

Strangers who had come to visit Heraclitus of Ephesus found him warming himself by his hearth. They hesitated to enter, but he summoned them: ‘Come in, and don’t worry; for there are gods here also.’¹ The story comes to us from Aristotle, who wrote nearly two centuries after Heraclitus, but whether it really happened or not, it nonetheless captures a truth about the theology of this enigmatic thinker.² According to him, as we shall see in this chapter, divinity is everywhere—in a kitchen fire as much as an altar fire—because the whole cosmos is god. And yet, comparing this immanent god to an altar fire, he defines it in the oddest way: ‘The god: day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger. It alters, as when mingled with perfumes it gets named according to the pleasure of each one.’³ To make sense of this definition, so odd that few philosophers or theologians nowadays would even consider it such, we must begin by appreciating the fundamental challenges Heraclitus poses to our prejudices about language, thought, and world.

Among the deepest of these prejudices—certainly since Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle entrenched it, as we shall see in subsequent chapters of this book—is the view that thought and language should be purified of contradiction because the only intelligible and expressible world is thus pure. Writing before these philosophers, Heraclitus does not aim his aphorisms at them, but he does challenge a perennial temptation that their philosophies would later glorify. This is the temptation to deny greedy time, especially the death it exacts from all of us, and no tradition has surrendered to it more exquisitely than Greek philosophy. In later chapters we shall see how Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle underwrote this denial of time by purifying thought and language of contradiction. Privileging pure reason, they developed marvelous philosophies whose common summit is an unchanging and eternal divinity. As inscrutable as Heraclitus’s definition of god may be to us now, its temporality is already obvious: he lists two seasons of the year, two phases of the diurnal cycle, then four stages in the changing lives of individuals and nations; were the list of the first sentence not temporal enough, its second sentence says explicitly that god alters.

¹ On the Parts of Animals 1.5.645a20–21. (Irwin and Fine 1995:217).

² The precise dates of Heraclitus, like the dates of most Greek philosophers who wrote before Plato, are unknown, but the best approximation for his birth is 540.

³ DK 22B67 (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies, 9.10.8); translation revised from Kahn 1979:276.

Divine change was hardly unusual for archaic Greece, whose gods changed constantly and capriciously in the drama of the epics. One change that neither Homer nor Hesiod would permit the gods to suffer, however, was death. In their traditional Greek religion, the gods were immortal, humans mortal, without any movement between these two pure opposites. Heracles was the exception that proved the rule, as we have mentioned, and in the next chapter we shall find the Pythagoreans exploiting that exception as a symbol of the soul's survival after bodily death. Plato and Aristotle followed this radical Pythagorean departure from traditional religion, as we shall see, but the Heraclitean departure that only the Stoics would follow was still more radical. For rather than allowing our souls to ascend Olympus while leaving its thrones in celestial purity on the eternal summit above, Heraclitus immerses divinity so thoroughly in time that he mixes its station impurely with our own: 'Immortals mortals, mortals immortals, living the others' death, dead in the others' life.'⁴ This bewildering aphorism—which, like the definition of god, will preoccupy us for whole section of this chapter—not only immerses immortal divinity in time, it also promises divine life to mortal humans.

Becoming God, the title of this book, thus acquires in the philosophy of Heraclitus two distinct but related senses: first of all, his god is a becoming god, a god in time; secondly, he allows us to participate in its life by becoming god ourselves. The method by which we do so will prove as difficult to understand as this becoming god itself; we shall find that our method of becoming god is, in fact, the becoming god itself. This method, in brief, is self-inquiry. Heraclitean philosophers who seek self-knowledge soundly will find god, therefore, while Heraclitean theologians who seek divine knowledge soundly will find themselves. Sound thinking will appear impure from the perspective of a philosophical tradition that owes more to Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle than to Heraclitus. For such thinking not only tolerates contradiction in thought and language, it even encourages it. Accurate thought and speech must testify to the nature of the world, and the Heraclitean world is but one divine conflict. In the end, by acknowledging the temporality of all three—thought, language, and world—this method of thinking reveals itself as their shared structure. This divine structure, as we shall conclude, and by then hope to understand, is 'chiasmus: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.'⁵

2.1 FLUENT LOGOS

⁴ DK 22B62 (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies 9.10.6); Kahn 1979:216.

⁵ DK 22B10 ([Aristotle], On the World 5.396b20).

The book of Heraclitus puzzled even the ancients who could read it complete. Socrates was said to have praised it, adding nonetheless that ‘it needs a Delian diver to get to the bottom of it.’⁶ The story is likely an invention, but it gives a sense of the interpretive difficulty that confronted even ancient readers, who possessed a complete text. Only fragments of Heraclitus are available to us, by contrast, making our difficulties that much worse. We do not even know how to order these fragments, except for one. This is the book’s opening passage, which begins by invoking something he calls ‘logos’: ‘Although this logos holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard.’⁷ What is this logos? Already a paradox arises: if it is something to be heard, it would seem to be speech; but since it is something we do not comprehend even before hearing it, although apparently we should, it would seem to be something prior to speech, something in the world.

We can dive into this paradox—whose depths we shall not fathom until the end of this chapter—by reaching for a lexicon. Logos is a Greek word ambiguous between dozens of English terms. Its most basic meaning is ‘something spoken,’ and thus ‘word,’ ‘statement,’ ‘speech,’ ‘report,’ or ‘language.’ From there, moreover, it can mean ‘account,’ ‘explanation,’ ‘definition,’ ‘proportion,’ ‘structure,’ and ‘reason.’⁸ Deliberately exploiting such ambiguities whenever he invokes the logos, Heraclitus is able to mean both his own speech and the structure of the world—its reason—this speech conveys. Consistent with this complex meaning, the best Heraclitean aphorisms exhibit the very structure they ascribe to the world. As we shall see, this is more than literary finesse; it is the essence of his approach, without which his philosophy degenerates quickly into dogmatism and cliché. With this unity of form and content, however, he can demonstrate an identity between our logos and that of the world.

As an example of this unity take the most famous of his aphorisms, the so-called river fragment: ‘As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them.’⁹ The Greek is artful in several significant ways: Potamoisi toisin autoisin embainousin, hetera kai hetera hudata epirrei. First of all, before the comma the repeated sigmas of its datives sound together like

⁶ Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers 2.22. All translations of Diogenes Laertius are from Hicks (2000), unless otherwise noted.

⁷ DK 22B1 (Sextus Empiricus, Against the Professors 8.132). All translations of Heraclitus are from Kahn 1979, unless otherwise noted. In this one, the original logos has been preserved instead of Kahn’s ‘account.’

⁸ The authority Heraclitus grants the logos, according to Edward Hussey, is ‘none other than the impersonal kind of authority that is intrinsic to reason or rationality’ (Hussey 1999:93). A discussion of the meanings of logos, both in Heraclitus and later Greek authors, is available in Peters 1967:110–12. An exhaustive list of meanings can be found in Liddell et al. (1940:1057–59).

⁹ DK 22B12 (Arius Didymus fr. 39.2).

the sibilant babbling of an interrupted stream, whereas afterwards its aspirated vowels—finished by an aspirated rho—sound like waters returning to their customary flow. Secondly, the Greek words for ‘the same’ (*toisin autoisin*) could be associated with either ‘rivers’ or ‘they’ or both.¹⁰ In this particular English translation, Charles Kahn’s, it is associated with ‘rivers,’ so that although their waters are perpetually different, these rivers are nonetheless the same. In an alternate translation, Daniel Graham’s, ‘the same’ is associated with those who are stepping into rivers: ‘On the same (people) going into rivers, other and other waters flow.’¹¹ According to this version, the steppers are assumed to be stable things, but the rivers’ waters flow so quickly that they pass by the moment the steppers go into them.

When there is ambiguity in a Heraclitean aphorism, whether it is a matter of individual words or their relationships with one another, the multiple meanings seem deliberately balanced.¹² Later in this chapter, when we come to his doctrine of unity in opposition, we shall see such balances as illustrations, even demonstrations, of this doctrine.¹³ But for now, in the case of the river fragment, we should see stability in both subject and object—steppers and the rivers into which they step—despite the instability of the flowing waters that surround the one and compose the other. Indeed, we should not miss similar stability in the very aphorism that exhibits a parallel instability of meaning.¹⁴ Despite the syntactic ambiguity of ‘the same,’ after all, the river fragment hints at the one stable lesson that stepping selves and the rivers into which they step are what they are—in a word, the same—only by some kind of flowing, some kind of perpetual change or otherness.

Plato seems to be ‘sympathetically developing’ this ‘Heraclitean insight’ in his *Symposium*, as Kahn observes, and we shall discuss this sympathetic development later, in our chapter on Plato.¹⁵ In the meantime, another Heraclitean aphorism on rivers helps us to elaborate this

¹⁰ Both points belong to Charles Kahn (1979:167). He interprets the sounds of the aphorism differently—the interpretation advanced here is closer to Daniel Graham’s (2008:173), although not identical to his. However differently we interpret the significance of these sounds, we cannot deny that Heraclitus intends to signal something with them.

¹¹ Graham 2008:180.

¹² Kahn 1979:320, n.196. Graham (2008:179–81) develops the point, focusing especially on syntactic ambiguity.

¹³ Hussey 1999:106.

¹⁴ Graham (2008:180) provides several convincing reasons for seeing the syntactic ambiguity in this aphorism as deliberate.

¹⁵ Kahn 1979:167, referring to *Symposium* 207d.

contradictory lesson: ‘Into the same rivers we step and do not step, we are and we are not.’¹⁶ In the next section, we shall try to understand what Heraclitus is doing generally with such contradictory aphorisms; in the section after that, using our understanding of Heraclitean contradiction, we shall return to this specific one, investigating Heraclitus’s ephemeral self.

2.2 ILLOGICAL LOGOS

Another way of revealing Heraclitus’s logos is to examine his aphorisms on fire, which he assigns the same cosmic role as the logos itself. ‘The ordering [kosmon], the same for all, no god nor man has made,’ he wrote, ‘but it ever was and is and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures quenched.’¹⁷ The Stoics and many Heracliteans since then have taken this doctrine for a physics, believing that fire was for Heraclitus the prime substance of the cosmos, just as water and air were proposed by his immediate predecessors, Thales and Anaximenes.¹⁸ But whether or not Heraclitus had a physics, he is certainly using fire as a prime example, a paradigm of the paradoxical pattern he sees everywhere. Fire is ‘need and satiety,’ according to one report of his thought, and such paradoxes have given him a reputation for flouting the hallowed principle of non-contradiction.¹⁹ ‘The same attribute,’ writes Aristotle, ‘cannot at the same time belong and not belong to the same subject in the same respect.’²⁰ He goes so far as to call this ‘the firmest principle of all things,’ claiming that if one fails to heed it—as many even in antiquity thought Heraclitus failed to do—then one cannot have any knowledge at all.²¹

In this book’s fifth chapter, devoted to Aristotle, we shall consider why he considered this principle a necessary condition of knowledge; in our fourth chapter, on Plato, we shall see how his teacher made the same claim; and in the next chapter, on the Pythagoreans and Parmenides, whose philosophies would have such a deep influence on Plato, we shall see how Parmenides was the first

¹⁶ DK 22B49a (Heraclitus Homericus, Homeric Questions 24, Oelmann [Schleiermacher fr. 72]). Although many commentators, including Diels, accept this fragment as authentic, Kahn rejects it as a syncretism of several other aphorisms (Kahn 1979:288–89; see also n. 431). Even if it be spurious, we shall find it consistent with our conclusions—which do not depend on it, in any case—about the Heraclitean logos and self.

¹⁷ DK 22B30 (Clement, Stromateis 5.103.6); translation revised from Kahn.

¹⁸ See Long 1996:35–57. Thales lived in the late 7th and early 6th centuries. The rough dates of Anaximenes are c. 585–525.

¹⁹ DK 22B65 (Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies 9.10.7)

²⁰ Metaphysics 1005b19–21.

²¹ Metaphysics 1005b23–24. See also Topics 159b30–33, Physics 185b19–25, Metaphysics 1012a24–26, and 1012a33ff. See also Plato’s Theaetetus 183a.

to do so.²² Ignoring for now this genealogy of the principle of non-contradiction, let us consider instead whether Heraclitus heeded Aristotle's most explicit formulation of it. Initially it appears that he did not: many of his aphorisms, after all, seem to state contradictions. Here are three representative examples: (i) 'The way up and the way down are the same'; (ii) 'The sea is purest and foulest water: for fish drinkable and life-sustaining; for men undrinkable and deadly'; (iii) 'Cold things grow hot, a hot thing cold, a moist thing withers, a parched thing is wetted.'²³ Despite initial appearances, however, each of these aphorisms heeds Aristotle's formulation of the hallowed principle by appealing to one of its three qualifications.

The first aphorism appears contradictory because it says the same attribute (e.g., up) at the same time belongs and does not belong to the same subject (e.g., a mountain road): the way up and the way down the mountain are the same. But in fact the attribute 'up' belongs with respect to one direction (from the bottom to the top), whereas it does not belong with respect to the other direction (from the top to the bottom). Aristotle is careful to qualify his principle, allowing that the same attribute can belong and not belong to the same subject in different respects. Similarly, it allows for contradictory attribution to different subjects, and this qualification accommodates the second Heraclitean aphorism above: sea water is drinkable to fish but undrinkable to humans. Finally, Aristotle's formulation allows for contradictory attribution at different times: something may be cold at one moment but not-cold at another. By appealing to one or more these qualifications, in this manner, commentators have resolved the apparent contradictions of Heraclitus's aphorisms, exonerating him from the charge of obscurity that has stuck to him since antiquity.²⁴

But there are a few aphorisms that cannot be resolved so easily, beginning with the one that calls fire need and satiety. For if fire were needy and satisfied at the same time (now), with respect to the same thing (its fuel), the attribute of satisfaction would both belong and not belong to the same thing, as would neediness; it would therefore flout the principle of non-contradiction. The Stoics saved Heraclitus from this contradiction by making his fire—which became their prime

²² For Plato, see Republic 5.476e4–480a13 (cf. 4.436b8–c1). For Parmenides, DK 28B2.3 (Proclus, Commentary on Plato's Timaeus 1.345.18).

²³ (i) is DK 22B60 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.10.4); (ii) is DK 22B61 (ibid. 9.10.5); (iii) is DK 22B126 (Tzetzes, Scholia to the Exegesis of the Iliad p. 126). The translations are all Richard McKirahan's (1994:123). McKirahan (1994: 121–24) also arranges the Heraclitean aphorisms on opposition into one large group (Group V, Fragments on Opposition). Moreover, he subdivides this group, roughly as we have, according to the type of opposition in question.

²⁴ A recent example of such a commentator is Daniel Graham 2006:118–22. As for the charge of obscurity, Diogenes Laertius (9.6) records a verse of Timon (c.325–c.235) calling Heraclitus 'riddling' (ochloloidoros). Others echoed the charge: Cicero (On Goals 2.15); Lucretius (1.638–44); Strabo (14.25); Hippolytus (Refutation, 6.9.4, 9.8.5–6, 9.10).

substance, and thus their whole cosmos itself—oscillate between conflagration and extinction.²⁵ At one time, according to them, the cosmic fire is satisfied with a holocaust; at another time, it becomes needy and is extinguished. Imagining a perpetual cosmic cycle between these extreme stages, the Stoics anticipated the doctrine of the Eternal Return some readers find in the writings of another Heraclitean, Nietzsche.²⁶ But no such elaborate cosmology is necessary to save Heraclitus from irrationality; in fact, as with Nietzsche, cosmologies of any kind distract attention from the deep lessons available upon careful contemplation of something more common.²⁷ ‘Heraclitus’s aim is not to improve the Milesian cosmology,’ writes Kahn, but ‘by meditating on the fire one who knows how to read oracular signs can perceive the hidden harmony that unifies opposing principles not only within the cosmic order but also in the destiny of the human psyche.’²⁸

Adopting this aim as our own, let us consider the humble candle flame: even it is need and satiety, at the same time (now), and with respect to the same thing (its fuel). After all, for any given moment, if it were not satisfied with its fuel in that moment—having insufficient fuel to continue burning—it would be extinguished; and yet, if it were not also needing that same fuel at the same time—not consuming the requisite fuel to continue burning—it would likewise be extinguished right then. The candle flame’s burning thus requires it to be needy and satisfied with respect to the same thing, a contradiction, at each moment. Unlike the other aphorisms we have examined, this one about fire cannot be resolved by appeal to Aristotle’s qualifications upon the principle of non-contradiction. The same attribute—whether satisfaction or need, it does not matter which—at the same time belongs and does not belong to the same subject (the candle flame), in the same respect (towards its fuel). The point is difficult to grasp, but only because it demands that we do something impossible: freeze the flame in a moment. Fire cannot be frozen in a moment because it is, above all, a process. For fire, in other words, there is no now.

²⁵ Fuller discussions of the Stoic (mis)appropriation of the Heraclitean fire aphorisms are available from Kirk 1962:303–328, Kahn 1979:147–53, Long 1996:40–42.

²⁶ Epictetus, for instance, writes that ‘There will be another Socrates, a Plato, and every man with the same friends and the same fellow citizens . . . and this renewal will not happen once, but several times; rather, all things will be repeated eternally’ (SVF 2.625; quoted in Hadot 1998:76). Marcus Aurelius, likewise, writes more tentatively of ‘the periodic rebirth of the Whole’ (Meditations 11.1.3; see also 2.14, 5.13, 5.32, 9.35; all translations of Marcus are from Grube 1983, unless otherwise indicated), but Hadot interprets this as a spiritual exercise rather than as a cosmological doctrine (1998:41, 48–51, 75–76, 144–45, 177–78, 267). As for Nietzsche, the most explicit references are from his unpublished notes, which should be ignored, as Robert Solomon has argued. From the published works, the key passages are: The Gay Science 4.341; Thus Spoke Zarathustra 3, ‘The Convalescent’; and Ecce Homo 752.

²⁷ For a fuller account of this interpretation of Nietzsche, see Miller 2008.

²⁸ Kahn 1979:23.

More than anything else, except perhaps a river, fire draws our attention to the fact that time is not composed of frozen moments, of ‘nows.’ Aristotle himself would later provide an argument to this effect in his Physics.²⁹ Roughly, he observed that if time were a succession of moments, each moment would have to perish, for only so could these moments yield to one another and produce the flow of time. But when could a particular moment perish, in which moment could it do so? Not in itself, for then it would both exist and not exist; nor could it perish in any other moment, for then it would be simultaneous with a different moment.³⁰ Both options, in short, would break the principle of non-contradiction. Indeed, the contradictory options available to anyone who thus freezes time resemble nothing so much as the dilemmas produced by the paradoxes of motion Aristotle considers elsewhere in his Physics, the paradoxes that help him articulate his own theory of time, the paradoxes crafted by a follower of Parmenides, Zeno of Elea.³¹

Of Zeno’s four paradoxes of motion, or change, the most relevant for our purposes is the so-called Flying Arrow.³² As we tried a moment ago to freeze the Heraclitean fire, this paradox similarly invites us to freeze the flight of an arrow. If time is composed of moments, what happens to a flying arrow frozen in each of them? Aristotle agrees with Zeno that it must be at rest: ‘If everything when it occupies an equal space is at rest, and if that which is in locomotion is always in a now, the flying arrow is therefore motionless.’³³ So compactly stated, this paradox requires some explanation. Were we to freeze a flying arrow in a ‘now’—catching it on film with a high-speed camera, for example—it would occupy a space equal to itself. For if it should occupy a space longer than itself, so to speak, it would be moving, not frozen. In our photographic analogy, it would be as if our shutter speed were too slow: rather than catching the flying arrow at a moment, we caught it over several moments, creating a blur. Catching it in a ‘now,’ however, we would find it occupying a space equal to itself, which is to say motionless. In every ‘now,’ at every moment, it must therefore be motionless. Yet at each moment it must also be moving. After all, it is a flying

²⁹ Physics 218a9–30.

³⁰ A parallel question could be asked—although Aristotle does not ask it—about when a moment that comes into being does so. In which moment? Not in itself, for then it would have to precede its own existence, when it would both exist and not exist; nor in any other moment, for then it would be simultaneous with a different moment.

³¹ Plato’s Parmenides (127a–128d) depicts Zeno (b. c. 490) as not only the student but also the young lover of Parmenides.

³² DK 29A27 (Aristotle, Physics 6.9.239b5–7, 30–33). For a fuller discussion see McKirahan 1999:151–55.

³³ Physics 239b5–7.

arrow: if it never moves, it cannot fly. In sum, then, at every moment it must be both moving and still.

Like a burning fire, the flying arrow would thus seem to break the principle of non-contradiction. But according to Aristotle, such an absurd ‘result follows from the assumption that time is composed of moments: if this assumption is not granted, the conclusion will not follow.’³⁴ In other words, if ‘time is not composed of indivisible nows,’³⁵ but is instead infinitely divisible, there is no freezing the flying arrow in a moment. Without freezing it in a moment, however, there is no way to generate the contradiction of simultaneous stasis and motion. Cameras tempt us to think that there are moments, real ‘nows,’ and that fast-shuttered cameras catch them on highly-sensitive film. But if time and motion are in fact continua, as Aristotle believes,³⁶ then even the fastest-shuttered camera using the most sensitive film will only diminish the blur, perhaps to the point of indiscernibility—either by us, the camera, or both. For if a motion happens over time that is infinitely divisible, every division of its duration should reveal it to be moving. While moving, must always occupy a space longer than itself, only less so with each finer division. With no final division, however, there is no moment at which the arrow turns out to be still. One solution to this paradox, therefore, is to claim that time is not composed of ‘nows’; instead, it is infinitely divisible.

Is the same Aristotelian solution available to the paradox of fire? Yes, but with profound philosophical consequences that will preoccupy us in one way or another for the rest of this book. Fire, as a process, is ever-changing, a sort of motion. Dividing the duration of its burning—where this burning is parallel to the arrow’s moving—we shall never reach a moment when it ceases to burn, anymore than we shall reach a moment when the arrow is still. The parallel is important to keep in mind, since the same photographic temptations arise for fire that arose for the flying arrow. We imagine capturing a fire on film; with the image of such a fire before our minds, we are tempted to think that we have frozen it in exclusive satisfaction, the way we were tempted by Zeno to think of the arrow as perfectly still in a ‘now.’ But if time is infinitely divisible, however finely we divide the duration of the fire’s burning, it is no more exclusively satisfied in this division of its duration than was the arrow perfectly still in its own. In every division, no matter how fine, the flying arrow is moving. Correlatively, in every division, no matter how fine, the fire is burning.

This burning is a satisfaction with fuel, lest it be extinguished, but it is also a need for fuel, lest it be frozen. Fire cannot burn in a moment, anymore than an arrow can fly in a moment, and so it should come as no surprise that the effort to imagine it doing so creates a contradiction. In order

³⁴ Physics 239b31–32; DK 29A27.

³⁵ Physics 239b7–8.

³⁶ Physics 220a25–31.

to stay aflame in a moment, as we have seen, fire would have to be both need and satiety with respect to the same bit of fuel, flouting the principle of non-contradiction. But thanks to the analyses of Aristotle and Zeno, we can say more precisely that the logical offense occurs only when we conceive of time as divisible into ‘nows.’ Immersed in the flow of time, and thus surrounded by changes, motions, and processes—including the process that are our selves, as we shall see in the next section—we have learned from Heraclitus that these processes appear contradictory only when we conceive them as happening by distinct moments. Indeed, as Aristotle argues, time itself appears contradictory when we conceive it this way.

Yet there is a deep irony here that Aristotle himself does not seem to recognize: the principle of non-contradiction itself encourages us to conceive time and change this way. Demanding that we freeze time in a moment in order to examine whether the attributes of anything analyzed are consistent with one another, if this principle really is a necessary condition of knowledge, so too must knowing any object require freezing it. But if knowing demands that we freeze the object of knowledge, processes, changes, and motions must be unknowable as such. They cannot ever meet knowing’s necessary condition: the principle of non-contradiction. Recognizing this entailment, we should not be surprised in later chapters to find the philosophers who make the principle of non-contradiction a necessary condition of knowledge—not just Aristotle, but also Plato and Parmenides—making the proper objects of knowledge unchanging, timeless, eternal.

Once the proper objects of knowledge have been placed outside of time, as we shall also see, the subject who knows them must take up residence in eternity as well. Only so can the knowing subject grasp the known object. But a fatal problem will then arise for temporal subjects who must inquire to achieve knowledge, subjects who seek by the special activity of philosophy to understand themselves and the divine. This fatal problem—the unbridgeable chasm between the eternal knower and the temporal subject who comes to philosophy seeking self-knowledge, moral improvement, and even salvation—will not become fully clear until the end of our chapter on Plotinus. For in many ways Plotinus consummates the tradition that begins with Parmenides, even as his ultimate principle, the One, subverts it. That story of consummation and subversion is the story of this whole book. Long before we come to its conclusion, though, we must understand the rival principle that this tradition began by rejecting. In the next section, accordingly, we begin our ascent to the ultimate principle of Heraclitus, his immanent god.

2.3 DIVINE CONFLICT

The logos may not freeze time in contradictory moments, but it nonetheless affirms as one a world that appears full of contradictions. Or so Heraclitus writes: ‘It is wise, listening not to me but to the logos, to agree that all things are one.’³⁷ How can we affirm as one both life and death, war and peace, hunger and satiety, along with all the other opposites of this world? What sort of logos, that is, affirms unity in the midst of so much difference? Is such a logos even logically possible? That will depend on our logic: the principle of non-contradiction precludes it, to be sure, but perhaps such a logos becomes possible according to another logic, where the principle of non-contradiction plays an important role, but is not the firmest principle of all. The Heraclitean aphorisms speak not only of the oppositions in the world, but also of their situation in the river of time. Properly understood, according to this logos of time, the contradictions of this multifarious world become one.

Heraclitus notoriously revels in such contradictions, going so far as to exalt conflict and divinize war: ‘War is father of all and king of all.’³⁸ These were Homeric epithets of Zeus;³⁹ by appropriating them for war, Heraclitus transfigures it into a god. This is easily misunderstood as bellicose, as a perverse celebration of violence, but instead of worshipping a malicious god he recognizes an indifferent cosmic principle. ‘One must realize that war is shared,’ he writes, ‘and conflict is justice, and that all things come to pass in accordance with conflict.’⁴⁰ Although this aphorism also evokes the bloody war and greedy conflict denounced by his epic rivals, Hesiod as well as Homer, Heraclitus is highlighting a principle according to which every unity is a tension of warring opposites, while every battle of opposites hides a deeper unity.⁴¹ His simplest examples are bow and lyre: each must strain in opposite directions just to be the unity it is. Contemplating both, he thinks, we see ‘how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is a harmoniē turning back on itself.’⁴²

Before joining him in this contemplation, we should become aware of the polysemy of this Greek word, just as we did earlier with logos. Once we have done so, just as we did earlier with

³⁷ DK 22B50 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.9.1). There is an important ambiguity in the Greek of this aphorism that we shall not raise until section 2.8 of this chapter, “Divine Chiasmus.”

³⁸ DK 22B53 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.9.4). See also DK22A22.

³⁹ Iliad 1.544. Perhaps aware of Heraclitus’s writing, Pindar calls time the father of all things (*Second Olympian* 18).

⁴⁰ DK 22B80 (Origen, Against Celsus 6.28).

⁴¹ For Homer, see Iliad 28.107; for Hesiod, see Works and Days 11–26. For Heraclitus’s critique of ‘the poets of the people,’ generally, see DK22B104; for his particular critiques of Homer and Hesiod, see DK 22B40, B42, B56, B57, B106.

⁴² DK 22B51 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.9.4). Kahn translates harmoniē as ‘attunement.’

logos, we can adopt an Anglicized equivalent: harmonia. For this concept will turn out to be no less important to our interpretation of Heraclitean philosophy. In the end, we shall discover, they are but two different ways of speaking of the same structure, whether found in language, thought, or world. In the meantime, though, we should note how harmoniē can mean at least three things: a physical arrangement of parts, a musical harmony, or a reconciliation between opponents.⁴³ For simplicity's sake, let us call these the physical, musical, and political meanings. Not surprisingly, when this word appears in the Heraclitean aphorisms, it reverberates with all three, showing how even diverse meanings can agree at variance with themselves when they are strung artfully.⁴⁴

This is nowhere more evident than in an aphorism whose translation obscures its artistry. Harmoniē aphanēs phanerēs kreittōn : 'Harmony concealed rather than revealed is greater.'⁴⁵ We can begin to appreciate this artistry by considering the three meanings suggested by the polysemy of harmoniē alone. In political arrangements, the unwritten constitution of habit is stronger than many written laws; in musical arrangements, the ratio of tones is more fundamental than the many manifest chords; but of all arrangements, according to Heraclitus, the best is that of the physical world—the cosmos—and its many apparently chaotic events.⁴⁶ For beneath its appearances of randomness, according to another aphorism, lies order: 'The fairest order [kosmos] in the world is a heap of random sweepings.'⁴⁷ Of the three resonances of harmoniē audible in this aphorism, then, Kahn highlights the third, writing of 'the divine unity that structures the world.'⁴⁸ Insofar as this unity is concealed beneath the world's contradictory appearances, he adds, harmoniē aphanēs might be taken 'as a general title for Heraclitus's philosophical thought.'⁴⁹

We have yet to understand the nature of this divine unity, this logos of the whole cosmos, but we have just begun to see how this very aphorism—itsself a logos too—conceals a marvelous

⁴³ Kahn 1979:196–97, complete with citations of source texts.

⁴⁴ Kahn 1979:197–99. When Plato and Aristotle testify to B51, they both interpret it as a comment about musical harmony, neglecting the other semantic overtones and thereby flattening it. (For Plato, Symposium 187a–b; for Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 8.1.1155b4.)

⁴⁵ DK 22B54 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.9.5). For a more extensive commentary, see Kahn 1979:202–4.

⁴⁶ Kahn 1979:203 discusses the latter two meanings, noticing especially the appropriation of Pythagorean doctrine with the musical one. Although Heraclitus criticized Pythagoras harshly (DK22B129, but also DK22B40), Kahn notes how he nonetheless adapted Pythagorean psychology. We shall discuss the Pythagoreans in the next chapter. The murky chronology of their main figures and doctrines makes it difficult to decide who influenced whom. It is possible, as Kahn himself observes (1979:204) that later Pythagoreans, such as Philolaus, appropriated Heraclitean doctrines.

⁴⁷ DK 22B124 (Theophrastus, Metaphysics 15 [p. 16, Ross and Fobes]).

⁴⁸ Kahn 1979:203.

⁴⁹ Kahn 1979:203.

arrangement. For three features make it an instance of the very harmonia it describes. Besides the polysemy of harmoniē, there is also the ambiguity of kreittōn—like ‘greater,’ it can mean better or stronger. The second sense, writes Kahn, ‘brings with it the deeper interpretation’ because it resonates with other aphorisms about the hidden strength of the divine one.⁵⁰ This resonance establishes another link between the concealed harmonia and the divine logos. Counting simply the multiple meanings of its two most ambiguous words, moreover, we have already six literal English translations of this sentence. But the aphorism is more than a skein of intertwined meanings. Unifying this semantic plurality of parts is their syntactic arrangement. The antonyms aphanēs and phanerēs—‘unseen’ and ‘seen,’ most literally—oppose each other across the middle of this perfectly balanced sentence, while harmoniē and kreittōn surround them, so that the unity of arrangement for this sentence, the harmonia of this logos, is symbolically greater than the opposition it contains.

This logos thus agrees at variance with itself. Once we have revealed the artistry of its arrangement, in fact, this agreement seems hardly to have been concealed at all: four simple words, straightforward syntax, all together forming one harmonious logos. Such a hardly concealed but nonetheless deep harmonia agrees with the logos with which Heraclitus opens his book, the logos with which we began our interpretation of his philosophy, the logos that warns how ‘men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard.’⁵¹ Admonished further that the unseen harmonia is greater than the seen, we should turn back to its two initial signs—bow and lyre—which conceal deeper unity in difference than first appeared above, as does the aphorism that links them. For in its full version it signals another parallel between harmonia and logos, beginning with words that turn back to the opening aphorism: ‘They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is a harmonia turning back on itself, like that of a bow and lyre’⁵²

To be what it is, for instance, the lyre needs the initial opposition of its frame and strings, the particular arrangement of its diverse parts. But furthermore, this arrangement can produce not just single notes but also the simultaneous opposition of many. This musical harmony, in turn, may oppose the voice of a singer to achieve a richer unity, which is further enriched when he opposes his voice to that of a chorus. Singing together, they may accompany a feast, celebrating the

⁵⁰ Kahn 1979:203–4, citing DK22B114.

⁵¹ DK 22B1; see also B2, B17, and B34.

⁵² DK 22B51. By using palintropos, a deliberate substitution for the customary palintonos, this aphorism also resonates with all the other aphorisms about cyclical reversions (DK22B31a, B94, B120), characteristically exhibiting the very logos it describes (Kahn 1979:199).

reconciliation of opponents.⁵³ And so on, just as with the bow, which is both like and unlike the lyre. For to be what it is, correlatively, the bow also needs the opposition of its frame and strings. Like the lyre, which must be plucked to produce its notes, the bow can shoot an arrow only when it is drawn in opposite directions by the archer.⁵⁴ If he uses it in a hunt, moreover, it participates in the harmonious conflict of organic life; whereas if he uses it in war, it thwarts the reconciliation of opponents. In both cases, it kills. Compounding this integral unity of opposites, bios is Greek both for life and for bow.⁵⁵ Exploiting another opportunity to show the logos at work in language as well as the world, Heraclitus observes that ‘the name of the bow is life; its work is death.’⁵⁶

Carrying the bow as a weapon of war and the lyre as an adornment of peace, Apollo thus embodies this harmonious logos.⁵⁷ ‘The lyre and the curved bow shall ever be dear to me,’ he says the moment he is born, adding, ‘I will declare to men the unfailing will of Zeus.’⁵⁸ Yet his declarations of Zeus’s will, his paradoxical prophecies, exemplify the logos as much as do his contradictory accoutrements. ‘The lord whose oracle is in Delphi,’ writes Heraclitus, ‘neither declares nor conceals but gives a sign.’⁵⁹ As oracular as the Delphic god himself, the Ephesian has likewise given us paradoxical signs. He certainly has not declared his harmonious logos; apparently it is greater when not apparent, if only because the ‘nature’ it aims to exemplify as well as convey ‘loves to hide.’⁶⁰ This logos frustrates our desire for clarity. We may wish Heraclitus had eliminated its ambiguities, then demonstrated its universal claims from universal premises, but instead he has given us only these concrete and paradoxical aphorisms. By the end of this chapter we shall understand better why he has chosen this frustrating route, but for now we must register his implicit imitation of Apollo: both speak the divine logos of Zeus.

⁵³ ‘The immortal gods think only of the lyre and song’ (Homeric Hymn to (Pythian) Apollo 3.188). Homeric Hymn to Hermes (4.480–82).

⁵⁴ ‘Il faut donc considérer non pas l’instrument inerte mais le couple,’ writes Marcel Conche, ‘le tout formé par l’instrument et celui qui s’en sert’ (Conche 1998:429). Similarly, Kahn (1979:198) cites Lewis Campbell, who ‘took his inspiration from Plato’s remark at Republic 439b.’ We shall consider briefly in our chapter on Plato the possibility that he in turn took his inspiration from Heraclitus. 439b uses the example of an archer to explain a principle very like that of non-contradiction.

⁵⁵ Accented on the iota it means life; on the omicron, bow.

⁵⁶ DK 22B48 (Etymologicum Magnum, s.v. bios). Here is a transliteration of the aphorism: to toxō onoma bios, ergon de thanatos.

⁵⁷ See DK 22B67, where the opposition of war and peace makes a list that characterize ‘the god.’ We discuss this aphorism in the next section.

⁵⁸ Homeric Hymn to Apollo 3.131–32.

⁵⁹ DK 22B93 (Plutarch, On the Pythian Oracles 404D).

⁶⁰ DK 22B123 (Themistius, Orations 5.69b).

Our interpretive task is nonetheless to reveal this concealed logos, for it is far from obvious that the pattern now evident in bow and lyre—the pattern of unity in opposition—is a universal feature of the cosmos, rather than something to be found only in a few concrete examples. To show that it such a feature, even if Heraclitus is never so explicit, we must highlight something that permeates the world, something that would by its universal presence make everything in it, and even the world itself, a unity in opposition. The next section argues that this feature is time. As we saw in the previous section, when a temporal unity such as fire is frozen in a moment, it will oppose itself. As long as fire remains immersed in the flow of time, however, as long as it remains in the flow of time whose perpetual difference makes it the same, it does not generate contradictions. The most fundamental unity is the world itself; it too should avoid contradiction and conflict as long as it flows in time. As we shall see in the next section, this one world, unified by time’s reconciliation of its opposites, is Heraclitus’s god.

2.4 DIVINE UNITY

Heraclitus is careful to use appropriate names when speaking of the divine, as were other Greeks who trembled before gods both vain and fickle.⁶¹ Believing god to be neither, Heraclitus nevertheless speaks carefully because ‘the wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.’⁶² This contradictory aphorism, like the god it invokes, stands at the intersection of several lines of Heraclitean thought. One such line connects the aphorisms on wisdom, and one of these even begins with the same three words: ‘The wise is one, knowing the plan by which it steers all things through all.’⁶³ Repetition of these neuter and abstract words (hen to sophon) encourages us to combine the two aphorisms they begin, turning back from the one to the other as we have already done with earlier reverberations. Doing so with these, we find the wise one, god, to be neither vain nor fickle, nor one among many others like him—such as Zeus among the capricious Olympians of epic poetry—but instead as something impersonal that knows and executes a rational plan, a gnōmē, an insight.⁶⁴

This rational plan and insight correspond to the logos, which is not only a report of the world’s reason, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, but is that very reason itself. This

⁶¹ See, e.g., Oedipus at Colonus 486–87.

⁶² DK 22B32 (Clement, Stromateis 5.115.1): hen to sophon mounon legesthai ouk ethelei kai ethelei Zēnos onoma.

⁶³ DK 22B41 (Diogenes Laertius, 9.1): hen to sophon; epistasthai gnōmē hokē kubernēsai panta dia pantōn.

⁶⁴ Kahn (1979:171) justifies both ‘plan’ and ‘insight’ as translations of gnōmē, also reminding us of the relevant aphorisms on the logos (DK 22B2 and B50).

correspondence warrants the following substitution of terms: the wise is one, knowing the logos by which it steers all things through all. Such a substitution permits us to recognize the divine plan as the logos we have already canvassed. ‘It is wise,’ recall, ‘listening not to me but to the logos, to agree (homo-logein) that all things are one.’⁶⁵ Reporting that it is wise to agree with the logos—literally, to say the same as the speech that all things are one, but also to think the same as the thought that all things are one, and ultimately to become as unified as the world in which all things are one—Heraclitus is encouraging his listeners to bring themselves into agreement with the logos of the wise one, of god. Agreeing with our earlier argument, this logos is also a harmonia, a unity of opposites, justice in conflict, so that now harmonia is also revealed as the divine plan. Bringing all these names together, now, we can more easily see how they invoke in different ways the wise one alone (mounon), who is thus understandably unwilling as well as willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus.

This aphorism about naming god, which appears so contradictory on its surface, conceals a deeper consistency by unifying opposing syntactic roles for mounon (‘alone’ or ‘only’). The Greek word floats more freely through the original aphorism than does any of its equivalents through an English rendering. We have already witnessed Heraclitean words playing an ambiguous syntactic role in the river fragment; Graham shows how this technique recurs in several other aphorisms,⁶⁶ where one word stands between two it thereby unifies despite their opposition. The simplest example is also arguably the deepest: ēthos anthrōpōi daimōn (‘character human destiny’).⁶⁷ Uniting our character and our destiny—or, alternately, our character and our divinity—humanity grasps an aphorism, like the world it describes, balancing two opposites and thereby exemplifying divine harmonia.⁶⁸ The full depth of this little aphorism will not become clear until we have discussed several others on mortality and immortality, grasping and selfhood. Long before plumbing it fully, though, we can see how its paradigmatic technique of syntactic ambiguity works: rather than forcing on us a choice between syntactic roles, it encourages us to hold both in mind at once, so that we might recognize their unity in opposition.

⁶⁵ DK 22B50.

⁶⁶ Graham 2008:178–81.

⁶⁷ DK 22B119 (Stobaeus 4.40.23 = Plutarch, Quaestiones Platonicae 999E, etc.); trans. PLM. The middle word is a dative of reference, but the roles of subject or predicate in an accurate translation could be played by any of the three words. After discussing the meaning of daimōn, which can mean ‘divinity,’ even in Heraclitus himself (DK 22B79), Kahn renders this aphorism as follows: ‘Man’s character is his fate’ (Kahn 1979:260–61).

⁶⁸ The full significance of this pregnant aphorism will not become clear until we have discussed several others on humanity and selfhood, mortality and immortality, but even without understanding it fully we can see how the technique of syntactic ambiguity works.

In the case of the aphorism about the naming of god, we should thus recognize, mounon can be taken with what precedes or what follows it. Taken with what precedes, ‘the wise one,’ it produces the translation quoted earlier—‘the wise is one alone, unwilling and willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus’—indicating that there is only one such being. Upon this surface reading, god may be willing to be spoken of by the name of Zeus, insofar as that name signals the highest honor in Greek theology, but is unwilling to be identified with him because of the anthropomorphism of the epic poets. Such thinking would put Heraclitus in agreement with Xenophanes, who not only criticized anthropomorphic theology,⁶⁹ but also wrote of ‘one god’ (heis theos) who was ‘greatest among gods and men.’⁷⁰ Heraclitus criticizes Xenophanes almost as harshly as he does Pythagoras,⁷¹ so it might surprise us to find him adopting both of their doctrines. But whether he exploits the harmonies of the one or the henotheism of the other—not to mention the cosmologies of the Milesians—he enriches every doctrine he adopts from his predecessors according to his own logos.⁷²

Beneath the surface reading of the aphorism on the naming of god, accordingly, his logos suggests a deeper translation.⁷³ For when mounon is taken with what follows, it can modify either the infinitive (‘to be spoken of’) or the noun (‘the name’). Taking it with both, we derive this composite English paraphrase: the wise is one, willing alone to be spoken of by the name of Zeus, but unwilling to be spoken of by the name of Zeus alone. In other words, none other than this god should be known by the name of Zeus, since none other is worthy of such high esteem. But also, because even this name is inadequate for such an impersonal and indifferent deity, this god should also be known by other names. Similarly, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter, an altar fire is known not by itself but instead by the scents of the different perfumes cast upon it.⁷⁴

We introduced Heraclitus’s theology in the last section under the name of war, the divine conflict that is justice.⁷⁵ This conflict, as we also saw there, is harmonia, unity in opposition, the

⁶⁹ DK 21B11, B14–16, B23–26.

⁷⁰ Clement, *Strom.* 5.109 = DK 21B23.

⁷¹ DK 22B40.

⁷² Kahn 1979:136, 145–46, 203–4, 239, 269. Anaximander reportedly said that his Boundless ‘contains all things and steers them all’ (DK 12A15; Aristotle, *Physics* 203b11). If this is an accurate report, as Kahn observes (1979:272), Heraclitus likely has it in mind when we writes that his Wise One ‘steers all things through all’ (DK 22B41).

⁷³ Kahn (1979:269) describes how to construct such a composite paraphrase, but does not provide it himself.

⁷⁴ DK 22B67 (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 9.10.8).

⁷⁵ Justice (*Dikē*) is named among the daughters of Zeus and Themis by Hesiod (*Theogony* 902)

logos. As a result, god not only knows the logos by which it steers all things through all; god is this logos. It is therefore wise to recognize that all things are one, declares this logos, which is itself the unity of all things in their harmonious opposition, in the conflict that is justice, in the ‘cosmos’ that ‘ever was and is and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures quenched.’⁷⁶ On the growing list of divine names, then, we find Fire, War, Conflict, Justice, Harmonia, Logos, and Zeus. Anyone who is wise, Heraclitus thinks, will recognize them all as both adequate and inadequate names for the wise One.

2.5 BECOMING GOD

This One, as we have seen, ‘steers all things through all,’⁷⁷ but it does so not as a god transcending what it governs; rather, it is immanent—the world itself as deity. ‘This is monism,’ writes Kahn, ‘with a vengeance.’⁷⁸ We shall complicate this description toward the end of this chapter, after we have noticed that even the Heraclitean aphorism that appears most explicitly monistic conceals a contrapuntal pluralism, holding both monism and pluralism in a harmonia that is paradoxically both one and not one. Before we come to this supreme paradox of Heraclitean philosophy, though, we can see that its monism is far from the static one of pure being, which we shall find Parmenides developing in the next chapter. If Heraclitus is a monist, his one is dynamic: one world perpetually becoming according to a divine order.

The name ‘fire’ suits this order as well as any other, especially when he emphasizes its judicial role. ‘Thunderbolt pilots all things,’⁷⁹ he writes, invoking at once the purest fire of the heavens and the traditional accoutrement of Zeus, the arbiter of justice.⁸⁰ Were the judicial role of pure fire not clear enough from this aphorism alone, Heraclitus also writes that ‘fire coming on will discern and catch up with all things.’⁸¹ Such a fire discerns not simply malfeasants, apparently, but catches up with everything. With so indiscriminate an indictment, however, what sort of judgment

⁷⁶ DK 22B30; translation revised from Kahn. Kahn has ‘ordering’ for kosmos, a translation he justifies while nonetheless recognizing ‘cosmos’ (in the sense of a world-order) as a deeper meaning of the aphorism (1979:132–34). We preserve his preferred translation in the next section when we discuss this entire aphorism again in light of the theology just surveyed.

⁷⁷ DK 22B41.

⁷⁸ Kahn 1979:137.

⁷⁹ DK 22B64 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.10.7).

⁸⁰ For a discussion of thunderbolt (keraunos), especially as purest fire, see Conche 1998:302–5 (citing DK 22B31 and B90).

⁸¹ DK 22B66 (Hippolytus, Refutation 9.10.7). See also DK 22B28b, as well as B16, which Kahn (1979:274) reads as a reference to omnipresent divine fire.

does it render, what sort of sentence does it deliver, and how can it do so justly? The justice of cosmic fire, as we shall now argue, is what it suffers and itself exemplifies: time.

We first approached Heraclitus's illogical logos through an analysis of fire, producing the contradiction of 'need and satiety' when we froze it in a moment. Contradiction and conflict is similarly the fate of everything temporal at every moment in this kosmos of time: 'The ordering [kosmos], the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire everliving, kindled in measures and in measures quenched.'⁸² In other words, the world is one and everliving, but it is nonetheless a cauldron of many things, all becoming and perishing. Some of these things are becoming while others are perishing, to be sure; more importantly, though, each of them is becoming and perishing at once. At every moment of its burning, as we have seen, fire perishes from its own satisfaction yet becomes thanks to its need: kindled in measures and in measures quenched. When we articulated Heraclitus's illogical logos of time with the help of later philosophers, moreover, we found Zeno's flying arrow at every moment to be both moving and still, while Aristotle's 'now' proved to be both present and absent.

As time passes, generally speaking, everything it encompasses must age; as everything ages, as it moves through time, it must suffer contradiction at every moment. This is true of a river, but also of a mountain range, and even of 'The god [theos]: day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger. It alters, as when mingled with perfumes it gets named according to the pleasure of each one.'⁸³ This is the only extant aphorism in which Heraclitus defines his deity, but now that we have surveyed the other divine names we can see how his definition draws upon them. Indeed, by comparing his god directly to an altar fire that provokes different names according to the different pleasures or scents of the different perfumes mixed with it, Heraclitus has woven into the definition itself an explanation for the assignment of many different names to the one god.⁸⁴ According to this aphorism, however, these many names are not those we have examined so far in this chapter—the names other aphorisms suggest, such as 'fire' or 'harmonia,' each revealing in its own way the

⁸² DK 22B30; translation revised from Kahn.

⁸³ DK 22B67; translation revised from Kahn 1979:276. Kahn inserts 'and' between each of the opposing pairs in the first sentence of this aphorism, but there is no equivalent in the Greek, and the severe asyndeton of the original heightens the confusion of opposites that is the aphorism's point. Kahn translates hēdonē as 'pleasure,' the common meaning the word in the fifth century, while noting 'the old technical use of hēdonē for a flavor or perfume' (1979:280). Although odd, this translation does keep before our minds the subjective contribution of the namer when naming the one god according to a false dichotomy. In later sections of this chapter we shall examine the deliberate confusion of subject and object in the Heraclitean account of thinking and speaking about the world.

⁸⁴ Conche (1986:381) discusses in detail the image of an altar fire mixed with perfumes, citing Pindar and Hippolytus.

concealed divine nature—but rather the names common in Greek religion, which he roundly criticizes.⁸⁵

War and peace, for instance, were popularly considered separate and opposing gods,⁸⁶ but Heraclitus nonetheless unites them, as we have seen, under the rule of one god: ‘War is father of all and king of all.’⁸⁷ Although he appears to be contradicting himself here by privileging one opposing god over the other, in truth he unites these two popular conceptions of deity in one hidden god who is neither war nor peace, at least as commonly conceived, but rather both in harmonia—not unlike the bow, the lyre, and the god who makes them both his signs, Apollo. The same critique of popular piety is more explicit in his definition’s conflation of ‘day night.’ After all, both were divinized by Hesiod, whom Heraclitus rebukes for dividing and thus misunderstanding the one god.⁸⁸ ‘The teacher of most is Hesiod,’ he writes with scorn, ‘It is him they know as knowing most, who did not recognize day and night: they are one.’⁸⁹ They are so unified in the Heraclitean definition of god, in fact, that their names stand next to one another in blunt asyndeton, without a conjunction, as though in apposition rather than opposition. Popular piety, by contrast, opposes Day and Night, and thus overlooks the divine unity in their opposition.

Approaching the fire of the divine altar, analogously, thoughtless worshippers name it ‘myrrh’ or ‘cyprus’ or ‘rose,’ according to the scents of the perfumes mixed with it.⁹⁰ They thus overlook its concealed nature, its unity of opposing need and satiety, its harmonia. ‘Most men do not think things in the way they encounter them,’ Heraclitus protests, for most are like these thoughtless worshippers who fail to ‘recognize what they experience, but believe their own opinions.’⁹¹ These opinions are the perfumes they mix with the divine, concealing its logos according to the pleasure of each. Exploiting these opinions and pleasures, the Heraclitean logos of god, his definition, is thus a list of things carefully arranged—a harmonia—according to their

⁸⁵ See DK 22B5, B14, B15, B96. To these criticisms of popular piety, we must add the criticisms of Homer and Hesiod (DK 22B40, B42, B57, B106), whose texts underwrote so much of Greek religion (Burkert 2003:120).

⁸⁶ The more famous god of war is Ares (see *Iliad* 5.889–98); lesser known is Peace (*Eirēnē*), whom Hesiod makes the daughter of Zeus and Themis (*Theogony* 902).

⁸⁷ DK 22B53. See also DK22A22.

⁸⁸ *Theogony* 748–57.

⁸⁹ DK 22B57 (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 9.10.2).

⁹⁰ Conche 1986:380–81.

⁹¹ DK 22B17 (Clement, *Stromateis* 2.8.1).

positive or negative value from the human perspective (or at least the perspective of sixth-century Greeks and their religion).⁹²

Daylight stands for life (positive), nighttime for death (negative); winter is the stormy season (negative), summer the season of growth (positive). Switching from these two prominent cosmic cycles, Heraclitus next lists two dramatic human cycles. War destroys (negative), whereas peace preserves (positive); satiety is what we work to achieve (positive), while hunger is what we struggle to avoid (negative). Taken together, then, the values of these oppositions form the following complex pattern: + - - + | - + + -. Within the cosmic cycles, first, there is a chiasmus (+ - - +); within the human cycles, next, the order of values is reversed (- + + -). Ultimately, then, the definition unifies a chiastic opposition between cosmic and human. Chiastic unity, we shall eventually see, is Heraclitus's god. We should not be surprised to find the divine concealed beneath such a complex pattern of human valuations, for 'although the logos is shared, most men live as though their thinking were a private possession.'⁹³ In the midst of these private possessions, god is the harmonia that unifies their oppositions.

If this harmonia were to be one thing, it would be time. Time unifies day and night, winter and summer; time is an ordering, kindled in measures and in measures quenched; time, it therefore seems, is Heraclitus's god. For only by perpetually becoming, in time, can this god encompass the simultaneity of need and satiety, the absence and presence of every moment, as well as the simultaneous becoming and perishing of every thing. But definitively naming this god—whether by 'time' or any other single noun—would be a mistake. 'Grammar,' Nietzsche writes, 'is the metaphysics of the people.'⁹⁴ We the people are tempted by its distinction between noun and predicate, for example, to assume a real distinction between lightning and its flash when we hear that 'Lightning flashes.'⁹⁵ In the reality described by this simple sentence there is not the lightning, on one hand, and its flash, on the other. The lightning just is the flash: 'there is no "being" behind the doing, effecting, becoming.'⁹⁶ With grammar as our metaphysics, however, we are tempted by nouns into thinking of the things they designate as static. 'Fire' and other nouns seem to refer to something stable—a nugget, so to speak—although we have seen how they misrepresent their

⁹² Kahn (1979:278) describes in more detail the complex arrangement presented in the next paragraph. Conche (1986:382) discusses the same arrangement, citing Deichgräber and Serra.

⁹³ DK 22B2 (Sextus Empiricus, Against the Professors 8.133).

⁹⁴ The Gay Science 354; see also Twilight of the Idols ('Reason in Philosophy,' 5).

⁹⁵ Genealogy of Morality 1.13.

⁹⁶ Genealogy of Morality 1.13.25–26.

referents by doing so. Apparently recognizing this temptation, Heraclitus eschews a simple definition of god and instead provides a logos that lists nouns in polar opposition.

Such a definition suggests that god is no one static thing to which any of these nouns refers, but rather the temporal process of opposition between them all. To dispel further the illusion of stasis fostered by nouns, moreover, Heraclitus switches in the second sentence of his definition to verbs, which in Greek may stand alone without any explicit subject: '[It] alters, as when mingled with perfumes [it] gets named according to the pleasure of each one.'⁹⁷ Had Heraclitus been less artful, and more inclined to neologism, he might have anticipated Heidegger and written not of god but of 'godding,' or something to that effect.⁹⁸ Besides its awkwardness, however, such a ruse stumbles on the fact that verbs (not to mention participles, which are verbal nouns) may also trick us into ossifying the world, into thinking processes themselves as stable. When we think of flowing or burning, for example, how often do we think of them as processes or even things that could exist in a moment without contradiction? Without practicing Heraclitean meditation—reminding ourselves perpetually of the passage of time, and of the absurdity produced by trying to thwart its greed—the candid answer must be: nearly always.

To disrupt such thinking, Heraclitus juxtaposes his definition's two sentences in a unity of perfect syntactical opposition. 'The first consists of nine nouns in the nominative, with no syntax, simply a list of names,' as Kahn observes, whereas 'the second sentence is all syntax, with three finite verb clauses but no subject noun.'⁹⁹ In sum, Heraclitus uses grammar itself to dispel the illusions of grammar. Defining god not by one sentence or the other, but rather in the harmonia between the two, he reports a logos that exhibits what it conveys. For his becoming god is the unity of all these opposites, a god that 'rests by changing,'¹⁰⁰ a god that is the unity of this opposition as it processes through thought, language, and world.

2.6 BECOMING ONESELF

To find ourselves in the becoming god, we must first search for our selves. Doing so, we follow in the footsteps of Heraclitus himself: 'I went in search of myself.'¹⁰¹ Yet contradiction arises the moment such a search begins. If Heraclitus is searching for himself at a moment, he must both be himself and not be himself, for he is both the searcher and the sought. As searcher, he must be

⁹⁷ Kahn 1979:276–77.

⁹⁸ See, e.g., Heidegger 1999:4.

⁹⁹ Kahn 1979:277.

¹⁰⁰ DK 22B84a (Plotinus, Enneads 4.8.1).

¹⁰¹ DK 22B101 (Plutarch, Against Colotes 1118C).

present to himself; as sought, he must be absent, lest there be no need for a search. ‘This is as straightforward a paradox as any in Heraclitus,’ writes Kahn, who summarizes it with a simple question: ‘How can I be the object of my own search?’¹⁰² This simple question will be elaborated throughout the ancient philosophical tradition, first by Plato, then by Aristotle, culminating in the version of the Skeptic Sextus Empiricus.¹⁰³ We shall examine Sextus’s version in this book’s sixth chapter, where Plotinus responds to it, or something very like it, in order to justify his own search for self-knowledge. Without anticipating that much later version, anachronistically, we get a sufficient sense of it for the purpose of interpreting Heraclitus once we recognize how a moment of self-inquiry requires the searcher to be ‘absent while present.’¹⁰⁴

Described in these terms, his own, his paradox of self-inquiry resembles his contradictory description of fire as need and satiety. Accordingly, we should not be surprised to learn that this contradiction too can be avoided by refusing to freeze self-inquiry in a moment, by understanding it as a temporal process. As much as this process resembles fire, though, it differs inasmuch as it is self-reflexive. Fire burns fuel, something other than itself; self-inquiry, by contrast, inquires into itself. When it does so, however, it must find itself to be this very activity of self-inquiry. Otherwise there would arise a distinction between this activity and its object, so that the activity would not be a self-inquiry, properly speaking, but instead an inquiry into a distinct object. As with the flash of lightning, we should not be fooled by grammar into performing two inquiries, one into the self and another into its characteristic activity, self-inquiry. Our investigation of this activity is tantamount to an inquiry into self because the self is nothing other than this activity: its thinking about itself must be a thinking of its own thinking, even a thinking of its own thinking of its own thinking, and so on ad infinitum.¹⁰⁵

The next section will attempt to grasp this infinite regress, ultimately arguing that it is not nearly so narcissistic as it first appears because it involves a contemplation of the whole cosmos. Before grasping this elusive conclusion, though, we can already see how a self that is identical to self-inquiry would increase itself, and do so infinitely: it inquires into itself, then inquires into itself inquiring, thence into itself inquiring into itself inquiring, and so on, infinitely elevating the height of its self-reflection. This vertiginous result matches two of the few extant Heraclitean aphorisms about the self. First: ‘To the self belongs a logos that increases itself.’ And second: ‘You will not

¹⁰² Kahn 1979:116.

¹⁰³ Against the Mathematicians 7.310–12. Sextus flourished in the 2nd century of the common era. For earlier versions in Plato and Aristotle, see Charmides 167a–169c and De Anima 3.2, 425b12–28.

¹⁰⁴ DK 22B34 (Clement, Stromateis 5.115.3).

¹⁰⁵ Hussey 1999:105.

find out the limits of the self by going, even if you travel over every way, so deep is its logos.¹⁰⁶ It is the activity of self-inquiry that travels over every way, as we shall see, but we have already argued that this activity is the self itself. The logos of the self is thus without limit because its activity is equally so. To understand the nature of this infinite self, in sum, we must grasp the nature of this infinite activity.

This is a difficult activity to grasp, and not only because of its infinity, for grasping it—like grasping fire—seems to demand that we freeze it in a moment. But this would generate the contradiction introduced above: because the self (as subject of the inquiry) investigates the self (as object of the inquiry), these two selves must be different for there to be a genuine inquiry, but in the same moment they must also be identical for the self truly to inquire into itself. Perhaps this contradiction will disappear, as did the similar contradiction of frozen fire, once we introduce the flow of time. Fire, recall, is nothing more than the immanent logos of its burning, the simultaneous unity of its opposing need and satiety, the paradoxical harmonia of its being kindled in measures and in measures quenched. Fire, in short, is a temporal process. Frozen in a moment—like a fire, a flying arrow, or time itself—you too must be simultaneously becoming and perishing, moving and still, present and absent. Although this, your complex harmonia, may be concealed even from yourself, Heraclitus seems to think you reveal its hidden strength whenever you go in search of yourself.

Searching for yourself, you move through time, just as you do while reading this sentence: moving from the self that thinks through the thoughts at its beginning to the self that thinks through those at its end, not to mention the self that now thinks about itself thinking, then thinks about itself thinking about itself thinking... When you move through any sentence—but most obviously when it is as complex and self-reflexive as the previous sentence—you have stepped into a river of thinking, so to speak. Whereas the waters of a literal river flow around you, however, the thinking of a sentence flows through you, just as your thinking flows through it. There is a confluence of logos and logos, quite literally, so that when you understand its thinking, when the confluence is complete, the subject and object of your thinking become one. Such confluence is most obviously perfect when the object of your thinking is the self-thinking that is your very self. When the object of someone's inquiry must be the very subject that is his self-inquiry, as we have seen in Heraclitus's search for himself, or the search of any self for itself, the logos of one must be indistinguishable from the logos of the other.

¹⁰⁶ DK 22B115 and B45. In both translations, 'self' renders psychēs, which Kahn translates more literally as 'soul.'

In the activity of self-inquiry, then, as in the burning of fire, the contradictions of any frozen moment become a harmonia, a unity in opposition, through the passage of time. By self-inquiry, in short, one becomes one self. The next section endeavors to explain how this obscure unity happens.

2.7 GRASPING ONESELF

Unity of thinking's subject and object is nowhere more prominent in the Heraclitean aphorisms than in the one that resembles the logos of god: 'Graspings [syllapsies]: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.'¹⁰⁷ As we saw earlier, the logos of god begins likewise with one thing and then defines it by a list of oppositions. 'The god [theos]: day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger.'¹⁰⁸ In Kahn's estimation, 'both in form and content these two fragments serve as complements to one another, providing a kind of summary of Heraclitus's thought.'¹⁰⁹ Linked by their common form, in fact, they recommend a comparison of their parallel elements. What is the relationship, for instance, between theos and syllapsies, god and graspings? Recognizing this particular relationship—this identification, we shall argue—turns out to be the highest activity of Heraclitean philosophy, and it is tantamount to recognizing oneself. To promote this recognition and identification, we should begin by examining the other parallels between these aphorisms.

Most importantly, this new logos replaces the concrete and manifest oppositions of the logos of god—day night, and the others—with concealed and abstract oppositions.¹¹⁰ The manifest concrete oppositions of god's logos are not exhaustive, after all, but merely examples; to their list, other aphorisms add disease and health, weariness and rest, living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old.¹¹¹ Rather than providing examples, then, the abstract oppositions of this new logos describe the concealed structure of their unity in opposition, the ubiquitous harmonia of our temporal cosmos. By both expressing and exemplifying this harmonia, as we shall see, this abstract

¹⁰⁷ DK 22B10 ([Aristotle], On the World 5.396b20).

¹⁰⁸ DK 22B67.

¹⁰⁹ Kahn 1979:281.

¹¹⁰ Kahn 1979:283.

¹¹¹ DK 22B110–11, B88. Of the last, we should notice how it shares formal features with both the logos of god and the logos of graspings. It lists concrete oppositions of the human life-cycle, like the logos of god, then follows this list with a chiasmus, like the logos of graspings: '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.' We shall discuss the figure of chiasmus below, in time making it our translation of syllapsies.

logos poses the most direct challenge to the exalted status of the principle of non-contradiction. To be precise, it does not threaten its value for sound thinking; instead, it dethrones it as the supreme arbiter of rational thinking, the purest activity of reason itself, the firmest principle of all. For, according to this logos, when we understand ‘day night’ not just as a manifest opposition but as a concealed unity, what we grasp is both whole and not-whole: ‘day-night’ is a whole unifying the not-whole of ‘day versus night.’ The object of our understanding is thus neither the one nor the other—neither the unity nor the opposition, neither the whole nor the not-whole—but both at once.

Correlatively, when we understand fire not just as a manifest unity but as a concealed opposition, we perform the same combined activity, grasping the whole that is need-satiety as well as the not-whole of need versus satiety. Whether we seek to understand fire or river or anything else in this temporal cosmos, therefore, we must not only analyze it into distinct moments—where it is contradictory, not-whole, divergent, and dissonant—but also synthesize these moments into a temporal continuity—where it is consistent, whole, convergent, and consonant. Neither by analysis alone nor by synthesis alone do we understand, Heraclitus is thus saying, but only by both together, a combined activity he calls syllapsies.¹¹² The logos that defines this combined activity does not exclude the principle of non-contradiction, notice, because it does not exclude analysis, which is this principle in activity. Instead, it reveals analysis as merely one of the opposites unified by understanding. To understand, according to Heraclitus, we must synthesize as well as analyze—not just alternately, but simultaneously—with one complex activity that he calls nous.¹¹³

Lest this activity seem too complex, even impossible, Graham compares it to looking at the duck-rabbit drawing popularized in philosophy by Ludwig Wittgenstein.¹¹⁴ Looked at in one way,

¹¹² Many of the better manuscripts have synapsies, as Kirk observed (1962:170), but even he preferred syllapsies. Marcovich wrote that ‘the difference in meaning between the two words is minimal’ (1978:105). Both are cited by Conche (1986:433–34), who himself favors synapsies. As elsewhere in this chapter, unless otherwise noted, we adopt the text and translation of Kahn, who chooses syllapsies. He does not discuss any textual grounds for doing so, saying only that the alternative ‘is rejected in most recent editions of the text’ (1979:338, n.423). Persuasive enough, however, is his philosophical reasoning—namely, that the best translation of syllapsies is ‘graspings,’ which makes the aphorism about both the subject and object of thinking. We develop this reasoning in the main text of this section.

¹¹³ See DK 22B40, B104, and B114. In two of these aphorisms, Heraclitus denies nous to those whom others celebrate for their wisdom: specifically Hesiod, Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus (B40); but more generally, popular poets and the mob who celebrate them (B104). In the other aphorism (B114), he describes those who speak with nous as those who ‘hold fast to what is shared (xunōi) by all.’ This is presumably the logos that is said in B2 to be ‘shared’ (xunou).

¹¹⁴ Graham 2008:181. (For Wittgenstein, see Philosophical Investigations 2.11. The drawing first appeared in a German humor magazine in 1892, then again in Harper’s the same year. A Gestalt psychologist, J. Jastrow, introduced it to academic psychology in 1899.) Graham compares nous to the vision of the duck-rabbit drawing, and his own interpretation of nous has been helpful in the development of the interpretation advanced here, but our interpretation departs somewhat from his. According to Graham, nous grants ‘insight into the world and its complexity’ (2008:181). With the help of Heraclitean aphorisms, more

the drawing appears to be of a duck; looked at in another, though, it appears as a rabbit. The drawing remains unchanged, our eyes do not move, yet we alternate between seeing it one way and then another, back and forth, often quickly, and sometimes involuntarily. When we willfully contemplate not just the drawing but also these very alternations, though, we can rise to a higher level of reflection, coming to see the drawing as duck-and-rabbit-in-alternation, that is, as duck-rabbit, as a unity in opposition. Similar epiphanies occur when we study contrapuntal music. Listening to a Bach fugue, for example, we can with disciplined effort discern not only one theme or its counter-point, nor only both in alternation, but both at once. Beyond even this difficult accomplishment, the highest understanding discerns ultimately the concealed harmonia of their conflict. To fully appreciate the fugue, in other words, we must hear the unity in opposition that is Bach's composition. Studying Heraclitean aphorisms with no less discipline than a musicologist, we learn likewise to see their concealed harmonia, complex composition, and unity in opposition.

This is the logos they exhibit, but it is also the logos of the world they describe. Heraclitean aphorisms share the logos of the world; their goal is to help us share it as well. But to the extent that our thinking is already a temporal process, like everything else in the world, it already does. Syllapsies is accordingly ambiguous between two English meanings: on one hand, the 'comprehensions' germane to thinking's subject; on the other, the 'collections' in the world that are thinking's object. 'Syllapsies,' Kahn thus writes, 'will denote the pairwise structuring of reality and also the act of intelligence by which this structure is gathered together.'¹¹⁵ His commendable effort to carry this ambiguity into English is 'graspings,' which he believes can signify objective collections of things in the world as well as subjective comprehensions of it. Close as this translation may come to preserving this delicate ambiguity, though, it tips the balance toward the subjective side. After 'logos' and 'harmonia,' then, we shall adapt a final term directly from Heraclitus's Greek: 'syllapsis.'¹¹⁶

specifically, 'we perceive suddenly the complexity of the representation, and also its unity' (2008:182). Graham thus describes these aphorisms as 'exercises in intuition, in right-brain logic, in synthetic intelligence' (2008:183). In our interpretation, however, that is only half the story. Just as he thinks that an observer can view the duck-rabbit drawing as a duck or a rabbit, 'though not as both at the same time,' Graham also claims that Heraclitus's deliberate ambiguities 'can be construed one way or the other, but not both ways at the same time' (2008:179). Our interpretation goes farther and argues—both of the drawing and of the ambiguities of the aphorisms, not to mention of the world whose logos they report—that perception of both ways at the same time is possible. Our example of a Bach fugue, below in the main text, is an example of this possibility. Analogously, we add, sound thinking's combination of analysis and synthesis is also possible.

¹¹⁵ Kahn 1979:282. 'There is a kind of isomorphism between the knower and the known, agrees Graham, 'inasmuch as they share a structure' (2008:184).

¹¹⁶ The Greek original, syllapsies, is plural, whereas we shall treat our adapted form as singular, in order to speak more easily of one activity. But not without provisos. For the so-called 'river' fragment (B12)

Whichever term one prefers to denote this complex activity, one must preserve this crucial ambiguity. For when understanding is achieved, according to Heraclitus, the thinking subject exhibits the very same activity as the object understood, the activity we now call *syllapsis*. Insofar as it is a temporal process, as we mentioned above, our thinking is always participating in this activity, just as a fire must do to burn. Yet some fires grow weak either by excess or deficiency, by need or satiety, whereas other fires burn brighter thanks to their more perfect unity in this characteristic opposition. A much later Heraclitean would make this analogy himself, twice comparing the virtuous self to ‘a bright fire that appropriates whatever you throw into it and from it produces flame and light.’¹¹⁷ We shall derive more help from Marcus Aurelius’s interpretation of Heraclitus in the next section of this chapter, but for now we can elaborate his analogy a little, adding that virtuously thinking selves exhibit a perfect unity in the midst of their characteristic opposition—analysis versus synthesis—and this unity is nous, which likewise grows stronger with every appropriation.

Guiding our thinking exclusively by the principle of non-contradiction, as we have often observed, we must arrest whatever we contemplate in a moment and generate contradictions. Contemplating fire, for instance, we would see only opposition, divergence, and dissonance, thereby misunderstanding fire’s full nature. Were we to abdicate analysis, however, we might see unity, convergence, and consonance—the way we see a fire when we use it to cook, for example, without considering it as a complex process—but we would misunderstand the fire’s full nature. Thinking only synthetically about it, we could not know what opposition, divergence, and dissonance it unified, reconciled, and harmonized. To think at once of its unity and its opposition, indeed of its unity in opposition, the self must think both synthetically and analytically, which is to say *syllaptically*.

This requirement of understanding becomes most urgent when the self tries to understand itself. For, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter, self-understanding requires that

also uses plurals, as Kahn observes (1979:166–67), and presumably this is deliberate, so we should not occlude the significance of the grammatical number by our adaptation. That said, Heraclitus’s point with the plural in this case seems to be that there appear initially to be two sorts of graspings, those in thinking’s subject (‘comprehensions’), and those in the world that is thinking’s object (‘collections’). But in the end, as we shall argue, his deeper point here is that these two sorts of graspings are really identical, two sides of the same mind-world coin. Although we favor the singular with our provisional adaptation of ‘*syllapsis*,’ we shall always be sensitive to both of these points, the one initially revealed and the other more deeply concealed. Indeed, we shall soon consider the difficult relation between one and many in Heraclitus, when we investigate the final phrase of the *logos* of graspings: ‘from all things one and from one thing all.’ Our interpretation of this relation will confirm, however, that the singular adaptation of *syllapsies* is as accurate as the plural, if not more so because it helps to reveal the concealed meaning.

¹¹⁷ *Meditations* 10.31; cf. 4.1.

thinking's subject be the same as its object. Were such a subject to think only analytically, on one hand, contradiction and fragmentation would thus afflict it as well as its object, just as we found when we analyzed the apparently banal but truly paradoxical aphorism: 'I went in search of myself.'¹¹⁸ On the other hand, anyone who searches for himself without the help of analysis will glibly assume he is a unity, as we humans usually do before we have been awoken from our self-neglect, either by the paradoxes of self-inquiry or, as is more often the case, the frustration of inner conflict.¹¹⁹ To consider oneself a unity in this way, without also seeing oneself as opposed to oneself, is to misunderstand what kind of unity one is: the only kind there is, according to Heraclitus, a unity in opposition.

If a thinking subject is to understand itself—indeed, if it is to become one self, as the previous section concluded—it must exercise both analysis and synthesis. In other words, it must think according to a more comprehensive principle than the principle of non-contradiction. This we now call the principle of syllapsis: 'wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.'¹²⁰

To think according to this principle is the ultimate goal of Heraclitean philosophy; this is its version of pure reason. To anyone who holds the principle of non-contradiction to be the firmest principle of all, needless to say, this version of reason will appear impure. It is contradictory, after all, for the same subject to think both analytically and synthetically at the same moment about the same object, just as it is contradictory for the same object to be both whole and not-whole, not to mention all the other opposites named in the more comprehensive principle. Yet purely analytic thinking, according to the principle of non-contradiction, has also revealed itself as contradictory, ironically, whenever it turns to anything temporal, but most of all when it turns upon itself. Self-thinking according to the principle of syllapsis, by contrast, surpasses its contradictions, because its fragmentation, divergence, and dissonance are together only one component of this complex activity. The other component simultaneously achieves reconciliation, convergence, and consonance. If this synthesis be considered impossible—as it must be by anyone who exalts the principle of non-contradiction above its secondary status—then so too, remember, must be the burning of fire.

¹¹⁸ DK 22B101.

¹¹⁹ In this book's fourth chapter, on Plato, we shall consider his influential treatment of inner conflict, which he highlights in tandem with the principle of non-contradiction in order to divide the self into parts. Other famous instances of this philosophical strategy—not treated in this book on ancient Greek philosophy, but nonetheless downstream from its conclusions—are found in Augustine's Confessions and Freud's The Ego and the Id.

¹²⁰ DK 22B10.

Searching for oneself is not impossible, of course, because self-thinking, like the burning of fire, is in time. Accordingly, we may reconstruct the following movement in the self-thinking of syllapsis. Thinking of itself by first exercising analysis upon its simultaneous unity of synthesis and analysis will indeed elicit a contradiction. Analysis thus fragments the self into the divergent activities of analysis and synthesis. But since this self-thinking is truly syllaptic, such fragmentation serves only to summon a reconciliation. From this additional unity of analysis with synthesis, however, a subsequent analysis elicits still another contradiction, breaking this unity into parts that will summon still another synthesis. And so on. In this perpetual motion of self-reflection, the self will achieve thinking of thinking, not to mention thinking of thinking of thinking... In the midst of this vertiginous self-inquiry, moreover, the self recognizes itself. For at every milestone on this infinite way, the subject and object of thinking is but the same syllapsis. In self-inquiry, in short, the self recognizes itself as this divine activity, the very activity of the whole temporal cosmos, becoming god.

2.8 IMMORTALS MORTALS

Whenever we arrest this becoming god in a moment, mixing its divine fire with our longing for stability, we give it inappropriately static names: day or night, winter or summer, satiety or hunger, war or peace. Whenever we think the temporal world, including our selves, according to the principle of non-contradiction, absurdities arise. Why do we do either? Parmenides and his philosophical heirs cannot be to blame. He may have been the first to propose this principle, as the next chapter will argue, but he seems to have written after Heraclitus.¹²¹ The target of the Heraclitean aphorisms cannot therefore have been Parmenides, his principle, or the successors who honed it, but must instead have been something more fundamental in our habitual ways of thinking. This target seems to have been the denial of time which the principle of non-contradiction appears to justify. Yet which pleasure (hēdonē) do we indulge when we deny time? None of the extant aphorisms names it directly, although from them we must expect it to be hostile to the becoming god. Naming it more explicitly than did Heraclitus himself, his philosophical heirs have since called it nostalgia.

‘That it cannot break time and time’s greed,’ writes Nietzsche, arguably the most faithful of these heirs, ‘that is the will’s loneliest misery.’¹²² And why is this? Why is the will miserable

¹²¹ The chronological order of Heraclitus’s and Parmenides’ writings has been hotly contested since Hegel first claimed that Parmenides wrote first. The majority of scholars now subscribe to the opposite order. Graham surveys the state of this scholarship and argues that Heraclitus wrote first (2002:27–44). For another view, see Nehamas in the same volume (2002:4–64).

¹²² Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Second Part, ‘On Redemption.’

before inexorable time? Every new moment brings the death of an old one; time's greed thus consumes moments and whatever in them we have cherished. Whenever we deny time, then, the pleasure we indulge is the fantasy of a deathless 'now,' an eternal present, an immortal moment in which nothing good is lost. With its idea of a timeless heaven, where everything good survives, and only what is good survives, Christianity presented Nietzsche with the purest form of this fantasy. Diagnosing the redemption it promises as 'the spirit of revenge' against time, a resentful denial of its inexorable greed, his Zarathustra preaches an alternate redemption, a 'reconciliation with time.'¹²³ This is the often misunderstood doctrine of the Eternal Return. Although this book is not the place to interpret it,¹²⁴ we should nonetheless notice how another Heraclitean anticipated both it and the diagnosis that prompted Nietzsche to propose it.

Marcus Aurelius meditates on the passage of greedy time, not to escape it, but to accept it. 'Observe every object,' he writes, 'and realize that it is already being dissolved and in process of change, and, as it were, coming to be from decay and dispersion.'¹²⁵ Preoccupied with death, not least his own, Marcus writes with a melancholy that Nietzsche's joyful science seeks to overcome.¹²⁶ However disparate their moods, though, both are after the same Heraclitean goal: a reconciliation with time, a recognition that life is at every moment intertwined with death, an acceptance of such conflict as just and ultimately divine. Returning our attention to his aphorisms, none of them promotes this reconciliation more directly than the one Kahn considers 'in point of form Heraclitus's masterpiece, the most perfectly symmetrical of all the fragments.'¹²⁷ Indeed, this aphorism exhibits a complex chiasmus similar to the one we found in the logos of god, forging a formal link with that aphorism which its content also corroborates: 'Immortals mortals, mortals immortals, living the others' death, dead in the others' life.'¹²⁸

Before discussing the content of this aphorism, let us analyze its chiasmic form, first recalling the structure of the logos it resembles. Using signs for the positive or negative values of the terms by which god was there defined, we discerned the following complex pattern: + - - + | - + + -. Within the cosmic cycles denoted by the first half of the aphorism, there was one chiasmus (+ -

¹²³ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Second Part, 'On Redemption.' For a fuller picture of the diagnosis, see First Part, 'On the Hinterworldly,' and Second Part, 'On the Blessed Isles.'

¹²⁴ For a discussion of the misunderstandings and an alternate interpretation, see Miller 2008.

¹²⁵ Meditations 10.18.

¹²⁶ This is especially true of Books 2 and 3; see Hadot 1998:264–65.

¹²⁷ Kahn 1979:216.

¹²⁸ DK 22B62; Kahn 1979:216.

- +); within the human cycles of the second half, there was another, but the order of values was reversed (- + + -). Thus, the definition unified a chiasmic opposition between cosmic and human, immortal and mortal. A remarkably similar pattern emerges when we analyze this logos of life and death. If we use ‘+’ to stand for life or non-death (immortality), ‘-’ for death or non-life (mortality), and we adopt a translation that hews closer to the Greek original, we get: ‘Immortals (+) mortals (-), mortals (-) immortals (+), living (+) the others’ death (-), in the others’ life (+) having died (-).’ This time our pattern is as follows: + - - + | + - - -.¹²⁹ No matter how complex its chiasmic structure, no matter how close its formal resemblances to the logos of god, this logos on life and death speaks louder with the content of its words.

Immortality was the hallmark of divinity in Greek religion: gods live forever, humans must die.¹³⁰ Thus, by intertwining life and death, living and dying, mortality and immortality—just as earlier aphorisms intertwined becoming and perishing—this aphorism implicitly conflates divinity and humanity. The conflation is so thorough, in fact, that the arrangement of the aphorism’s first half makes the subjects of the participles in its second half ambiguous. Do mortals live the death of immortals, so that immortals are dead in mortals’ lives? Or, instead, do immortals live the death of mortals, while mortals are dead in immortals’ lives? Stumbling upon ambiguity now, as so often before in Heraclitus, we need not choose one interpretation to the exclusion of the other; instead, we should see a unity in this opposition, a harmonia that is the deeper significance of its logos. As it turns out, this deeper significance is a lesson we have already learned. We have not fully digested this lesson, however, until we can accept its application to our selves.

Arrested in a moment, we too are both whole and not-whole, absent and present, dying and being born. Every moment of our lives is thus entwined with fragmentation, absence, and death; correlatively, every moment of our death should also be entwined with wholeness, presence, and life. ‘Perhaps the greatest surprise that awaits us at our death,’ writes Kahn, ‘is that things will not be very different, since we are and always have been familiar with the experience of continually dying and continually being reborn.’¹³¹ We reconcile with time, accordingly, when we accept that time is no more greedy than generous: it is each in equal measures. Such an acceptance should be doleful and buoyant in equal measures, but neither Marcus nor Nietzsche was able to maintain this

¹²⁹ The second half of the aphorism appears to lack a chiasmus, let alone the opposite one we witnessed in the second half of the logos of god, but if we assign our symbols based on syntactic form rather than semantic content, simply letting ‘-’ stand for participles, ‘+’ for nouns, regardless of their value, we do get the following: - + + -. This would make the patterns of the two aphorisms identical (+ - - + | - + + -). Admittedly, though, this may stretch the parallel between them too far.

¹³⁰ ‘Athanatos (immortal) . . . means god and nothing else.’ (Guthrie 1955:115; see also 239).

¹³¹ Kahn 1979:226–27.

difficult balance. Marcus tips it toward melancholy, with his emphasis on destructive death; with his emphasis on creative life, Nietzsche inclines toward joy.¹³² Despite their different emphases, though, both are faithful to the Heraclitean logos: affirming the whole world, acknowledging the god in which we too are becoming, and grasping its conflicts whenever our thinking arrests it in a moment.

Marcus thus advises in one passage: ‘Let the whole of time and the whole of substance be continuously present to your mind.’¹³³ To this ambitious intellectual discipline, he soon adds the following affective exercise: ‘the universe loves to create what is to happen ... therefore I say to the universe: “I join in your love.”’¹³⁴ Against the temptation to arrest time in a moment, in other words, Marcus recommends contemplating time’s passage and loving its perpetual activity of creation. Combining his own meditation on time with a still more rhapsodic embrace of everything it encompasses, Nietzsche later asks, ‘Have you ever said Yes to one joy?’ If so, he adds, ‘then you also said Yes to all pain. All things are enchained, entwined, enamored.’¹³⁵ Along with his parallel meditation on the whole of time, then, Nietzsche also evokes the Stoic doctrine that all events are necessarily connected. To his own intellectual discipline, finally, he adds the following affective condition: ‘If you ever wanted one time two times, if you ever said “I like you, happiness! Whoosh! Moment!” then you wanted everything back.’¹³⁶ Sharing Marcus’s enthusiasm for all things in time, then, Nietzsche likewise flirts with an eternal return of all times.¹³⁷

But whether they believe in this doctrine as a matter of cosmology, or merely propose it as a spiritual exercise—enjoining us to love time’s perpetual creation so ardently as to wish paradoxically for its repetition—both philosophers are trying to elaborate the Heraclitean logos. Speaking of this logos, and quoting Heraclitus, Marcus writes that ‘men are at odds with that with which they are in most contact touch.’¹³⁸ All the Stoics owe a deep debt to Heraclitus, but Marcus

¹³² For Marcus, see especially Meditations 4.48; for Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Fourth and Final Part, ‘The Sleepwalker Song’ (10).

¹³³ Meditations 10.17.

¹³⁴ Meditations 10.21.

¹³⁵ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Fourth and Final Part, ‘The Sleepwalker Song’ (10).

¹³⁶ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Fourth and Final Part, ‘The Sleepwalker Song’ (10).

¹³⁷ The most relevant passages of Marcus are 2.14, 5.13, 5.32, 9.35, and 11.1; Hadot has detailed discussions of the question (1998:41, 48–51, 75–76, 144–45, 177–78, 267). For the relevant passages from Nietzsche, as well as a discussion, see Miller 2008.

¹³⁸ To Marcus’s several quotations of Heraclitus in Meditations 4.46, we owe this fragment, DK 22B72, as well as B73. This section also quotes or paraphrases DK 22B36, B74, and B76. Kahn thinks all of these fragments are quoted from unreliable memory (1979:104), and thereby suspect.

pays him special homage.¹³⁹ Besides quoting this and other aphorisms from memory, he twice alludes to the Heraclitean river. ‘Existence is like a river in perpetual flow,’¹⁴⁰ he writes in one passage, elaborating the same metaphor in another: ‘Time is a river of things that become, with a strong current. No sooner is a thing seen than it has been swept away.’¹⁴¹ For his part, Nietzsche alludes to the river and agrees with Heraclitus that ‘everything is in flux.’¹⁴² Although this doctrine has been frozen through the ‘hard winter’ of subsequent philosophy, he writes, at long last ‘the thaw wind is blowing!’¹⁴³ Nietzsche fashioned himself this thaw wind, this champion of Heraclitus, for in one of his first books he eulogized him thus: ‘The world forever needs the truth, hence the world forever needs Heraclitus.’¹⁴⁴

In this section we have turned to Marcus and Nietzsche—two Heracliteans who supplement the intellectual austerity of the extant aphorisms with emotional diagnoses—in order to understand why humans so stubbornly distort the logos, conceal its harmonia, and arrest its becoming god. The answer shared by both is that our impotence before time, and especially our death, makes us inveterately nostalgic. While Heraclitus does not promise us power over time, he nonetheless reconciles us to it by conflating life and death, mortality and immortality, even humanity with divinity. We cannot freeze time, but by thinking syllaptically and thus meditating on the unity in these and other oppositions, the harmonia of their conflict, and the logos of their everliving fire, we take consolation by grasping ourselves becoming god.

2.9 DIVINE CHIASMUS

Syllapsis is the divine dialectic of analysis and synthesis. As analysis, it brings all things out of one; as synthesis, it brings one thing out of all. The terms of this distinction are as applicable to god as they are to self, we saw, but they appear more suited to cognition than to the cosmos. Reverting to the more cosmic terms canvassed earlier, then, we recall that the first component of this divine

¹³⁹ See Long 1996:35–57.

¹⁴⁰ Meditations 5.23.

¹⁴¹ Meditations 4.43.

¹⁴² Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Third Part, ‘On Old and New Tablets’ (8). ‘Everything is in flux’ is a translation of the most famous paraphrase of Heraclitean philosophy: panta rhei. Plato and Aristotle use this wording in several passages (e.g., Cratylus 440c and De Caelo 3.1.298b30), as do other ancient authors (e.g., Theophrastus and Simplicius). But it is never attributed to Heraclitus as a quotation, and so it is not usually included among his authentic aphorisms. Conche nevertheless includes it, providing a full list of its ancient citations (1986:467–70).

¹⁴³ Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Third Part, ‘On Old and New Tablets’ (8).

¹⁴⁴ Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks (Nietzsche 1996: 68). See also Genealogy of Morality 2.16.

activity is also called conflict; the second, justice. Whichever set of terms they feature, though, the Heraclitean aphorisms are usually either one of two types: some speak of contradiction, conflict, and opposition, while others testify to reconciliation, justice, and unity.¹⁴⁵ These two types of aphorism represent two divergent and dissonant trends in Heraclitean philosophy, but they appear no less convergent and consonant when properly arranged by a correct interpretation. To achieve this arrangement and interpretation, as we have seen, several aphorisms offer the key.¹⁴⁶ None does so more perfectly than the principle of *syllapsis*.

This one *logos* reports the unifying structure of all the aphorisms when they are collected and comprehended together, and this structure is *chiasmus*: opposition in unity, unity in opposition. Recognizing this pattern, and doing our best to avoid neologism, we may at last translate *syllapsies* by a word that is accepted English, even if it too began as Greek. Equally at home naming thought and world, which is also to say equally alien doing either, it tips the balance neither toward the subject nor the object of thinking. ‘Chiasmus,’ in short, is no closer to ‘comprehension’ than it is to ‘collection.’ Most significantly, it reveals the structure of both, the concealed harmonia of the *logos* itself. Accordingly, the principle of *syllapsis* could just as well be called the principle of *chiasmus*, translated as follows. ‘Chiasmus: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.’¹⁴⁷

True to form, as by now we should expect, this aphorism exemplifies the structure it describes. Of its four pairs of opposites, the first and the last are joined internally by a conjunction, while the two in the middle lack one. A first *chiasmus* is therefore: *syndeton*, *asyndeton*; *asyndeton*, *syndeton*. Secondly, with each opposite in the middle expressed by one word, while many words express most of the oppositions around them, the aphorism exhibits the *chiastic* movement it reports, going from many to one before returning to many from one. *Nous*, or understanding, is just this dialectical movement between synthesis and analysis. As such, it must also be the movement exhibited by any understanding of this very *chiastic* principle. Whenever it is understood, therefore, it must be thinking’s subject as well as its object, exactly as we concluded earlier. Indeed, as we also concluded there, the self is but the perpetual exercise of this understanding, which is an understanding of understanding (and so on without end). The principle

¹⁴⁵ On opposition alone, e.g.: DK 22B18, B26, B31, B34, B36, B48, B53, B59, B60, B61, B65, B80, B91, B110–11, B123, B126. On unity alone, e.g.: DKB1, B33, B41, B54, B57, B108, B113–14.

¹⁴⁶ There are several such ‘key’ aphorisms, testifying to unity in opposition (DK 22B10, B30, B32, B50, B51, B54, B62, B67, B88, B101). These are consequently the aphorisms to which we have dedicated most of our attention.

¹⁴⁷ DK 22B10; translation revised from Kahn 1979:85, 281.

of chiasmus thus reveals itself as the logos not only of understanding, but ultimately of divine self-knowledge.

As subject of understanding this principle, you must move between its parts and its whole, analyzing and synthesizing, as you would while understanding any other logos. While understanding this logos in particular, though, your thinking must move not only between its parts and its whole, but also between this whole and itself as part of a still greater whole: your self. After all, you are the subject of understanding that is identical to its object, the principle of chiasmus; as your understanding becomes an understanding of understanding, then, so too does the logos with which you are identical: wholes and not-wholes both, in a perpetual dialectic between unity and plurality, moving to ever higher levels of understanding. Once prompted—whether by the logos of Heraclitean aphorisms, the harmonia in the world these aphorisms report, or the syllepsis of the thinking self they enjoin us to recognize—we identify more fully with all three. Like the fire that burns brighter by its perfect chiasmus of need and satiety, when we consciously unify our own opposition of analysis and synthesis, through the dialectical movement of time, we burn brightest of all. We grasp, finally, our own divine chiasmus.

In earlier sections of this chapter we introduced the divine as both conflict and unity: conflict and contradiction in a moment, unity and reconciliation in the flow of time. Now that we understand Heraclitus's god more thoroughly as the divine chiasmus of unity and plurality, we may analyze the simultaneous contradiction as many and one, whereas the temporal reconciliation is one alone. Yet this god is both contradiction and reconciliation, and thus even more paradoxical than a simple chiasmus of unity and plurality. At this elevated stage of analysis, in other words, this god must be many and one...as well as one. The paradoxical chiasmus of many-one (or one-many) makes Heraclitean theology difficult enough; the addition of this final one makes it seem altogether mystical. But we have been prepared to understand precisely this paradox by our earlier discussion of self-thinking. For at this level of divine contemplation there is indeed an additional contradiction, but higher-order conflict summons a further reconciliation, provoking another conflict, generating a still greater unity, and so on.¹⁴⁸

Ascent past even the first level is a struggle, to say the least. While remaining here below, though, we can nonetheless see how this divine activity shares the dialectical movement of self-thinking. Divine activity exhibits the logos of self-knowledge, in fact, just as self-knowledge revealed the logos of the divine. Although this common logos is a temporal dialectic of many

¹⁴⁸ In terms of unity and plurality, here is an analysis of these stages: additional contradiction (one-many and yet one); further reconciliation (the one that is somehow one-many-and-yet-one); another conflict (one-many-one and yet one); a higher unity (the one that is somehow one-many-one and one); and so on.

stages—an opposition of many unified by one, then a contradiction of one-many reconciled by a more comprehensive unity, and so on—it is tempting to see it ultimately as a unity. Thus, despite its delicate balance between conflict and justice, opposition and unity, pluralism and monism, Edward Hussey discerns in the Heraclitean logos a supreme monism. ‘Unity-in-opposites is a unified conception that overcomes the apparently unbridgeable oppositions of monism and pluralism,’ he observes, adding that ‘it is therefore an example of itself.’¹⁴⁹ By now we should expect Heraclitean conceptions to be instances of themselves, but we cannot accept any formulation of the Heraclitean logos as final.

A moment’s analysis reveals this one—unity-in-opposites—to be a contradiction, as we have often observed, thereby summoning a future synthesis, which a subsequent analysis reveals as contradictory, provoking a consequent synthesis...If this is one logos, one activity, even a perfect unity, we must nevertheless refract this one into many whenever we think or speak it.¹⁵⁰ Heraclitus accordingly refracts the divine one into many names, as we discussed earlier, although he is careful to add that it is unwilling as well as willing to be known by even the most exalted of them.¹⁵¹ Pulled farther toward the monism that is but one pole of his chiasmus, commentators have found testimony to the Heraclitean One in the aphorism that we have already scrutinized: ‘It is wise, listening not to me but to the logos, to agree that all things are one [*hen panta einai*].’¹⁵² This typical translation does make the thought appear monistic,¹⁵³ but only so long as we overlook the irony of Heraclitus inviting us to listen not to him, but to something else. If this is the canonical aphorism of Heraclitean monism, it remarkably begins by distinguishing between Heraclitus and the logos, even if, in the end, it collapses all such distinctions.¹⁵⁴

This particular irony recalls the first sentence of Heraclitus’s book—‘Although this logos holds forever, men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard’—which refers ambiguously either to an eternal logos of the world, or the account of it in words, or, as we argued earlier, both at once.¹⁵⁵ The same lesson can be found in the syntactic ambiguity

¹⁴⁹ Hussey 1999:105.

¹⁵⁰ DK 22B1 and B2.

¹⁵¹ DK 22B32.

¹⁵² DK 22B50. We have already witnessed Kahn speaking of Heraclitus’s ‘monism with vengeance’ (1979:137). Addressing himself to the ‘programmatic declaration’ of this specific aphorism (B50), Hussey thinks it ‘already suggests that Heraclitus harbors monistic ambitions’ (1999:96).

¹⁵³ Another common translation, by Richard McKirahan, is almost exactly the same: ‘Listening not to me but to the logos it is wise to agree that all things are one’ (Curd 1996:34).

¹⁵⁴ The observation belongs to Ronald Polansky.

¹⁵⁵ DK 22B1.

concealed by the typical translation of Heraclitus's putatively canonical aphorism on monism. The grammar of Greek's indirect statement—where the verb is infinitive, while subject and predicate are both accusatives—does not determine whether panta (all things) or hen (one) is its subject. The most obvious meaning, thanks to the customary word-order, is that all things are one; but a concealed meaning, sustainable even with this word-order, is that one is all things. Recalling first how the principle of chiasmus held both one and all in perfect balance, then remembering how the concealed harmonia is better than the obvious one, we cannot neglect this second meaning.¹⁵⁶ The price of such neglect can be very high in Greek literature, at least when the meaning is concealed beneath the deceptively obvious deliverance of an oracle.

Herodotus, for example, tells how the king of Lydia, Croesus, considered making war on the Persians, but first sent legates to consult the Delphic oracle of Apollo in order to see whether it was wise.¹⁵⁷ Accustomed to ambiguous responses, as Heraclitus himself observes,¹⁵⁸ Apollo used the grammar of an indirect statement—at least in Herodotus's account—to conceal the meaning Croesus feared beneath the revealed meaning his hopes sought. In a common translation that follows the revealed meaning, the oracle says that 'if he made war on the Persians, he would destroy a great empire [megalēn archēn min katalusein].'¹⁵⁹ This translation takes 'he' (min) as the subject of the indirect statement, and 'great empire' (megalēn archēn) as its object.¹⁶⁰ But the reverse is equally sustainable: 'a great empire would destroy him.' This is the concealed meaning that turned out to be true. When we neglect the concealed meaning of a Heraclitean aphorism which shares the same grammatical ambiguity that seduced Croesus, we risk offending the same god. For it was upon Apollo that Heraclitus modeled his own oracular style, but also his search for himself, as we shall see in the next and final section of this chapter.

To conclude this section with Heraclitus and his most oracular deliverances, we should aim to 'recognize what is wise, set apart from all,' some unity transcending all multiplicity, but we must also grasp that whenever we try to do so our thought and speech enter necessarily into a chiasmic

¹⁵⁶ Neither Kahn (1979:131–32) nor Conche (1986:25–27) raises even the possibility of this meaning.

¹⁵⁷ Herodotus (1.53). Although the historian wrote in the century after Heraclitus, neither he nor his century invented this sort of story—consulting an oracle, only to hear its obvious meaning to the exclusion of its concealed meaning, and thereby ruining oneself.

¹⁵⁸ DK 22B93.

¹⁵⁹ Herodotus 1.53.3; trans. Waterfield 1998:23.

¹⁶⁰ The English conveys the same ambiguity without the same grammatical trick, for in the end Croesus does destroy a great empire: his own.

and dialectical movement between one and many.¹⁶¹ Thus, even if we acknowledge that ‘the wise is one,’ we must also understand that it cannot be the object of any final or definitive thought and speech.¹⁶² To the many names divine names introduced by Heraclitus, we have reluctantly added ‘Time,’ ‘Syllapsis,’ and ‘Chiasmus,’ aware that they each become as paradoxical as any of the others whenever we focus our thinking upon them. Perhaps this supreme divinity can be confessed—if at all—only apophatically, by signaling the presence of its absence.

2.10 CHIASTIC WISDOM

Heraclitus speaks in the enigmatic style of Apollo’s oracle, as we have found on more than one occasion, but the comparison between mortal philosopher and immortal god does not end with style. Above the temple walls at Delphi were several gnomic inscriptions. The two most famous were gnōthi sauton (know thyself) and mēden agan (nothing in excess). ‘Both maxims might reasonably be paraphrased as sōphronei,’ writes Kahn, who translates this polysemous Greek term as the command to ‘be of sound mind.’¹⁶³ Heraclitus connected self-knowledge and sound thinking, too, when he insisted that ‘it belongs to all men to know themselves and think well (sōphronein, keep their thinking sound).’¹⁶⁴ The philosopher thus speaks the same logos as the god, giving the same counsel, neither declaring nor concealing it but giving a paradoxical sign.¹⁶⁵ How, after all, can sound thinking and self-knowledge properly belong to all men, when Heraclitus supposes both to be difficult achievements that elude the many whom he scorns as ‘absent while present’?¹⁶⁶

This contradiction resembles the one implicit in the opening of his book. There, as we saw, Heraclitus speaks of the logos that ‘men ever fail to comprehend,’ even though ‘the logos is shared.’¹⁶⁷ Noticing the similarity between these two contradictions—searching for an absent while present self, searching for an absent while present logos of the world—Kahn concludes that ‘self-knowledge and world-knowledge will in the end converge in this comprehension of the common logos.’¹⁶⁸ After our own investigations of the Heraclitean world and self have brought us to the

¹⁶¹ DK 22B108.

¹⁶² DK 22B41; see also B32.

¹⁶³ Kahn 1979:116, with citations of Plato (Charmides 164e7) and two modern scholars (North and Wilamowitz). Other common translations would be: be temperate, be moderate, be humble, and so on.

¹⁶⁴ DK 22B116 (Stobaeus, 3.5.6).

¹⁶⁵ DK 22B93.

¹⁶⁶ DK 22B34.

¹⁶⁷ Respectively: DK 22B1 and DK 22B2.

¹⁶⁸ Kahn 1979:116.

same conclusion, we find ourselves here at the end of this chapter back at the point of its beginning: the common (xunos) logos. Taking some satisfaction in the aphorism that ‘the beginning and end are shared (xunon) in the circumference of a circle,’¹⁶⁹ we should not overlook the contradiction of such a point, whether in the motion round a circle or in the progress of our inquiry. But neither should we forget that such points appear contradictory only when the movements that course through them, and the time that is their shared medium, have been denied.

Our beginning is self-neglect; our end, self-knowledge. We all begin living as though our thinking were a private possession; the best of us aim to grasp the shared logos. The contradictory point each of us inhabits now, in this single moment, is the ethical tension between who we are and who we could be. Heraclitus dramatizes this tension in several vivid aphorisms: ‘a man is found foolish by a god, as a child by a man’; or, ‘human nature holds onto no set purpose, but the divine has.’¹⁷⁰ Read in isolation, these aphorisms might appear as proof-texts against the thesis of this chapter: according to Heraclitus we are becoming god. But we have also witnessed him balancing mortals and immortals in perfect chiasmus. ‘War is father of all and king of all,’ moreover, ‘and some he has shown as gods, others men.’¹⁷¹ Reading all four of these aphorisms together, we acknowledge their tension, but refuse to view Heraclitean ethics incoherent as a result. For this is exactly the sort of tension, the sort of chiasmus, we have come to expect from the Obscure.

There is indeed a tension between who we are and who we could be, but in the Heraclitean account we are this tension. We are, recall, chiasmus. Grasping ourselves as such, we do not resolve any tension—for that would indeed be our death, just as the resolution of tension in bow or lyre would be theirs—but rather we enhance it. This enhancement is wisdom. Not reconciling contradiction but maintaining contradiction and reconciliation in chiasmus, the wise are analogous to a brightly burning fire, which does not become exclusively need or satiety, as we have seen, but instead increasingly both in equal measure. Knowing ourselves, thinking soundly, which is to say chiasmically, we recognize ourselves as this very chiasmus. The wise, by achieving this height of self-knowledge, grasp themselves as cosmic logos, divine chiasmus, becoming god. Heraclitean wisdom is thus an affirmation of time and world. The philosophical tradition that developed in opposition to his teaching, the tradition to which we now turn, sought to escape both to an eternity pure of this world and its conflicts.

¹⁶⁹ DK 22B103 (Porphyry, Homeric Questions, on Iliad 14.200); cf. B2 (xunou), but also B1 (axunetoi) and B34 (axunetoi).

¹⁷⁰ DK 22B79 (Origen, Against Celsus 6.12) and DK 22B78 (Origen, ibid.); translation of the second revised from Kahn (1979:172), following the interpretation he himself provides (1979:173).

¹⁷¹ DK 22B53 (see Kahn 1979:209).

WORKS CITED

- Burkert, W. 2003 (1977). Greek Religion. Tr. J. Raffan. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Caston, V. and D. W. Graham, eds. 2002. Presocratic Philosophy. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Conche, M. 1986. Héraclite. Paris: Presses Universitaire de France.
- Curd, P. and D. W. Graham. 2008. The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Curd, P. 1996. A Presocratics Reader. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Graham, D. W. 2008. 'Heraclitus: Flux, Order, and Knowledge,' pp. 169–88 in eds. Curd and Graham 2008..
- _____. 2006. Explaining the Cosmos: The Ionian Tradition of Scientific Philosophy. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- _____. 2002. 'Heraclitus and Parmenides,' in Caston and Graham 2002:27–44.
- Hadot, P. 1998 (1992). The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius. Tr. M. Chase. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Heidegger, M. 1999 (1936–38). Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning). Trs. P. Emad and K. Maly. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Hicks, R. D. 2000 (1925). Diogenes Laertius: Lives of the Eminent Philosophers. The Loeb Classical Library. 2 vols. (184–85). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hussey, E. 1999. "Heraclitus," pp. 88–112 in ed. A. A. Long 1999.
- Grube, G. M. A. 1983. Marcus Aurelius: The Meditations. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. 1955. The Greeks and their Gods. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Irwin, T. and G. Fine. 1995. Aristotle: Selections. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Kahn, C. 1979. The Art and Thought of Heraclitus. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Kirk, G. S. 1962. Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments. Repr. with corrections of the 1954 ed. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Liddell, H. G., et al. 1940. A Greek-English Lexicon. 9th edition. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
- Long, A. A. 1999. Early Greek Philosophy. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1996. Stoic Studies. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Marcovich, M. 1967. Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary. Merida, Venezuela: Los Andes University Press.
- McKirahan, R. D. 1994. Philosophy Before Socrates. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- _____. 1999. 'Zeno,' pp. 134–58 in ed. A. A. Long 1999.
- Miller, P. L. 2008. 'Immanent Spirituality,' on The Immanent Frame, October 31st, 2008: http://www.ssrc.org/blogs/immanent_frame/2008/10/31/immanent-spirituality/
- Nehamas, A. 2002. 'Parmenidean Being/Heraclitean Fire' in Caston and Graham 2002:45–64.
- Nietzsche, F. 2006 (1883–85). Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Tr. A. Del Caro. Eds. A. Del Caro and R. Pippin. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1996 (1873). Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks. Tr. M. Cowan. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc.
- _____. 1974 (1882–87). The Gay Science. Tr. W Kaufmann. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- _____. 1998 (1887) Genealogy of Morality. Tr. M. Clark and A. J. Swensen. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- _____. 1997 (1888) Twilight of the Idols. Tr. R. Polt. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.
- Peters, F. E. 1967. Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Waterfield, R. 1998. Herodotus: The Histories. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1953. Philosophical investigations. Tr. by G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.