fellows take the name *Nobody* literally. These literal interpretations are a denial of ambiguity, a refusal of the indeterminacy of *Nobody*, and constitute a failure to recognize the duplicitous nature of language and of reality. The oracles, like the fragments of Heraclitus and Parmenides, take the form of poetic language; these examples should demonstrate the danger associated with holding *clarity* to be a poetic virtue rather than obscurity. One of the many deeply ironic speeches put into the mouth of Oedipus, as he says:

I shall begin again and light up the obscurity. Phoebus is right, and you are right, to show this concern on behalf of the dead man, so that you shall see me also justly fighting for him, and defending the cause of this country and of the god. For it will not be on behalf

---

<sup>1</sup> In the Greek textual footnotes to fragment twenty, Kahn defines limits as *termata*, Dawn as the east, Evening as the west, The Bear *Ursa Major* as the north(?), and the Warder as “*ouros*, , *ouros*, watchman, warder, boundary, limit whose opposite (*Arktouros*), whose risings and settings commonly served to mark the seasons.”

<sup>2</sup> Heraclitus #45: You will not find out the limits of the soul by going even if you travel over every way, so deep is its logos.

of a distant friend, but for my own sake, that I shall drive away this pollution; whoever killed him may well wish to turn the same violence against me, so that in defending him I am helping myself.<sup>1</sup>

Oedipus receives the justice that he asks for, but it does not come in the form he expected—once again, it comes in disguise. The thing that comes in the disguise is *nobody* because it is an encounter with one's own self, but with a hitherto unrecognized aspect. Hubris is an expression of the limits of the mortal condition, and the encounter with the law when those limits are breached. Thus the punishment is *just* because it is, in some way, self-inflicted, mortality as the encounter with the other that is *Nobody*. Its corollary is *humility*, which, as T.S. Eliot remarks in his *Four Quartets*, is endless.<sup>2</sup> Humility is a divine quality precisely because it resists determination, at the border it effaces itself and disappears. Humility is *invisible* in that one cannot *know* that one has it. Just as Odysseus must become *Nobody* in order to escape his death at the hands of the Cyclops, the dissolution of the ego as instrument of hubris is not a dissolution into *nothing*, but is an unexpected transformation into *everything*, or the divine. Hubris, as in inescapable element of mortal existence, is thus the very thing that brings mortals to the divine power of Justice, curing them of the limitations of mortal blindness.

In this context, we might reexamine the idea that *doxa* is necessary, and happens in accordance with the *logos* as law. The psychical blindness that Heraclitus describes at such length is the *means by which* the *logos* is grasped; the experience of separation and alienation from the *logos* is necessary in order to experience it as unity. There is a close parallel in Parmenides, where the “roads” are at first presented as though they will lead

---

<sup>1</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, Loeb, 132-141.

<sup>2</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Four Quartets”, *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909- 1950*, Harcourt Brace, 1971. T.S. Eliot begins his quartets with the Greek text of Heraclitus' fragment 2 and fragment 60.

the listener to truth; it turns out that there are no “roads” because there is only one being—but the deception of the roads was the *means by which* the one being is realized. In Heraclitus’ fragment 46, he says: “Oiesis is a sacred disease and seeing is being deceived.” The deception of seeing, like the conjecture of mortal thinking, is arrogant, yet it serves a *sacred* purpose. Just as Apollo Oulis must first destroy in order to make whole, the *doxa* and illusion of the mortal condition happen in accordance with divine law.

## Sleep and Psychosis

*The world of the waking is one and shared, but the sleeping turn aside each to his private world.” Heraclitus*

*A close affinity of this psychosis with normal dreams is unmistakable. A pre-condition of dreaming, however, is a state of sleep, and complete abandonment of perceptive capacity and of the outer world. Freud<sup>1</sup>*

*Nervous disorders consist primarily in an alienation from one’s instincts, a splitting off of consciousness from certain basic facts of the psyche. Hence rationalistic opinions come unexpectedly close to neurotic symptoms. Jung<sup>2</sup>*

*Yet the enchainment of past and future  
Woven in the weakness of the changing body,  
Protects mankind from heaven and damnation  
Which flesh cannot endure.  
T.S. Eliot, “Four Quartets”*

The oblivion that Heraclitus describes as the mortal condition bears a close relation to Freud’s description of psychosis, and this chapter will explore the elements of Freud’s theory alongside Heraclitus’ fragments, particularly those that involve *sleep*. The “psychical blindness” that was a focal point of the preceding chapter will appear once again in this context of psychosis and sleep. The “reality principle”, when considered in light of the alienation from reality that characterizes the mortal state according to Heraclitus, becomes a *fantasy*. Alienation from reality, whether in the extreme case of psychosis or the more common case of repression, is caused by some unbearable *pain* that the psyche cannot face. I will argue that this pain is precisely the condition of mortality, as a state of impending death; the repressed element is *death*, which is inextricably bound up with all mortal experience. If Heraclitus’ implications are borne

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, Simon and Schuster, 1999; from “Neurosis and Psychosis”, 187.

<sup>2</sup> Jung, “The Soul and Death”, *Collected Works* v. 8, 409-410.

out, the “reality” that most human beings experience is a fantasy designed to protect them from *death*. This analysis will have serious consequences for the way in which we understand perception, the death instinct, and the mortal experience of reality.

The unconscious is the repository for all the irrational elements of the human psyche. One mark of this designation is Freud’s description of the unconscious as operating only in accordance with the *pleasure* principle rather than the reality principle; his explanation for this theoretical structure is that the relation of the unconscious to external reality is never direct, but always mediated by consciousness.<sup>1</sup> Consciousness is, presumably, more rational than the unconscious, and does not operate according to the pleasure/pain model. This distinction between the “realistic” rational ego, that follows the rule of the reality principle, and the animalistic unconscious, that operates only according to pleasure and pain, is a clear demarcation along rational/irrational lines.

This picture of the unconscious seems to deny it any real intelligence, placing it on the level of simple animal behavior or infantile functions; only the rational ego, through its relations with the “real” world, allows the human being to transcend this *lower* existence. While Freud’s structural analysis of the psyche is careful and convincing, his valuations of these psychic components reveal a denigration of irrational elements, those “lower” functions also present in animals, and a privileging of rational consciousness as superior. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud describes the work of psychoanalysis as “an instrument to enable the ego to achieve a progressive conquest over the id.”<sup>2</sup> Freud is very aware of the ego’s precarious position, and its use of

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, “The Unconscious”, “Instincts and their Vicissitudes”, “The Economic Problem in Masochism”

<sup>2</sup> Freud, *Ego and Id*, SE, 58.

deceptive rationalization, but he does not consider another possibility: that the force of the unconscious, particularly manifested as the death drive, can be aiming towards the dissolution of the *ego*. From a rational standpoint, this aim is disastrous and must be halted and interfered with in every possible way—which is precisely the work of *Eros*, but this rational standpoint is the *ego*'s, and as such, it is a transparent cry of self-preservation. For Freud, the *ego* operates according to the “reality principle”, since it is believed to be the “surface” of the psyche and the only point of contact with the external world; but if we take the words of Heraclitus and other Presocratics seriously, then our experience of the so-called external world is as much the result of imagination and fantasy as the “psychic reality” of a psychotic.

In his descriptions of the unconscious, Freud distinguished four special characteristics that differentiated unconscious processes from those of consciousness: “exemption from mutual contradiction, primary process (motility of cathexis), timelessness, and substitution of psychic for external reality”.<sup>1</sup> These characteristics are, like the unconscious itself, irrational. Timelessness and the failure to adhere to the principle of non-contradiction are transparently illogical; the other two qualities require further examination.

Freud mentions two phenomena that represent “motility of cathexis”, both associated with dreams: condensation and displacement. Freud defines these ideas in this way, “by the process of displacement one idea may surrender to another the whole volume of its cathexis; by that of condensation it may appropriate the whole cathexis of

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *General Psychological Theory*, Simon and Schuster, 1999; from “The Unconscious”, 135.

several other ideas.”<sup>1</sup> These processes are extremely dynamic, and their behavior is unpredictable in that it does not follow a rational model, but seems to be of an *associative* nature. Displacement substitutes things for one another, often revealing associations that link the two things in some relation of *identity*. In the case of repressed contents, a dreamer will be confronted with a substitute for the real object of repression; the manifest content of the dream is the latent content *encrypted* according to this associative model. The case of condensation is similar, since the thing presented is an amalgamation of elements, and the way in which they are combined also seems to be according to the principle of association. These examples demonstrate that the unconscious does not proceed entirely without logic, but that the logic is associative rather than linear. This associative logic is much closer to mythological than to rational thought, since mythical understanding requires that connections be drawn by means of association, and without regard for contradiction or paradox.

This primary process can only be observed in dreams or in cases of neurosis; Freud remarks that these instances are *regressive* and only occur when the “higher” conscious systems “revert to an earlier level.”<sup>2</sup> These designations of higher and lower reveal an identification with the conscious systems, and even more strikingly, a belief in their superiority. This judgment at least partially rests on the premise that the conscious systems are more highly organized; in other words, that they follow a rational model of organization.

The final characteristic that Freud names as a special quality of unconscious processes is the substitution of psychic for external reality. He describes the state of

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, “The Unconscious”, 134.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, “The Unconscious”, 135.

psychosis in terms of the ego's withdrawal from reality, and substitution of its own fabricated reality in its place.<sup>1</sup> In this way, the psychotic can be said to dwell almost entirely in the unconscious, insofar as the reality principle ceases to hold sway when the relation between the ego and the external world is ruptured. Like repression, this procedure is a reaction to "pain". The most salient difference between neurosis and psychosis is the degree to which external reality is accepted; in neurosis, reality is merely ignored, while in psychosis it is *denied*.<sup>2</sup> This denial of external reality has the effect of transforming perception into hallucination.

This aspect of psychosis bears a strong resemblance to the mortal perception, or lack of it, described by Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles. This inability to use the senses has been explored at some length in earlier chapters, so I would like here to focus primarily on the recurrent theme of *sleep* in the fragments of Heraclitus. The first fragment compares the oblivion of waking life to the forgetting of dreams:

1: ...But other men are oblivious of what they do awake,  
just as what they do asleep escapes them.

The experience of dreams is ephemeral and easily forgotten, and this forgetting is usually immediate and permanent. If dreams are remembered, they are present only as a *trace* that bears the mark of an irremediable absence; since the contents of the unconscious are experienced as alien to consciousness, dreams take on the elusive character of strangeness and alterity. This strangeness, for Heraclitus, is not merely the experience of the dream-state, but is also experienced in the waking state, due to

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, "The Loss of Reality in Neurosis and Psychosis", 202-6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 204.



alienation from the most apparent reality, the logos. Fragments 72 and 73 express this idea most succinctly:

72-3: Men forget where the way leads and they are at odds with that with which they most constantly associate. And what they meet with every day seems strange to them... We should not act and speak like men asleep.

The words and deeds of most men are as strange to them as the world of dreams; human beings “act and speak like men asleep.” Similarly, Freud formulates a somewhat alarming hypothesis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, when he states that “consciousness arises *instead of* a memory-trace.”<sup>1</sup> Because a memory-trace exists in a state of latency, it is an unconscious content, and incompatible with conscious processes. Just as Heraclitus says that the deeds of waking men escape them, Freud argues that “excitatory processes do not leave behind any elements in its [system Cs.’] elements but expire, as it were, in the phenomenon of becoming conscious.”<sup>2</sup> Thus the contents of consciousness slip away in the same manner as dreams, sinking back into the unconscious—their nature is alien to consciousness, and they naturally separate, like oil and water. These observations must inform the reading of fragment 89, where Heraclitus describes the private world of “the sleeping”:

89: The world of the waking is one and shared, but the sleeping turn aside each to his private world.

In approaching this fragment, the identity of “the sleeping” is called into question: on the surface, this fragment appears to be making a superficial observation about the difference between the waking and the sleeping world—in contrast to the private world of sleep, the waking world is “shared” due to its universal accessibility.

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, W.W. Norton, NY, 1961; page 28, my italics.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 28.

Fragment 1 has already raised the problem of this accessibility, since human beings are out-of-sync (*axunetoi*) with the logos and do not demonstrate familiarity with it.

Fragment 89 must be read in the context of Heraclitus' repeated descriptions of human beings as "asleep"; thus "the sleeping" does not refer only to the usual nightly retreats from reality, but to the mortal condition as a whole. In this way, Heraclitus' description of mortals is, in Freud's terms, *psychotic*.

If we follow Freud's logic, the state of psychosis is attributed to some unbearable *pain* that causes the conscious self to retreat from reality, and replace it with a fabricated pleasurable substitute, in other words, a *fantasy*. Heraclitus describes this tendency in fragment 107:

107: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize what they experience, but imagine for themselves.

Thinking and recognition are replaced by *seeming*, or imagination; true perception has been usurped by *doxa*. This reading raises two important questions. First of all, fragment one implies that even this *doxa*, this failure to comprehend, must come about in accordance with the logos, since all things do—so what is the purpose of this fabrication? Secondly, Freud argues that psychosis, the alienation from reality that Heraclitus is describing, results from *pain*—does Heraclitus offer any indications regarding the nature of this pain? Since this alienation from reality is identified as the mortal condition, it follows that the reason for this schism is likely to be *mortality*. The answer to both questions lies in Freud's analysis of the death instinct.

Freud argued that repression consists in making certain elements of reality inaccessible to consciousness, and psychosis is a state in which most or all of reality is perceived to be unbearably painful; in this respect, psychosis is repression taken to its

furthest extreme. The condition of mortality is essentially one of impending death; what could be more painful to consciousness than the recognition of its own inevitable destruction? Death is an inextricable element of all mortal experience; it looms on the horizon inexorably. In Freud's theory, this constant awareness of death is relegated to the unconscious in the form of the death drive; he argues that it is a manifestation of the "elasticity" of instinct.<sup>1</sup> Freud speculates that the repression of contents associated with death may be due to our "intellectual uncertainty" regarding death, and may result in the phenomenon he named "the uncanny", which is essentially the experience of "something familiar that has been repressed."<sup>2</sup> This description bears a strong resemblance to the alienated condition so frequently described by Heraclitus; it is an inability to recognize what should be familiar, the inexplicable absence of recognition in the face of the obvious.

Freud links the uncanny with "all that arouses dread and creeping horror...it tends to coincide with whatever excites dread."<sup>3</sup> This concept is essentially the experience of something novel that is at the same time mysteriously familiar; it is the presence of something absent. Freud notes that the Arabic and Hebrew words for *uncanny* imply the daemonic, and he uses the experience of seeing "wax-work figures, artificial dolls, and automatons" as an example of something that produces the experience of the uncanny.<sup>4</sup> These examples are reminiscent of Vernant's analysis of the *kolossos* and its function as a *double*, as the presence of something absent, particularly because the uncanny is also

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny", *Collected Papers Vol. 4*, Basic Books, NY, 1959; page 401.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny", 368.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, "The Uncanny", 378.

associated with ghosts and phantoms, which are other manifestations of this *eidolon*.<sup>1</sup> Freud remarks upon this phenomenon of the double, and calls it “an insurance against destruction to the ego.”<sup>2</sup> This doubling occurs, according to Freud, as an “impulse towards self-protection which has caused the ego to project such a content outward as something foreign to itself.”<sup>3</sup> These experiences of the uncanny are all experiences of irrationality; the projection is a result of the conscious mind’s denial of its own irrational elements.

Freud mentions several examples of the uncanny, including the experience of madness and the perception that thoughts have a direct effect on external reality; these kinds of experiences are, for Freud, evidence of a regression into “primitive” or “animistic” modes of thought.<sup>4</sup> Basically, he argues that the belief that thoughts can directly influence reality is a reversion to panpsychism, and can be transcended by a complete reliance on rational principles; these uncanny experiences only arise when things that “are regarded as incredible are not, after all, impossible.”<sup>5</sup> Or as Heraclitus says, “incredibility escapes recognition”. Once again, the question returns: is the cosmos itself rational? Since consciousness has sundered from itself all of its irrational elements, the confrontation with these elements has the character of the uncanny, both alien and familiar simultaneously; this category includes contact with the divine and other “supernatural” elements, which represent an *excess* and so cannot be understood *rationally*. These rejected and projected parts of consciousness appear to the ego as

---

<sup>1</sup> Vernant, “The Kolossos”, *Myth and Thought in Ancient Greece*; see preceding chapters for discussion of this concept of the double.

<sup>2</sup> Freud, “The Uncanny”, 387.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 389.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, “The Uncanny”, 396.

<sup>5</sup> Freud, “The Uncanny”, 404.

originating externally. This deception's aim is once again self-preservation, since the instinctual elasticity that Freud mentions never ceases to pull human beings towards death. In Freud's analysis, the uncanny seems to be consistently associated with death, particularly with *dread* of death. The failure to recognize the reality of death is evident in Heraclitus fragments 21 and 26:

21: Death is all things we see awake; all we see asleep is sleep.

26: A man kindles a light for himself in the night, when his sight is extinguished. Living, he touches the dead in his sleep; waking, he touches the sleeper.

Fragment 26 contains a strange repetition of *haptetai*, which means both “touches” and “kindles”; both of these meanings can be applied to the three instances of *haptetai* in the fragment. Kahn notes that the first use of *haptetai* implies that the light being struck is replacing some other light, and “the curious wording of *apostheis opseis*...literally says that he, the man and not his eyes, has been extinguished like a lamp.”<sup>1</sup> There is a striking resemblance between this description of psychic activity and the cycle of everliving fire in fragment 30, which is alternately kindled and extinguished. Heraclitus seems to be implying that the cycle of waking and sleeping, like the cycle of life and death, are manifestations of the cosmic cycle on a psychic scale. We have already encountered the problem of sleep in fragment 89, which tempts us to unhesitatingly align ourselves with “the waking” rather than confront the frightening possibility that we are “the sleeping”. As the vastly divergent perspectives of individual subjectivities attest, we do not *experience* a world that is “one and shared”, although we must exist within this one world—the “private worlds” of men are the “seemings” of fragment 17.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Cambridge, 1979; page 214.

The phrase “when his sight is extinguished” can be understood as a reference to night or to death, and Heraclitus’ consistent method of using ambiguity motivates us to infer that he means to imply both. When a man is asleep, the light he “kindles for himself” so that he might see is the world of dreams; despite the darkness and lack of perceptual activity, he imagines that he is awake and moving about in the world of light. Heraclitus is here drawing an implicit analogy between sleep and death; just as in sleep, when a man is dead, he “kindles a light for himself” and lives in a world of imagination where he believes that he is alive.<sup>1</sup> Just as we cannot be certain that we are awake, our belief that we are alive is equally questionable; these fragments aim at presenting us with the possibility that waking/sleeping and life/death are two appearances of the same thing, not separate states at all. This inference is also upheld by fragment 57, where Heraclitus criticizes Hesiod for his failure to recognize that day and night are one.

Fragment 21 is problematic because in stating that all we see awake is death, one might expect all we see asleep to be “life”; as Kahn says, “the symmetry of the clauses leads us to expect” this.<sup>2</sup> Many commentators shy away from this fragment, because it frustrates expectations in a very deliberate way, and poses a seemingly insoluble riddle.<sup>3</sup> The expectation that Heraclitus purposefully creates is meant to draw our attention to the unacknowledged source of this expectation; our belief that we actually experience and are

---

<sup>1</sup> The placement of sleeping/waking directly alongside living/dead in fragment 88 is further evidence for this reading.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Kahn does not offer analysis of the fragment, but only examines its frustrating complexity (*Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 213); Wheelwright only mentions it in passing as akin to fragment 26 (*Heraclitus*, 25); Kirk, Raven, and Schofield similarly group it with other fragments that mention sleep, and conclude that in sleep, the “fieriness” of the soul is “diminished” but offer no further explanation of the disturbing statement “death is all things we see awake” (*The Presocratic Philosophers*, 205) .

familiar with *life*. Just as we tend to assume that we are awake, we automatically believe that we are alive, despite our complete ignorance of the nature of death. As fragment 62 makes plain, mortals and immortals “live the others’ deaths” and “are dead in the others’ life”; this implies that what looks like death to a mortal is life to an immortal, and vice versa. Following this formula, mortals may be understood as *sleeping immortals*; when awakened, they would look upon this mortal life as *death*. Life, for mortals, is not truly life but the animation of the dead; a play of shadows that appears to be life, not unlike the sight of the prisoners in Plato’s cave. If we were to awaken, we would recognize this pantomime for what it really is: a phantom dream of life dreamt by the dead. This is precisely why Heraclitus withholds the expected term “life” from the second clause of fragment 21; he is gently hinting that what we believe to be life is only sleep.

This discussion has significant bearing on the interpretation of Freud’s theories regarding repression, psychosis, and the death instinct, and suggests an unexpected reading of the relation between them. There is a very strong resemblance between *symptoms*, as they result from repression, and *delusions* that are created in psychosis. Freud says that a symptom is a “substitutive gratification”, and is essentially the repressed impulse in disguise.<sup>1</sup> Symptoms are *neurotic* manifestations, and so they differ in intensity from *psychotic* products, which are far more dramatic. The product of psychosis most analogous to a symptom is described as a *delusion*: “in regard to the genesis of delusions, a number of analyses have taught us that the delusion is found like a patch on the spot where originally there was a rent in the relation between the ego and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, “Neurosis and Psychosis”, *General Psychological Theory*, 186.

outer world.”<sup>1</sup> In this way, a delusion is also a kind of *substitution*, in that it fills in the gap created by this tear between the ego and the external world; like a symptom, it creates the appearance of continuity where there is, in fact, a hole or an abyss. This process can be observed in “normal” perception, which fills in gaps with what is *expected*, as in the cases of visual blind spots or missing letters in words.

Heraclitus and other Presocratics, particularly Parmenides and Empedocles, repeatedly imply that human beings are living in a world of illusion; this idea is still very present in the writings of Plato. We are faced, in these writings, with a disturbing presentation of the mortal condition as a state of sleep, oblivion, and complete perceptual incapacity; this picture accords with Freud’s conditions for psychosis. In this case, what Freud calls the reality principle is actually a fantasy, and what we believe to be conscious experience is far more aligned with his descriptions of the pleasure principle, since perception would be conditioned according to *wishes* in the same way that dreams are. Our ordinary observations regarding perception reveal this tendency, expressed as the fulfillment of expectations; we see what we want to see.

According to Freud’s logic, some unbearable pain must be responsible for causing this psychotic state; somehow reality must have entirely frustrated psychic wishes, in order to account for this rupture from the external world, from reality. Instead of the presence of this unbearably painful thing, the psyche has a hole. To best discover the identity of the unbearable pain, we might look to that which is most avoided, most absent from experience, most mysterious—the obvious candidate is *death*. The constant terrible

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, 187.



presence of the “mute” death instinct is met everywhere with the “clamor” of Eros.<sup>1</sup> This clamor is, according to these Presocratic texts, the clamor of dream and deception—nothing but the illusory sound of sleep. The purpose of this clamor is precisely the purpose of Eros; it is to fend off “the continuous descent towards death.”<sup>2</sup> What passes for human life is merely the diversion created to avoid the constant ineluctable presence of death. This picture seems morbid and terrifying to human beings only when they imagine that they understand what death is—not to mention what *life* is. T.S. Eliot addresses this clamor and distraction in “Four Quartets”, where human beings are “distracted from distraction by distraction filled with fancies and empty of meaning...not here the darkness, in this twittering world.”<sup>3</sup>

The unbearable pain that caused the alienated, psychotic mortal condition is the presence of *death*; the reaction to this absolute stillness is the frenzied clamor of life. When Freud describes the elasticity of instinct, he stresses its *stasis*; it is a return to the *inorganic*—a return to death.<sup>4</sup> The movement of life is illusory, since it is a *dream* created as a substitute for the expected reality. Just as Parmenides’ goddess demonstrates, the true nature of reality is stasis. The logic of the unconscious accords with this reality; both the motility cathexis and the timelessness described by Freud demonstrate that the unconscious operates in accordance with this stasis. While consciousness believes in movement, the unconscious “knows” that this movement is illusory—there is nowhere to go. In this regard, the unconscious possesses an intelligence superior to the deluded conscious systems. Freud says that the death instinct demonstrates the elasticity of

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>3</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Four Quartets”, *Collected Poems and Plays*, Harcourt, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE, 43.

instinct; the yearning to return to an earlier state of stasis. He interprets this observation to mean that the death instinct aims at the destruction of the *organism*, and is impeded by the will of Eros.

Eros counters this destructive force by impelling *creation*, the most obvious example of this being *procreation*; but this illusory bid for immortality only multiplies death rather than escaping it. The life instinct is closely bound up with the ego, and is essentially indistinguishable from it, since the perception of self is incompatible with the perception of death. If Eros is the force that creates the diversionary illusion in order to avoid the repressed contents of death, it is precisely that “constant expenditure of energy” that is necessary to keep the repressed contents from rising to the surface of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> The symptom of this repression, or likewise, the delusion of this psychosis, is *the ego*. The ego is a fantasy-formation created as a patch to seal off the abyss of death. The true purpose of the death instinct is not the destruction of the *organism*, but the destruction of the *ego*. The fantasy, or dream, which mortals believe to be *life*, is the activity of self-preservation on the part of the ego, which fears its own destruction and thus has a vested interest in the uninterrupted continuation of its erotic activity—this erotic activity is what we usually refer to as *perception*.

Before the dawn of rational thought, human beings could not experience the world as separate from themselves; they could not experience the *alienation* of this isolation. This schism has created a lacuna in the human psyche; there is a hole where all the “irrational” elements used to be—including the divine. The absence of god, a prevalent theme in religion and philosophy, is this experience of alienation. The ego is a

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, “Repression”, *General Psychological Theory*, 109.

substitute formation, formed as a replacement for god and in his image—just like rationality, the ego believes itself to be rootless (i.e. limitless), superior, and self-justifying. This image of the divine, when placed in a human being, creates ironic contrast; this tragedy is enacted in the drama of hubris and law.

## **Conclusions: Borderlands of Psyche and Logos**

The title of this work names “borderlands”; this name is an invocation of the goddess Artemis, as mistress of borderlands and liminal places. She is also the recipient of Heraclitus’ book, since he dedicated it in her temple at Ephesus. Whatever Heraclitus’ attitude towards Artemis or the gods may have been, he consistently reveals his skill in evoking symbolic meanings; in this regard, his action may well be an extension of his meaning. In other words, his “words and deeds” are both expressions of the *logos*, as fragment 1 implies; this dedication may be the only deed of which we have direct evidence. Borderland, as a symbol, has guided my approach to Heraclitus’ fragments, particularly in accordance with his conflict of opposites. This *indeterminacy* extends throughout his thought, and has special relation to his account of *psyche* and *logos*; in this relation, the concept of limit has recurred throughout this study, usually in association with *psyche* and divine law (*Zeus*). Before explicitly drawing conclusions, I would like to begin by contextualizing the underlying conceptual structure of this dissertation, using this concept of borderland, and with some comments on method.

In organizing the dissertation, Heraclitus’ own method continually frustrated any attempts I made to order his fragments; it was a lot like trying to put a puzzle together when the pieces keep shifting. After much struggle, I realized that the effect I was experiencing was intentionally induced by Heraclitus’ arrangement, and any order that I attempted to conform his fragments to was a projection of my own expectations. The patterns that I saw in Heraclitus were *my* patterns; I realized I was looking at myself rather than at his words. Most surprisingly, the patterns that I recognized had not

formerly been visible to me; his fragments reflected them back to me like a magic mirror. This reflection allowed me to recognize the “invisible harmony” that he mentions in fragment 54, and the phenomenon of projection in general; Heraclitus’ references to projection are frequent.<sup>1</sup> These observations led me to the conclusion that Heraclitus was indeed studying *psyche*, but his method was interactive—the fragments were designed for the readers to study *psyche* firsthand, in its “natural habitat”. My decision *not* to order the fragments was informed by these experiences, and I believe that it is consistent with Heraclitus’ own method. Any order that I could have presented would have conformed to my own private world, rather than remaining shared and common. In the interests of this important consideration, the fragments remain linked purely by association.

Association, as a method, is mythological in nature; poetic language conforms to this older model. As Vernant, Freud, and Jung, among others, have noticed, this principle appears to be a dominant principle of psychic activity; the psyche seems to *move* according to association. The interpretation of dreams, and all other manifestations of the unconscious, can only be recognized with this associative model as a guide; the language of *symbol* conforms to this model. In this regard, the “language of the soul” that Heraclitus implies in fragment 107 calls to mind more recent work in depth psychology<sup>2</sup>, which, following Jung, approaches the unconscious as a *language* of symbol. To a rationally trained mind, this associative method is frustrating, illogical, and inconvenient; it tends towards *obscurity* rather than clarity, and makes extreme demands upon the

---

<sup>1</sup> Fragment 17 is a good example of this theme: Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them, nor do they recognize what they experience, but *seem* to themselves. I have amended the last line to conform to a more literal translation suggested by Kahn (*Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 29).

<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I have James Hillman in mind here, with his work *The Soul’s Code*, Grand Central Publishing, 1997.

imagination. His medium of poetry, like Parmenides, was unacceptable to rational philosophers like Aristotle, because they believed that philosophy ought to be judged by a standard of clarity. This attitude has, with some exceptions,<sup>1</sup> predominated. Clarity, as a standard for judging philosophy, must be tempered by the recognition that reality itself is often obscure, and in some circumstances, obscurity is absolutely necessary for its expression. This observation has informed my opinion that Heraclitus' ambiguity is always deliberate; Charles Kahn has been a very convincing proponent of this view, and his introduction to Heraclitus strongly emphasizes this point.<sup>2</sup>

Ambiguity is, in many of the fragments, an indeterminacy between two (or more) elements; this kind of ambiguity is perhaps the most defining feature of Heraclitus' fragments. A borderland is a place of indeterminacy; a border (from Old French *bordure*) is a seam or an edge that separates two things while simultaneously determining them in relation to one another. A border is contradictory as it both separates and conjoins at the same time; thus it is not only indeterminate in its nature, but also in its action. As a place, the borderland is not identical to either of the things that it separates/conjoins; it is a *physical* manifestation of pure indeterminacy. This concept is cloaked here in modern language, but it had its mythological precedents.

The mythological significance of borderland is associated with ancient beliefs about human contact with the divine; it is the mystery of life and death. Borderlands appear wherever there is contact with death, or with the divine; for example, the goddess Justice's place at the gates of Night and Day, entrances to caves as doorways to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Some of the greatest philosophers have been those who defied this rule of clarity, for example: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, Kristeva, and Bataille.

<sup>2</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*.

underworld, the edges of the city that turn into the wilds. The goddess Hekate is an especially relevant figure in this regard, and she has ties to the goddesses Persephone, Aphrodite, Artemis, and Justice; her most essential role is as *mediator* between the human world and the realm of the divine. As Sarah Johnston has thoroughly explored in her book, Hekate is the goddess who transmits from one world to the other, holding the keys and administrating the *doorways* between worlds.<sup>1</sup> Hekate is the only witness to the abduction of Persephone, according to Hesiod, and she serves as her escort and guide between worlds thereafter. She is linked to Aphrodite insofar as she is the *binder* of the worlds, occupying the liminal spaces between them, and she hold the *keys* as the goddess Justice does in Parmenides' poem, at her station at the gates of Night and Day. Borderlands are also sacred to Artemis, and Hekate was especially acknowledged as the goddess of crossroads, where cairns were left in her honor, as she guides souls down the proper path. This ambiguity between various goddesses is itself evidence of the ambiguous nature of the feminine divine; as in the case of Zeus, no name can contain this power, and it takes on many guises. The nature of the feminine is especially associated with borderland because it is a nature of *two*; in this way, it is indeterminate.<sup>2</sup>

These mythological images have re-emerged in psychoanalytic research, which is not surprising if one regards the *psyche* as a biological structure, as Jung did. The concept

---

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed and thorough analysis of Hekate and her relation to other Greek goddesses, see Sarah Iles Johnston, *Hekate Soteira: A Study of Hekate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature*, The American Philological Association, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> See Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, Cornell University Press, 1985; elements of Chinese philosophy also exhibit this formula, especially the *I Ching*, where the feminine element (*yin*) is expressed by even numbers while the masculine (*yang*) is always odd.

of borderland is used by both Freud and Jung, in cases where they encounter a pure indeterminacy. Freud uses this concept in an explanation of *instinct*:

If we now apply ourselves to considering mental life from a biological point of view, an “instinct” appears to us as a borderland concept between the mental and the physical, being both the mental representative of the stimuli emanating from within the organism and penetrating to the mind, and at the same time a measure of the demand made upon the energy of the latter in consequence of its connection with the body.<sup>1</sup>

This explanation develops out of Freud’s analysis of *pain* and the pleasure principle; pain is an ambiguous phenomenon because it seems both internal and external at once. Pain is both mental and physical at the same time; this description can be extended to psychic phenomena in general, insofar as what is internal or psychic can be experienced as external or physical. This strange ambiguity between the physical and the psychical is one of Heraclitus’ most prominent themes; he consistently refers to concrete physical phenomena in order to express *psychical* reality. Recognition of this identity, or at least *radical continuity*, between the physical world and the psychical world is the aim of Heraclitus’ conflict of opposites. He is not merely revealing the structure of the cosmos, nor is he only pointing towards the structure of the psyche—he is demonstrating their structure as *common* or *shared*.<sup>2</sup>

For Heraclitus, soul cannot be merely an *object*, still less and object of inquiry; soul is dynamic and alive. As Wheelwright has remarked, “soul, to Heraclitus, is quality, substance, and activity in one.”<sup>3</sup> In this way, the cosmos itself *is soul*, and is alive and dynamic. This conclusion should not be surprising because it is essentially the doctrine of

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, “Instincts and Their Vicissitudes”, *General Psychological Theory*, 87.

<sup>2</sup> For a fascinating parallel to this idea, developed in detail, see Jung’s *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, Princeton, 1973. This model follows a principle of association rather than the linear, rational model of causality.

<sup>3</sup> Wheelwright, *Heraclitus*, 61.



*panpsychism*, and no less of an authority than Charles Kahn argues that Heraclitus, like Empedocles and the Pythagoreans, ascribed to this belief. This understanding sheds light on the method of Heraclitus, since it demonstrates *how* the psyche can continually be encountering itself *as* the cosmos. Limit or border is thus not merely an “idea” in the intellectual sense, but an *experience*, an event. An encounter with *limit*, or law, brings *psyche* into an encounter with the divine—but once this happens, there is no longer any separation between the *psyche* and the divine, because the divine is *limitless*. This event, experienced throughout time in its repetition, is the constant and eternal event of psyche.

The poem of Parmenides offers a dramatic demonstration of this event, as Parmenides, a *living* man, is carried to the land of the dead. Once he moves through the gates of Night and Day, he is in a realm *beyond* opposites; the Underworld is the divine world. One very strange consequence of this move is its effect on *all* opposites; just as the goddess banishes all forms of separation, since they imply non-being, the separation between mortal and divine must vanish as well. While Parmenides is in the Underworld, there is no separation between him and the divine. The journey to the Underworld is not to *meet* with the divine, it is to *become* divine. Unlike Freud, Jung applied this understanding to his research of the unconscious, and believed that the *psyche* has a purpose and a trajectory. This difference in understanding, among others, leads to a radical reinterpretation of the *meaning* of psychical “disturbances” such as neurosis and psychosis, depression, and dream interpretation.

The psyche is a borderland in that it precariously holds together the conscious and the unconscious mind. Jung describes this borderland as a tension, a polarity that results

from psychic processes as phenomena of energy.<sup>1</sup> Unlike a typical geographical border, *the entire psyche is borderland*; as Jung writes, “conscious and unconscious have no clear demarcations, the one beginning where the other leaves off. It is rather the case that the psyche is a conscious-unconscious whole.”<sup>2</sup> This formulation is disconcerting because it means that consciousness is inextricable from the unconscious; an abyss opens up beneath the conscious will. This abyss is *limitless*; it is the psyche’s encounter with the unconscious, or alternately, the Underworld: death. Jung writes:

The dread and resistance which every natural human being experiences when it comes to delving too deeply into himself is, at bottom, the fear of the journey to Hades.<sup>3</sup>

Heraclitus’ method, which allows the reader to *experience* the invisible elements of the *psyche*, is a method that explores the unconscious. The figure of Hades, as lord of the Underworld, provides context for this analysis. The works of Heraclitus, like Freud and Jung’s explorations of the *psyche*, evidence this interplay between the conscious and the unconscious; this is a *performance* made visible. The god Hades is unusual in that he is both a god and a *place*, the place of this performance. Mythological accounts of Hades offer some clues into the realm of the unconscious, specifically, they evidence the relation of consciousness towards this place. The parallels between Hades as Underworld and the unconscious are too numerous to explore exhaustively here, but I will cite some striking examples. The journey to the underworld is always a descent into a shadowy world of invisibles, with Hades himself as the invisible king. One of the telling epithets

---

<sup>1</sup> Jung, Carl. “The Personal and Collective Unconscious” and “The Technique of Differentiation”, in Vol. 7 of the Collected Works, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, Princeton University Press, 1966. See especially pgs 75, 76, and 221.

<sup>2</sup> Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 8, page 200.

<sup>3</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, The Collected Works, Routledge, 1953.

of Hades is *Pluto*, which derives from the word *plutos*, meaning wealth or riches; the underworld is paradoxically a place of death and a place of great fertility. The riches that lie beneath the earth are analogous to the richness of the psychic realm, the world of the unconscious. The queen of Hades, the goddess Persephone, personifies this paradox of barrenness and fertility; she is the dread goddess of the dead, but she is also the *kore*, the maiden daughter of Demeter. Her abduction by Hades signifies *loss*, the sacrifice that must be offered in order to make the journey to the underworld; psychologically, this represents the submission of the conscious mind's will to the dark forces of the unconscious, that violently drag us down into darkness, away from our familiar world.

The entrances to the underworld described in mythology have special psychic significance; cracks, crevices, chasms and caves are the doorways into the land of the dead. These entrances bear a striking relation to Freud's description of the holes in conscious reality, which first signaled the existence of the unconscious in his research. Unconscious elements can only enter consciousness "through the cracks"; Freudian slips, mysterious symptoms, dreams, hypnosis, and the evidence from schizophrenics are all examples of these fissures.<sup>1</sup> Once again, the resemblance between world and psyche becomes visible: the holes in the earth are the holes in our consciousness that lead down into the unconscious.

Hades himself is invisible, and his helmet of invisibility provides another relevant image. The wearer is made invisible, as Hades himself, and the helmet *covers the head*,

---

<sup>1</sup> Freud, "The Unconscious", *General Psychological Theory*.

rendering conscious thoughts powerless.<sup>1</sup> There are very few depictions of Hades in ancient artworks, and significantly, there are no cults or temples in his name, possibly owing to the fact that, as the god of riches, he needs no *gifts*. He is faceless, but he does not hide beneath a mask, as some terrible figures such as the Gorgon seem to; Hades is always the invisible that lies *beneath* any mask or disguise. The idea of Hades as psyche is not a distinctly modern one; Plato hints that Hades is a “state of mind” in his *Laws*, as E.R. Dodds has pointed out.<sup>2</sup> The *invisible* world is the world of Hades, and the “invisible harmony” that Heraclitus names, along with its riches, can only be experienced by an explorer willing to mine these terrible depths.

From the discussions contained in these chapters, several conclusions emerge. The first and most prominent of these has already been mentioned; the soul and the cosmos are continuous with one another, and reflect the same structure. In this sense, cosmos *is* soul, bringing Heraclitus’ philosophy into direct accord with panpsychism. Another element of this analysis is the conclusion that the soul and cosmos must also be *divine*. If the divine is limitless, it follows that there is nothing that is not divine. The apparent separation of the mortal and the divine realm is completely necessary for realization of their unity to be *experienced*. This experience occurs when one explores the depths of their own private psyche, and finds that it is continuous with the whole;

---

<sup>1</sup> For this image, as well as various general observations about Hades, I am indebted to Brian Clark’s essay “Hades as Place”, published by the Chiron Center, Melbourne, Australia, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, 221.

fragments 45 and 115 point to this phenomenon, and Kahn also acknowledges this conclusion in his analysis of *psyche*.<sup>1</sup>

The means by which this identity is realized is *logos*. As Kirk, Raven and Schofield have argued, “god cannot be essentially different from *logos*.”<sup>2</sup> Just as the divine is the underlying, invisible element that connects all things, *logos* is the visible manifestation of this unifying force. The *logos* is, as the word implies, language, though this language is more than just human speech—the visible world *is* the language. Human beings (*psyche*) must learn to understand this language, that presents itself through the visible world; in this sense, it is a language of the soul. In order to recognize the unity of the divine, human beings must experience the *logos*. The manner in which this is done leads me to a final conclusion, which concerns the nature and role of the *senses* in this whole process.

The senses are divine. While Empedocles says this far more explicitly than Heraclitus, this understanding is implied by all of the conclusions that can be drawn from Heraclitus’ fragments and method. The picture that has been painted by Heraclitus amounts to this: human beings exist in a state of *alienation*, which is the experience of separation from the divine. This state can also be expressed as alienation from the *logos*, since the *logos* is the physical expression of the divine in the physical world. In order to be united with the divine, human beings must become of its nature—this means that they must learn to “act and speak” in accordance with the *logos*. In order to do so, they must first learn to *listen* to the *logos*, and experience the unity that it expresses and embodies.

---

<sup>1</sup> See preceding chapters for full argument; Kahn states this conclusion in *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 118.

<sup>2</sup> KRS, 191.

The way in which this must be done is through the *senses*. The senses are the bridge across the border that separates the divine from the mortal, life from death, the conscious from the unconscious. If a human being is able to become identified with her senses, she *becomes* divine. The divine “part” of the soul, then, is not *reason* but the senses. This accounts for the dramatic contrast between the Presocratic philosophy of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles and the rational philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

In order to become divine, which is, for Heraclitus, the same thing as becoming conscious (i.e. “waking up” from sleep), a human being must learn to consciously use the senses. The way in which this is done is hinted at throughout the fragments, as *wisdom* is always associated with the ability to recognize *unity* rather than difference. The interplay of the opposites provides a framework in which unity can be evidenced *through* difference. *Psyche* must first observe this dynamic in the cosmos, and recognize unity *there*; upon doing this, the divine and all-pervasive *logic (logos)* of this unity implies that the cosmos is not separate from the psyche, and the unity becomes *here*—within awareness. The *psyche’s* encounter with its own *limits* is an encounter with the border that both separates *and* unites it with the divine; this encounter with *limit* is expressed as an encounter with *law*—the drama of *hubris* is the way in which this happens. In this way, *hubris*, which is associated with the private world of *doxa*, becomes a necessary element of this process.

The depth of Heraclitus’ works cannot be entirely grasped by any study of his fragments, because his fragments are an expression of the limitless *psyche*. In this work, I have followed his lead in developing my analysis through association; the impossibility of a methodical approach means that something will, inevitably, be left out. This *excess* is

inescapable, as it represents the sheer infinity of the *psyche*, and of the divine. As Heraclitus tells us, “you will not find out the limits of the soul by going, even if you travel over every way, so deep is its *logos*.” My analysis will conclude with reflection upon this invocation of the limitless. The mystery and paradox of life is its contact and continuity with the finality of death; it is not only death that is a threshold, but life itself. Human existence is at once perilously limited and mysteriously limitless; it is, as the Buddhists say, honey on a razorblade.

### **Bibliography: Ancient Texts**

Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics, De Divinatione Per Somnum, De Anima, De Somniis, Metaphysics, Generation of Animals* in *Basic Works*. (Random House, 1941).

Diels, H., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. by W. Kranz (Berlin, 1951)

Hesiod, *Works and Days*, Loeb Classical Library No. 57 (Harvard Univ. Pr., 1982).

Homer, *Iliad*, Loeb Classical Library No. 170, 171 (Harvard Univ. Pr., 1982).

*Odyssey*, Loeb Classical Library No. 105, 106 (Harvard Univ. Pr., 1982).

Plato, *Apology, Sophist, Phaedo, Timaeus* in *Collected Works*.

Sophocles' "Oedipus the King". Whitney J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr. *Seven Famous Greek Plays* (Modern Library edition, 1950).

### **Bibliography:**

Armstrong, Richard H., *A Compulsion for Antiquity* (Cornell Univ. Pr., 2005).

Bakker, Egbert, *Pointing at the Past: From Formula to Performance in Homeric Poetics* (Center for Hellenic Studies, 2005).

Burkert, Walter, *Greek Religion* (Blackwell, 1985).

*Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Harvard Univ. Pr., 1972).

Burnet, John, *Early Greek Philosophy* (New York: Meridian, 1957).

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Random House, NY, 1982).

Casey, Edward. *The Fate of Place* (University of California Press, 1997).

Cherniss, Harold, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, (Johns Hopkins Press, 1964).

Chittick, William C., *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oneworld Publications, 2007).

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner* (Dover 1970).

Corbin, Henry. *The Man of Light In Iranian Sufism* (Omega Publications, 1994).

Cornford, F.M. *From Religion to Philosophy* (Harper, 1957).



- Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous Feminine* (Routledge: London, 1993).
- Derrida, Jacques, "Difference", in *Margins of Philosophy* (University of Chicago Press, 1982).  
 "Khora", in *On the Name* (Stanford University Press, 1995).  
 "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text", in *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, (Fordam Univ. Pr., 2005).
- Dilcher, Roman. *Spudasmata, (Studies in Heraclitus)*, (George Olms Verlag, 1995).
- Dodds, E.R. *The Greeks and the Irrational* (University of California Press, 1971).
- T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems and Plays*, (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).
- Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, SE (WW Norton, 1961).  
*Complete Psychological Works*, (Hogarth Press, 1964).  
*Ego and Id*, SE, (WW Norton, 1961).  
*General Psychological Theory*, Simon and Schuster, 1963.  
*Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (Penguin, 2002).  
 "The Uncanny", *Collected Papers Vol. 4* (Basic Books, NY, 1959).
- Greene, William Chase, *Moira: Fate, Good, and Evil in Greek Thought* (Harper, NY, 1963).
- Havelock, Eric, *A Preface to Plato* (Harvard Univ. Pr., 1963).
- Hölscher, Uvo. "Paradox, Simile, and Gnomie Utterance in Heraclitus", *The Presocratics*, edited by Alexander P.D. Mourelatos (Anchor Books, NY, 1974).
- Inwood, Brad, *The Poem of Empedocles* (University of Toronto, 2001).
- Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, (Cornell Univ. Pr., 1985).
- Johnston, Sarah, *Hecate Soteira: A Study of Hecate's Roles in the Chaldean Oracles and Related Literature* (The American Philological Association, Scholars Press, 1990).
- Jonas, Hans. *The Gnostic Religion* (Beacon Press, 1958).
- Jung, Carl, *Collected Works of Jung*, Vols. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 14 (Bollingen Foundation, Princeton University Press, 1953).
- Kahn, Charles. *Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979).
- Kerenyi, C. *The Gods of the Greeks* (Jarrold and Sons, Norwich, 1951).

- Kingsley, Peter, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic* (Oxford, 1995).  
*In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Golden Sufi Press, 1999).  
*Reality* (Golden Sufi Press, 2003)
- Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1983).
- Onians, R. B., *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1951).
- Kitts, Margo. “Two Expressions for Human Mortality in the Epics of Homer”, *History of Religions*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Nov., 1994),
- Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror* (Columbia Univ. Pr., 1982).
- Marciano, M. Laura Gemelli. “Images and Experience: At the Roots of Parmenides’ *Aletheia*” (Ancient Philosophy vol. 28, 2008, forthcoming).
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”, from the *Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader* (Northwestern University, 1993).
- Mourelatos, P.D. Alexander. *The Route of Parmenides* (Parmenides Publishing, 2007).
- Murnagham, Sheila. *Disguise and Recognition in the Odyssey* (Princeton University Press, 1987).
- Post, Dror (Teachers College, Columbia University). “Heraclitus’ Hope for the Unhoped”, presented at the Ancient Philosophy Society meeting at Boston College, April 12, 2007.
- Struck, Peter. *The Birth of the Symbol*, Princeton, 2004.
- Vernant, J. P., *Mortals and Immortals* (Princeton University Press, 1991).  
*Myth and Society in Ancient Greece* (Zone Books, NY, 1988)  
*Myth and Thought Among the Greeks* (Zone Books, NY, 2006).
- Vernant and Detienne, *Les Ruses de l'intelligence: La Mètis des Grecs*, (Paris, 1974).