

Plato's Heracliteanism Reconsidered

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Was Plato really an "anti-Heraclitean"?¹ What did Plato take to be the teaching of Heraclitus? At the root of these questions is the more fundamental one formulated by Schaerer: "Platon a-t-il lu, a-t-il compris Héraclite?"² Schaerer proposed to reestablish the argument for "l'existence authentique d'une théorie du flux héraclitéen telle qu'elle est présentée dans les fragments et telle que Platon et Aristote l'ont développée ensuite."³ It remains however to be determined 1) whether the "theory of flux" is truly representative of the doctrine of Heraclitus and how such a theory is to be construed; 2) whether Plato understood Heraclitus' doctrine as such or otherwise; 3) how the apparent contradictions in Plato's and in Aristotle's presentation of the doctrine of Heraclitus may be reconciled, internally and with the evidence of the fragments we possess; and finally, 4) what is the import of the doctrine of Heraclitus, in so far as we are able to reconstruct it, for Plato and the subsequent tradition of Platonism?⁴

1. A question posed by H.-G. Gadamer in: "Plato's *Parmenides* and its Influence," *Dionysius* 7 (1983): 3-16.

2. René Schaerer, "Héraclite jugé par Platon," in *Kephalaion: Studies in Greek Philosophy and its Continuation Offered to Prof. C.J. de Vogel*, ed. J. Mansfeld and L.M. de Rijk (Assen, 1975) 9. A similar question is posed by Georges J.-D. Moyal in his article, "Did Plato Misunderstand Heraclitus?" *Revue des Études Anciennes* 90 (1988): 89-98, discussed in the context of its specific scope of interest below, part II.

3. *Ibid.*

4. In Schaerer's view, "Prétendre ... que la doctrine du flux est étrangère à Héraclite ... ce n'est pas seulement faire fi de témoignages intérieurs aux fragments eux-mêmes et à la doxographie, mais encore traite l'autorité de Platon et d'Aristote avec une désinvolture choquante" (*ibid.* 11). Nevertheless, he concedes that to reduce the doctrine of Heraclitus to the theory of flux would be no less mistaken. At a more profound level, the doctrine of flux gives way to the alternation of opposites "qui s'annulent en se posant." The latter is nonetheless no mere reduction of opposites, "mais affirmation radicale de leur antagonisme," "une 'harmonie invisible' (fr. B 54) qui est lutte constante et parfaitement équilibrée de contraire à contraire," i.e., an irreducible oscillation which reveals itself as "la loi du monde" (*ibid.* 11, 12). In Schaerer's view, Plato attributes to Heraclitus a universal theory of flux that traces back to Homer and ancient myths, retaining one aspect in order to subject it to a justified criticism. Plato's condemnation of a theory of flux, directed as it is in the *Theaetetus* as much against the "mobilisme" and

The message which, according to Findlay, "popularizing thought" distilled from the doctrine of Heraclitus, was "that everything was so absolutely in flux that nothing like a thing or a property remained fixed for an instant, and that all attempts to characterize the state of things as being thus or thus were therefore necessarily false and senseless."⁵ Clearly, such a characterization cannot do justice to the complexity of Heraclitus, with his juxtaposition of permanence and change, the common and the private, *nomos* or *logos* and the paradoxical compresence and perennial exchange of opposite states. Yet the picture of Heraclitus we find in the dialogues appears at first glance to be more like that of popularizing thought. Could Plato have meant to "misrepresent" Heraclitus' views? There is nothing to indicate that Plato otherwise went along with popularizing views on issues of philosophical importance. On the contrary, he often used such popular misconceptions as a point of departure for the peculiar parlay of question and answer on topics of philosophical interest which was his specific patent.

Modern discussion of "Plato's Heracliteanism"⁶ has generally taken as its point of departure Aristotle's presentation, in book Alpha of the *Metaphysics*, of the role of Cratylus and the views of the Heracliteans in the formation of Plato's theory of ideas. There Aristotle characterizes Plato's development as hinging on the opposition between the Heraclitean view and Socrates' search for definitions of ethical concepts:

For, having in his youth first become familiar with Cratylus and with the Heraclitean doctrines (that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them), these views he held even in later years. Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters, and fixed thought for the first time on definitions; Plato accepted his teaching, but held that the problem applied not to sensible things, but to entities of another kind—for this reason, that the common definition could not be a definition of any sensible thing, as they were always changing. Things of this other sort, then, he called Ideas, and sensible things, he said, were all named after these, and in virtue of a relation to these; for the many existed by participation in the Ideas that have the same name as they. (987a 32–987b 10; trans. Ross)

consequent relativism of Protagoras as against the companions of Heraclitus, does not intend to reduce the *polemos* to *rheuma*, but refers to just this one aspect of Heraclitus (ibid. 13; cf. *Theaetetus* 179d–181b). W.K.C. Guthrie deserves special recognition for having greatly clarified the relationship of the Sophists to Heraclitus and Parmenides and the relevance of the Sophists' teachings to Plato's criticism of Heraclitean doctrine. See below, section II, and nn. 47–50. Moyal also places Plato's critique of the doctrine of flux in this context (cf. n. 2). On this point cf. further section II below.

5. J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (New York, 1984) 12.

6. T.H. Irwin, "Plato's Heracliteanism," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977): 1–13. Cf. below 4 ff.

Is it necessary to assent to Aristotle's account? This is obviously not an adequate description of Heraclitus, though it may be taken as a brief but faithful summary of the views of Cratylus and "the Heracliteans." If, however, Plato was at one time a disciple of Cratylus, he would certainly have known, and felt obliged to confront intellectually, the work of Cratylus' teacher, Heraclitus. In this case, it is hardly conceivable that Plato was unable to differentiate the views of the disciple from those of the master. The position of Cratylus as Aristotle depicts it is such as to make "knowledge and reasoned assertion impossible";⁷ that of Heraclitus, on the other hand, establishes the basis of knowledge and truth in a manner that presages Platonic theory and confirms Heraclitus as Platonism's single most important historical precedent.⁸ Indeed, a closer examination of the relevant texts suggests that Plato himself saw in Heraclitus not, as Kahn at one time suggested, "the theorist of universal flux (*panta rhei* 'all things flow') in contrast to Parmenides, the partisan of a fixed and stable reality,"⁹ but an original anticipation of his own attempt to subsume and reconcile that contrast in a philosophical approach to the problem of knowledge.

In 1951, G.S. Kirk drew attention to the apparent discrepancy between the presentation of Cratylus in Plato's dialogue, where Cratylus defends the thesis of the natural rightness of names, though at the same time professing to be a convinced Heraclitean (*Crat.* 436 e ff, 440 d-e), and Aristotle's portrayal of Cratylus as the most extreme of those who call themselves Heracliteans, who in the end no longer believed it necessary to speak at all, but only moved his finger, and who is supposed to have chided Heraclitus for saying we cannot step into the same river twice, asserting instead that we cannot step into the same river even once (*Met.* 1010 a 7-15). While Kirk was inclined to deny Aristotle's account any independent authority outside Plato's dialogue, D.J. Allan believed "that a different account of the personality and influence of Cratylus, and the source of Aristotle's information about him, must be given."¹⁰ In his answer to Kirk, Allan remarks that Cratylus must be seen as a contemporary of Plato and suggests that a development in Cratylus' views must have taken place between the dramatic date of the conversation portrayed in the *Cratylus* and the account of Cratylus'

7. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* 12.

8. I wish to suggest, as Gadamer does, that a basic underlying continuity conjoins the dialogues of Plato with later Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy, and that both ultimately find their roots in the philosophy of Heraclitus, understood as the only possible solution to the dilemma posed by Eleatic monism.

9. Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and thought of Heraclitus. An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary* (Cambridge, 1979) 4.

10. "The Problem of Cratylus," *American Journal of Philosophy* 75 (1954): 272.

views given by Aristotle. Guthrie found neither Kirk's nor Allan's point of view convincing, judging Kirk to have been "influenced by his belief that Plato regularly misrepresented Heraclitus" and Allan's "hypothesis of two stages" in Cratylus' development to be "precarious."¹¹ Nevertheless, both the suggestion of a certain, perhaps conscious misrepresentation of Heraclitus' views on Plato's part, and the belief that Aristotle's remarks on Plato and Cratylus have generally been misread are characteristic of the ongoing discussion of Plato's Heracliteanism and remain in this respect relevant to any attempt at achieving a consensus on the subject.

Thus, Irwin rejects "the most common interpretation"¹² of Aristotle's remarks, that is, he rejects arguments taken from Aristotle that Plato arrived at the separation of the Forms as objects of knowledge from his acceptance of an extreme variant of the Heraclitean doctrine of flux and the resultant unknowability of sensible things. Irwin is at pains to show that the type of flux Aristotle refers to in his account of the origin of the Theory of Forms is not that of extreme Heracliteanism (presented in the *Theatetus* 181b 8–182c 8), but only that of the relativity of sensible properties. To clarify his point, Irwin differentiates two kinds of change, "self-change," in which a thing loses or gains a particular quality with respect to time, and "aspect-change," which signifies the fact of a thing simultaneously possessing opposed qualities, depending on the point of reference from which it is considered (a mouse is large with respect to an ant, small with respect to an elephant).¹³ Both Plato and Aristotle include both types of change in their characterisations of the Heraclitean flux, but in Irwin's analysis Plato never himself endorses the extreme form of the Heraclitean doctrine and, even though he

11. W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. V. *The Later Plato and the Academy*. (Cambridge, 1978) 4. Whereas Aristotle *Metaph.* 987a 32 states that Plato was acquainted with Cratylus from his youth. Diogenes reports "(without mention of source) that he [Plato] 'attached himself' to him after the death of Socrates" (Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. IV [Cambridge, 1975] 13f); cf. note 4: "Olympiodorus (*V.P.* 4) and the *Prolog. In Plat. Phil.* following him, also put Plato's instruction by Cratylus after the death of Socrates." As Guthrie observed, however, both statements must go back to the same source. Diogenes himself exhibits "some confusion" since he says elsewhere "that *before* he heard Socrates, Plato was a Heraclitean in philosophy." More likely, Guthrie concludes, Aristotle is right (*ibid.* 14).

12. Among those who accept Aristotle as saying that "Plato believes the sensible world is constantly changing and therefore unknowable" Irwin cites: H.F. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, Vol. I (Baltimore, 1944) 211; W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951) 19ff. and J.A. Brentlinger, "Particulars in Plato's Middle Dialogues," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 54 (1972): 116–52, cf. 132–37; giving also the *loci* in Plato on which each author relies. Cf. Irwin, "Plato's Heracliteanism" 2 n. 3.

13. On the "Heraclitean doctrine of the simultaneity of opposites" cf. W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. I, *The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans* (Cambridge, 1962) 446.

might deny there can be knowledge of particulars, neither the assumption of *s*-change nor of *a*-change figures directly in Plato's arguments for the separation of the Forms.¹⁴ Rather, Plato's arguments for the Forms in the Middle dialogues appear to rely not on the assumption of continuous flux in sensibles, but on the failure of some observable properties (largeness, smallness, equality) to explain, i.e., account for their own relativity, and on the analogous deficiency of other observable properties in attempting to provide an account of what is in itself the just, the brave, the pious and so forth. Irwin's point appears to be that it is not from flux in sensibles themselves, but from the inherent conceptual deficiencies of "classes of sensible objects" in attempting to account for them¹⁵ which Plato argues in attempting to justify the Forms. In fact, Hegel's observation that unmediated indeterminate sensibility is a mere abstraction, i.e., in itself an impossibility, something a more advanced stage of thought *postulates* as underlying the factual content of sense experience, since even the most primitive encounter with a "this" in the "here" and "now" already involves a kind of classification and generalization, i.e., universally valid conceptual characterization, undermines Irwin's argumentation in this point. To differentiate "flux in sensibles" from "flux in sensible properties" requires thus a distinction between unmediated sensible particulars—what Hegel calls "das unbestimmte Unmittelbare"—and identifiable sensible characteristics in itself foreign to Plato's manner of thinking. Even the extreme form of Heracliteanism fails to make this sort of distinction. That is to say, the distinction between *sense properties* and *sensibles* (which without such recognizable properties would not exist for thought) remains unreflected at this stage.

What Plato does appear to require is a reliance on the *logos* as the preferred and in fact the only valid means of providing an explanation of things and their properties. The question of whether *s*-change in sensibles requires a Form for every predicate applying to sense particulars¹⁶ may be of more use in determining whether Plato used the idea of a Heraclitean flux in arguing for the separate existence of the Forms. Plato's process of inference appears namely to differ from that assumed by Irwin: though Plato held the observations of sense experience to be inadequate for a full explanation of things and their properties he was nevertheless conscious of the difficulties involved in any attempt to base the arguments for the ideas on that inadequacy (as seen in the question raised by the *Parmenides* of whether to assume a Form for every particular). Irwin's differentiation of *a*- and *s*-change is useful in

14. Irwin, "Plato's Heracliteanism" 5, 6.

15. *Ibid.* 10.

16. *Ibid.* 11.

that it highlights the impossibility of an absolute definition of any thing with respect to itself alone and thus the difficulty, even impossibility of an absolute knowledge of separately existing Forms. By itself, however, that distinction fails to clarify the genuine significance of Plato's Heracliteanism, i.e., of what Plato took to be the genuine significance of Heraclitus' doctrine and to what effect he assimilated certain aspects of that doctrine.

As opposed to Irwin, Kahn, while admitting that "the impact of Heraclitus upon Plato was profound and pervasive" and that "[p]robably no Presocratic except Parmenides is of comparable importance for him," believes that "Plato's typical use of Heraclitus" was "not logical but cosmological and psychological."¹⁷ Against Irwin, Kahn denies that the logical relativism resulting from "the co-presence of opposites in a single subject *without* respect to time ... was ever regarded by Plato as a case of change or flux."¹⁸ Aristotle's account of Plato's relationship to Cratylus, however, he also finds suspect and proposes to "check" it against the evidence from the dialogues themselves. With this reservation, and having documented the most relevant loci in his previous study, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Kahn proceeds to investigate the question of "how Plato made a crucial use of Heraclitean ideas in the formulation of his own philosophy."¹⁹

Kahn bases his interpretation on Plato's apparent juxtaposition of Heraclitean and Parmenidean themes, finding "Heraclitean insights ... conspicuous in Plato's articulation of the notion of Becoming" and "the ontological vision of Parmenides" "decisive for Plato's account of Being."²⁰ At first, Kahn conceives Plato as *contrasting* Heraclitus, "the theorist of universal flux," with Parmenides, "the partisan of a fixed and stable reality."²¹ Subsequently, however, he suggests that Plato "unified" Parmenides' concept of eternal being with Heraclitus' concept of a realm of becoming structured by opposites.²² The middle dialogues especially, with their clear articulation of the theory of Forms, lend themselves in Kahn's eyes to this interpretation, and Kahn chooses three: *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and *Cratylus*, in which Heraclitean elements play a role, to demonstrate his point. Granting that "echoes of Heraclitean thought and language" can be discovered throughout the dialogues, Kahn nevertheless finds "no reference ... and no clear echo"

17. Charles Kahn, "Plato and Heraclitus," in: *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, vol. I (1985) 241-58; 246.

18. *Ibid.* 244, n. 4.

19. *Ibid.* 242.

20. *Ibid.* 244.

21. *Ibid.*; cf. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* 4.

22. "Plato and Heraclitus" 250.

of Heraclitus, his thought or his style in the early or "pre-middle" dialogues.²³ The influence of Heraclitus is, on the other hand, obvious, when in the *Symposium* (207d) Diotima describes our bodies and even our souls as being in a constant process of change and renewal throughout our lives, while we ourselves nevertheless somehow remain the same.²⁴

[E]ven in the life of the same individual there is succession and not absolute unity: a man is called the same, and yet in the short interval which elapses between youth and age, and in which every animal is said to have life and identity, he is undergoing a perpetual process of loss and reparation—hair, flesh, bones, blood, and the whole body are always changing. Which is true not only of the body, but also of the soul, whose habits, tempers, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, never remain the same in any one of us. (207d–207e)

This affirmation of the persistence of human identity despite changes continually affecting a person's bodily aspect as well as his thoughts and habits recalls the Heraclitean notion of permanence and unity persisting throughout the continual process of coming-to-be and passing away, as evidenced most strikingly in the river-fragments. Mortal nature's striving for immortality appears in the *Symposium* as an eminent expression of this paradoxical realization of permanence in change. Mortal nature ever strives to immortalize itself by leaving behind some new image of itself in place of the old, either by the begetting of children, by the achievement of fame and an illustrious reputation through the performance of valorous deeds, or by the begetting of beautiful works of art, and good laws through the cultivation of virtue. But this immortality is nothing more than the continuous replacement of what is old with something new and like the original, the only manner by which what is in itself mortal can partake of immortality, not keeping "exactly the same forever, like the divine" (208 a 10–b 1). In contrast, the vision of the idea of the Beautiful to which the lover of Beauty attains liberates him from the perpetual tension of opposites and from the cycle of coming-to-be and passing away, allowing him to become one with Being always unchanging and identical with itself. Thus, as Kahn remarks,

The concept of the eternal Being of the Form "which is forever and neither comes to be nor perishes" is articulated against a conception of the mortal realm of becoming which is structured by the opposites.²⁵

23. Ibid. 241, 245.

24. Cf. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* I, 467f.

25. "Plato and Heraclitus" 250.

The cosmological doctrine of the exchange of opposites comprises for Kahn the core of Heraclitean influence in Plato. In his view it forms the basis for the first proof of immortality in the *Phaedo*, a point previously recognized by Burnet, who treated the transmigration of souls "as a special case of the wider cycle of elemental exchange between opposites."²⁶ Here again, Kahn highlights the contrast with Parmenidean elements in Plato's definition of the realm of Forms.²⁷ Although "Plato's doctrine is ... no mere mixture of Heraclitus with Parmenides," Kahn sees it as an expression of the originality of Plato's theory that he is "able to derive the Heraclitean structure of the world of changing particulars from his own neo-Eleatic principles of invariant form."²⁸ Kahn concludes that it is Parmenides from whom Plato derives "his ontological vocabulary and his vision of changeless Being," whereas "reflection upon Heraclitus' view of cosmic order" enables Plato to see reality as structured by an "essentially *conceptual* framework of the opposites."²⁹ The "specifically Heraclitean insight" is nevertheless "not that sensible things are unknowable but that they are *known*, named, and structured by reference to the general pattern of conceptual opposition," a pattern articulated by Plato in his doctrine of Forms.³⁰

Now, it is difficult to see how Kahn's notion of "conceptual opposition" can exclude the type of opposition considered by Irwin under the heading of "aspect-change" or compresence of opposites in a single subject without respect to time. Kahn himself refers to loci in the *Symposium* (211a) and *Republic* (479a–b), where the relativity of opposites is used to illustrate the structuring of the realm of becoming in relationship to the Forms. He also notes that Plato places "relativistic" remarks based on this type of opposition in the mouth of Protagoras at *Prot.* 334 a–c.³¹ Any use Plato made of Heraclitus must by this estimate be *both* logical *and* cosmological or psychological. That is, if we assume Plato's reflection on Heraclitus to be self-consistent, he could have made no use of Heraclitus *not* determined by a logical or conceptual view of the conflict of opposites. The nonetheless valid distinction made by Kahn lies in the actual conclusion drawn by Plato from the compresence of relative opposites in a single subject: Plato did not regard this as evidence that sensible things are in flux and therefore unknowable, but as an integral aspect of the real conceptual basis for knowledge of the phenomenal world.

26. *Ibid.* 251–52 and n. 11. Cf. Burnet, *Plato's Phaedo*, on 70 E 1.

27. "Plato and Heraclitus" 251–54.

28. *Ibid.* 253

29. *Ibid.* 253f.

30. *Ibid.* 254. My italics.

31. *Ibid.* 251, n. 10.

Another who, prior to Kahn, emphasized the central importance of Heraclitus for Plato was W.K.C. Guthrie. In fact, to Guthrie's mind, the effect of Heraclitus' thought, ignored by thinkers of the "scientific tradition" like Anaxagoras and Diogenes of Appollonia, only begins to be seen in Plato, who was "perhaps the first to appreciate" Heraclitus' "full boldness."³² For Guthrie, however, it is not the notion of flux or the exchange of opposites, but in the first place the *Logos* which must be taken as characteristic for Heraclitus.³³ If we accept this, and if, as Guthrie maintains, Plato demonstrates a genuine grasp of Heraclitus, then it is here—and not, as Kahn argues, primarily in the cosmological and psychological implications of the exchange of opposites—that Heraclitus' legacy to Plato is to be sought. This, of course, does not imply that Plato's understanding of Heraclitus was logical in the modern sense. In the *Logos* of Heraclitus "Spiritual and material forces are still united as aspects of one and the same entity."³⁴ The Heraclitean *Logos*, accordingly, possesses a cosmological and a psychological, *as well as* an epistemological and an ontological significance.

Whereas Aristotle, in his description of Plato's philosophical development, emphasizes the opposition between the influence of Cratylus' flux-doctrine and Socrates' search for definitions, Guthrie, by contrasting the philosophical method of Heraclitus with that of the Pythagoreans and the Milesians, discovers important parallels between Heraclitus and the method of Socrates as it is known to us above all from the early dialogues of Plato. The essence of Heraclitus' method Guthrie finds in fr.101: "I searched myself," a dictum which might just as readily be taken to describe the activity of Socrates. In Plato's account, Socrates' untiring efforts to arouse his fellow Athenians to the care of their souls find their ultimate expression in the self-imposed quest to understand the meaning of the message directed to him by the oracle at Delphi: there is no one wiser than Socrates.³⁵ Both Socrates' and Heraclitus' self-search echo the proverbial call to "know thyself," attributed already in ancient times to Chilon of Sparta, one of the legendary Seven Sages mentioned among others by Plato himself. The sayings of the Seven Wise Men, inscribed at the temple of Apollo at Delphi, comprised an integral part of the traditional wisdom of the Greek mind.³⁶ In Guthrie's interpretation, three basic meanings concur in Heraclitus' saying:

32. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. I. 419, 436.

33. Cf. *ibid.* 419: "Heraclitus believed first and foremost in a Logos."

34. *Ibid.* 469.

35. *Ibid.* 418.

36. Cf. *Prot.* 343a-c; *D.L.* I, 40 (Dichaearchus, IV. cent. B.C.E.). Cf. B. Snell, *Leben und Meinungen der Sieben Weisen* (Munich, 41971); D. Fehling, *Die Sieben Weisen und die frühgriechische Chronologie* (Bern, 1985).

... first, "I turned my thoughts within and sought to discover my real self"; secondly, "I asked questions of myself"; thirdly, "I treated the answers like Delphic responses hinting, in a riddling way, at the single truth behind them, and tried to discover the real meaning of my selfhood; for I knew that if I understood myself I would have grasped the *logos* which is the real constitution of everything else as well."³⁷

Both Heraclitus and Socrates aim thus ultimately to pass beyond the a merely operative view of things in order to arrive at a *logos*, i.e., an account or an explanation, "a single truth that could be pursued by thought and grasped by insight."³⁸ In this sense, the Socrates of the early dialogues attempts to give an account, *logon didonai*, of certain hitherto unexamined ethical concepts employed by his interlocutors, concepts which he himself claims not to have sufficient knowledge of, but which he believes he may be able to define by examination of the hidden and often conflicting assumptions on which our uncritical and often mistaken use of such concepts and as a result our in one or another sense ethically misguided behaviour depends. Analogously, Heraclitus' self-search leads him to examine things according to their nature and to critique both men's failure to grasp what is common and their mistaken insistence on the possibility of having a private view of things. Clearly then, there exists an even larger, more comprehensive affinity between Heraclitus and Plato, one that concerns their common attempt to grasp problems basic to the nature of human intelligence and its objects, and which in this respect may be taken as an expression of their common intellectual heritage and shared historical descent.

I. THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE MANY: HERACLITEAN ELITISM AND THE SELF-APPOINTED MISSION OF SOCRATES

Heraclitus repeatedly sets himself apart from "men" and the many. Men "are like the untried" with regard to the task Heraclitus has set before himself and they remain as unaware of what they do when they are awake as they are of that which they do in sleep (fr. 1). The many hear like the deaf and dumb, they are absent though present (fr. 34). Although participating in a common *logos*, they live as if they possessed their own private insight (fr. 2). On the other hand, "one man is ten thousand, if he is best" (fr. 49), that is, if he possesses true insight into the *logos*. With respect to this one man it can be said that "It is law also to obey the counsel of one" (fr. 33). The Ephesians, however, deserve to be hanged, every one of them to the last man, and the city left to the boys, "since they drove out their best man, Hermodorus,

37. *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. I, 419.

38. *Ibid.*; cf. Guthrie's examination of the uses of the word *logos* current around the time of Heraclitus, *ibid.* 420–24.

saying 'Let no one be the best among us; if he is, let him be so elsewhere and among others'. (fr. 121).

The same aristocratic conviction of the superiority of the best to the many characterizes Plato's depictions of his master in the early dialogues, though now purged of all trace of bitterness and clothed in the urbane civility of the "customary irony of Socrates."³⁹ What Guthrie calls Heraclitus' "religious sense of the worthlessness of human knowledge in comparison with the divine," as represented in fragments 28 ("The knowledge of the most famous of men is but opinion"), 78 ("Human nature has no insight, but divine nature has it"), 79 ("Man is infantile in the eyes of a god, as a child in the eyes of a man"), 83 ("Compared with God, the wisest of men will appear an ape, in wisdom, beauty and all else"), 102 ("To God all things are fair and good and just, but men have assumed some to be unjust and some just")—recalls to mind Socrates' interpretation of the Delphic oracle as presented by Plato in the *Apology*:

... but the fact is, gentlemen, it is likely that the god is really wise and by his oracle means this: "Human wisdom is of little or no value." And it appears that he does not really say this of Socrates, but merely uses my name, and makes me an example, as if he were to say: "This one of you, O human beings, is wisest, who, like Socrates, recognizes that he is in truth of no account in respect to wisdom." (23a–b)⁴⁰

In his imagined conversation with his accusers, Socrates has these suggest that the prejudice which has arisen against him stems from his doing something other than most people (ἄλλοῖον ἢ οἱ πολλοί ... *Apol.* 20 c). More specifically, the prejudice against him has been aroused by his investigation of a certain type of wisdom, one which seems to him the only kind possible for humans to achieve and the nature of which he felt called to investigate on account of the riddle contained in the Pythia's saying: there is no one wiser than Socrates. By questioning the meaning of the oracle, that is, by regarding its statement as a contradiction in need of resolution, Socrates again sets himself apart from the Many. For Socrates' feigned consciousness of his own lack of wisdom turns out in fact to be an implicit criticism of all that men hold to be wise—and an affirmation of his genuine superiority in the only kind of wisdom human beings can possess.

Thus, the Socrates of the *Apology*, with his self-appointed mission to refute and so to overcome the incoherency of the unexamined life, stands apart.

39. I refer to the properly so-called "Socratic" dialogues and exempt such works as is the *Gorgias* in which a certain bitterness concerning the fate of Plato's master is distinctly palatable.

40. Kahn, too (*The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* 172), sees in Heraclitus, fr. 78, an anticipation of Socrates' estimate of the relative worthlessness of human wisdom with respect to the divine.

His interpretation of “forceful speaking” (δαινὸς λέγειν) as speaking the truth is opposed to the rhetor’s and the sophist’s ideal of speaking persuasively. His ideal of wisdom as knowledge of one’s own ignorance, of human wisdom as little or nothing in comparison with the divine, opposes him to the complacent self-assurance of those who like the Athenian statesmen, poets and artisans consider human wisdom to be something of value. His disregard for worldly goods—wealth, honour, reputation—sets him apart from the mass of his fellow Athenians, who pursue these things as though they were the ultimate aim of human existence. What made itself felt in Heraclitus as an elitist scorn for the common run of men, has in Plato come to define the character of the philosopher, who by nature and because of the nature of his object, the truth, finds himself logically and necessarily opposed to the unthinking and their self-contradictory intentions and goals.

Heraclitus’ dedication to the *logos*, however, recalls not only the Socrates of the early, explicitly Socratic dialogues, in his tireless probing for an unambiguous definition of the concepts central to the ethical life. This and other aspects of Heraclitus’ understanding of his mission as contained in fragment 1: his critique of “men,” ἄνθρωποι, the “untried,” who like sleepwalkers are incapable of grasping the *logos* according to which everything occurs; and his portrayal of his own endeavour *to distinguish in words and actions each thing according to its nature* and to determine how it behaves, ὅκως ἔχει—appear also to anticipate the progression from the early dialogues of Plato to those of the middle period. The soporific state of humankind, their inability to grasp the *logos* (*nomos*, *gnome*),⁴¹ the common principle governing the universe or the account to be given of it, although all things unfold according to its inherent determination—correspond in Plato to the condition of the Athenians, who careless of their souls and ignorant of the true nature of virtue, pursue what is of less worth instead of the things that are most important (*Apol.* 29d–e; 30 a–b). It is this waking sleep, the lethargy of the great and sluggish horse which Socrates, the gadfly of the *Apology*, sees as his task to disturb (30e–31a). Socrates warns the Athenians, who might “as people awakened from a sleep” slap at him and kill him, not to try to rid themselves of him in this manner, for in doing so, they would condemn themselves to pass the rest of their lives in slumber—unless God in his care for them should send someone else to sting them (31a–b). Similarly, in the description of the dialectician at *Rep.* 534 b–d, the one who is unable to define by his discourse and abstract from all other things the aspect or idea of the

41. The precise significance of the *logos* of fr. 1 being as it is one of the most controversial points of interpretation in Heraclitus, it may perhaps seem audacious to equate the terms mentioned here. Nevertheless, to disregard their interrelatedness in the preserved fragments would be to belie the genuine systematic import of what we are able to perceive of Heraclitus’ thought.

good (διορίσασθαι τῷ λογῶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἀφελῶν τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέαν), who cannot examine things according to their essence (κατ' οὐσίαν προθυμούμενος ἐλέγχειν), and render an account of that essence to himself and others (λογὸν αὐτῷ τε καὶ ἄλλῳ διδόναι), is said not to know the good itself or any particular good, but rather, insofar as he apprehends a mere image of the same and his contact with it is by opinion and not by knowledge, to be "dreaming and dozing through his present life," a sleep from which he will not awaken before he arrives at the house of Hades and falls asleep forever.

Something like the endeavour of Heraclitus must lie at the root of the Platonic theory of forms. In attempting to account for or define concepts like virtue, beauty, piety, courage, prudence, Plato's Socrates intentionally or unintentionally adopts the mission of Heraclitus and makes it the cause of the philosopher. From the aporetic of the Socratic dialogues, however, whose ultimate aim is the discovery of what it means to live well, emerges the great "trias" of ideas, the fair, the good and the just. The τί ἐστὶ of the definition dialogues gives way, thus, in Plato's middle period to the definition of the dialectician "who is able to exact an account of the essence of each thing" (διαλεκτικὸν ... τὸν λόγον ἐκάστου λαμβάνοντα τῆς οὐσίας, *Rep.* 534 b-c; cf. 533b) and render an account to himself and to others, defining and distinguishing in his discourse the idea of the good by abstracting it from all other things, and striving to examine everything according to its essential reality and not according to opinion (μὴ κατὰ δόξαν ἀλλὰ κατ' οὐσίαν προθυμούμενος ἐλέγχειν)—a definition which exactly corresponds to the self-understanding of Heraclitus in fr 1: ἐγὼ διηγέομαι κατὰ φύσιν διαίρων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει.

Guthrie, though drawing attention to some of the main points in which the doctrine of Heraclitus can be said to anticipate that of Plato, fails to provide a comprehensive picture of their relationship as a whole. Nor is the presentation of Heraclitus and Plato in *A History of Greek Philosophy* entirely consistent. In keeping with the main intention of *A History*, references to the Heraclitean extraction of specific aspects of Platonic doctrine are scattered throughout the presentation of each, so that the picture of the whole remains fragmentary. As a result, Guthrie's otherwise pioneering interpretation of the genuine philosophical relevance of Heraclitus' thought for Plato and consequently for the tradition of Platonism fails to achieve its full effect. In fact, the fragmentary manner in which the relationship of Heraclitus and Plato is dealt with in Guthrie's *History* may perhaps have lent itself to a moderate disregard for certain self-contradictions. Thus, while on the one hand contending that Plato in the *Sophist* (242d) showed "that he appreciated the full paradoxical rigour of Heraclitus' teaching, which most others

missed,⁴² in other respects Guthrie adopts a more conventional view both of Heraclitus and Heraclitus' influence on Plato. For example, in characterizing Plato's adaptation of Cratylus as an effort to reconcile the unknowability of the sensible world of flux with the definition-seeking activity of Socrates Guthrie unceremoniously embraces the position of Aristotle as presented in book Alpha. The "chronological sequence," Guthrie finds, is "unimportant" for the point Aristotle is making, "namely that Plato's two-world metaphysics was the product of an abiding faith, inherited from Socrates, that permanent and stable realities exist combined with a Heraclitean conviction that the whole sensible world was an endless flux of change and instability."⁴³ Yet, as we have seen in the discussion initiated by Kirk and Allen and subsequently pursued by Shaerer, Irwin, Kahn, Findlay and others, this reduction of Heraclitus' and of Plato's view of the world of sense experience represents a crude oversimplification of both their positions.

II. THE EXCHANGE OF OPPOSITES AND THE INTELLIGIBILITY OF BEING: CONCEIVING THE POSSIBILITY OF PERMANENCE IN CHANGE

Although it seems obvious that Parmenides exercised a decisive influence on the formation of Plato's thought, Aristotle, as Findlay remarked, "did not stress the association of Plato with this Eleaticism."⁴⁴ Indeed, certain aspects of Parmenides' monism, in particular the denial of differentiation and the resulting unbridgeable chasm between Absolute Being and all that in a lesser, derivative or partial sense may be said to be, preclude its acceptance by the Plato of the dialogues. In Findlay's estimate, both the Heracliteans and the Eleatics suffer from *aphasia*, i.e., from an inability to predicate anything of anything: the Heracliteans because all is in flux, the Eleatics since what there is is only itself.⁴⁵ Plato's main concern, however, was that of rationally penetrating reality, or everything that is, on the assumption that reality is fundamentally intelligible. Thus, on the one hand, as Findlay reiterates, "[c]hangeless being must be retained and its unity asserted"; on the other hand, that same being "must be that of the endlessly distinct 'senses,' the Ideal Contents" which pertain to the variety of the things of our experience.⁴⁶ This must enable us to recognize and accommodate all the "various sorts of secondary, derivative and as-it-were-being or near nothing" into which the Ideal contents are projected. Findlay, accordingly, sees the "whole of

42. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, IV, 34; cf. I, 436.

43. *Ibid.* IV, 14.

44. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* 13.

45. *Ibid.* 14.

46. *Ibid.*

Platonism" as a "careful modification of Eleaticism which prevents it from being as absurd as the flux-physics and flux-logic of Cratylus."⁴⁷

Clearly, the point of view expressed in these statements, however aptly it may characterize the central problematic of Platonic thought, cannot approximate an adequate understanding of Heraclitus or of Plato's understanding of Heraclitus. Nevertheless, Findlay's precise analysis of the epistemological task with which Plato saw himself confronted brings us a step closer to a proper estimate of the true nature of Plato's relationship to Heraclitus. Guthrie, who views Socrates as Plato's "chief inspiration in the dialogues for the greater part of his life," and Parmenides as "the greatest single influence on Plato after Socrates,"⁴⁸ points out that it is in contraposition to Parmenides that Plato formulates his position on knowledge and reality. While Parmenides argues that motion and change are impossible, for Plato the world of sense retains a certain legitimate status between the absolutely non-existent and the world of true intelligible being. This insight: that the only true being is non-sensible intelligible being (τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστὶν τε καὶ εἶναι),⁴⁹ Plato certainly inherited from Parmenides. Nevertheless, despite the apparent contradiction it involves, Plato attributed to the realm of motion and change a degree of reality not admitted by Parmenides, although that reality must by default remain secondary or derivative and retain its claim to be only by virtue of its "participation in" the realm of eternal and unchanging being, or vice versa, by virtue of the "presence" and "participation" of eternal and unchanging ideas in the world of sense.

It is precisely in the attempt to reconcile the Eleatic conception of true being with the world of sense, motion and change that the solution to the problem of Plato's Heracliteanism lies. Guthrie points in this direction in seeking to explain the inconsistencies surrounding Plato's characterisation of Cratylus.⁵⁰ The scepticism of the Sophists rests namely, as Guthrie perceives it and as Socrates himself argued in the *Theatetus*,⁵¹ "on a plausible interpretation of Heraclitus's flux-doctrine." Indeed, "H[eraclitus] himself would not have drawn the same epistemological conclusions"; for obviously the stereotyped portrayal of Heraclitus' doctrine, as expressed in the proverbial dictum *panta rhei*, does not represent the whole of his teaching, a full account of which, according to Guthrie, must include the doctrine of "the common *logos* and the folly of acting 'as if each had his own private wisdom'" (cf. fr. 1, 2), the constation the unreliability of the senses (fr. 107)

47. Ibid.

48. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* IV, 33.

49. Diels-Kranz, Parmenides B 3.

50. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* V, 3 and n. 5; cf. III, 193ff.

51. Cf. *Theatetus* 160d-e; 157a-c; 158 e. Cf. also Schaerer and Moyal as cited in n. 2.

and “the need for νόος; the one divine νόμος which feeds the human νόμοι” (fr. 114). The Sophists, however, “fascinated by the compulsion of Eleatic logic” (as can be seen in Gorgias’ use of “purely Eleatic arguments” to maintain the thesis that nothing exists) appear to have conjoined the eristic extrapolation of that logic to a stereotype doctrine of flux. Their “thesis of the impossibility of falsehood,” accordingly, rested “*both* on the Heraclitean assertion of the identity of opposites ... *and* on the Parmenidean dictum that ‘what is not’ cannot be uttered.” In this respect and for the purposes of the Sophists, “Heraclitean and Eleatic doctrine were at one in ‘abolishing the criterion’ for any comparative assessment of judgements about the sensible world and human affairs.”⁵²

Based on this unanimity of purpose, Plato would have found in “Cratylus the Heraclitean a suitable character through which to criticize the prevailing beliefs of the Sophists about the relationship between words and reality.”⁵³ By the same estimate, however, one must necessarily conclude that Plato’s characteristic misrepresentation of Heraclitus was directed primarily not at Heraclitus, but at those who failed to recognize the “full paradoxical rigour” of Heraclitus’ teaching, i.e., the Sophists,⁵⁴ and furthermore, that Plato’s own understanding of Heraclitus’ doctrine is to be sought elsewhere than in statements bearing an explicit reference to Heraclitus.

This point of view is shared by G. Moyal, though Moyal qualifies his thesis by the constataion that Heraclitus lacks the clear linguistic distinction between perception and understanding characteristic of Plato’s position.⁵⁵ In his analysis of the *Theaetetus*, Moyal finds that Heraclitus and Plato agree on the very things which Plato disputes in Protagoras’ relativism. Consequently, the doctrine attacked under the name of Heraclitus in the *Theaetetus* should more likely be ascribed to “Heracliteans,” who offered a only “a distorted version of their master’s thought.” According to Moyal, certain elements of Heraclitean doctrine as represented by the fragments resemble strongly what Socrates maintains against Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*, and in this respect Heraclitus must either be seen to have been Plato’s silent ally, or to have been “disavowed” by Plato and “undeservedly ranked with the ad-

52. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* V, 3; cf. III, 166, 182 n.2

53. *Ibid.* V, 4.

54. see above n. 2, 4.

55. “Did Plato Misunderstand Heraclitus?” 98. Moyal argues that there is no “sufficiently articulate psychology” in what Heraclitus says about soul “to warrant finding, in it, anything remotely resembling a *faculty* of thought or understanding” (90). This lack of an articulated vocabulary of the faculties of perception and understanding, does not, however, as I shall argue below, preclude the existence of a clear differentiation of those powers *in re*.

versary."⁵⁶ The elements of Heraclitus' doctrine singled out by Moyal include the commonality and the pervasive universality of the *Logos*, as well as the commonality of this and human thought which apprehends the *Logos*. Moyal also sees an anticipation or at least a premonition of the Platonic antagonism between reason and the appetites in Heraclitus' critique of men's failure to apprehend the *Logos* which permeates all of nature and according to which all things occur—a failure associated with the state of "relaxed tension in the soul" expressed in the images of sleep and wetness and deriving ultimately from men's natural inclination to seek their own pleasure.⁵⁷ Closely related to this is the opposition of commonality and particularity which characterizes men's ability to judge and to attain genuine wisdom and knowledge.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, for Moyal, Plato and Heraclitus appear to differ in just that point which for our discussion is to prove most essential to the determination of their supposed intellectual affinity: namely, with respect to the "epistemological accessibility of the *Logos*" in the sensible world, i.e., in the realm characterized by the Flux. It is this point on which the argument for Plato's Heracliteanism stands or falls.

Thus, although the contraposition of the doctrine of sensible flux and a monistic view of absolute unchanging being has often been taken to describe the opposition between Heraclitus and Parmenides—an opposition which Plato is supposed to have incorporated into his own view of the polarity of the realms of being and becoming, sense perception and true knowledge—Plato's own utilisation of Heraclitus in fact belies the over-simplification this equation implies. In the famous passage in the *Phaedo* (95e ff.), for example, where Socrates says that to answer adequately Cebes' question he must go into the whole question of how things come into being and perish, the exchange of opposites is seen not as a succession of otherwise unrelated states but as a continuous, uninterrupted and unintermittible tension or polarity, the push and pull of simultaneous and mutually conditioned elements underlying the unity of the soul itself.⁵⁹ This "tension between opposites" is seen by Kahn as permeating "the whole atmosphere of the *Phaedo*," especially as describing the human condition.⁶⁰ True, the first argument for

56. Ibid. 89f., cf. 98: "it is at least doubtful whether Heraclitus himself is the target of Plato's attack" in the *Theaetetus* on the representatives of the doctrine of flux.

57. Ibid. 90–93.

58. Ibid. 94.

59. Kahn finds the "doctrine of opposing powers," a doctrine "well known in early Greek thought" and going back probably "to the very earliest period of Ionian cosmology" exemplified in its for Heraclitus specific form in the image of the bow and the lyre, "a back-turning attenuation" as cited in the speech of Eryximachus in the *Symposium* (Kahn, "Plato and Heraclitus" 247, cf. 246–48).

60. Ibid. 252, cf. 251ff.

immortality seems to require the assumption of a succession of opposite states, as exemplified in the “fixed interchange of birth and death,” a special case of the “general cycle of recurrence” as depicted by Heraclitus in fr. 88: “living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old; these are transposed as those and those transposed again are these.”⁶¹ The simultaneous tension or presence of opposites required by Plato for a conceptualisation of the contents of sense experience proves, however, in itself to be no more and no less than a faithful application of the genuine Heraclitean insight, an insight which precludes in advance any sceptical or sophistical conclusions regarding the absolute knowability or unknowability of sensible particulars.

The cursory identification of Heraclitus with a doctrine of universal flux in the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* would thus appear to contradict the more differentiated understanding of Heraclitus’ thought which Plato elsewhere has been demonstrated to possess. *Cratylus* 402a quotes Heraclitus by name for his famous comparison of the world to a river into which you cannot step twice. At *Theaetetus* 152e Heraclitus is mentioned together with Protagoras and Empedocles as a believer in the genesis of all things from motions and mingling, in contrast to Parmenides, the only one who denied motion; and later in the same dialogue the Heracliteans are satirized as people impossible to deal with (179e ff.). Faithful to their doctrine they themselves are in perpetual motion. They cannot argue, but shoot out little riddling phrases like arrows, and there are no teachers or pupils among them, for each thinks he is inspired and the others know nothing.

For Kahn, the question as to why Plato in the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus* gives us this “superficial, oversimplified picture of Heraclitus as a doctrinaire of universal flux” is more literary and historical than philosophical. As Kahn suggests, Plato’s tendency “to identify stability and uniformity with what is rational and admirable, variability with what is inferior and unintelligible,” was naturally opposed to the anti-rational and confusionist tendencies of certain groups among his contemporaries who identified their own positions with what they saw as the Heraclitean doctrine of flux. To caricature these contemporaries as so-called Heracliteans and summarily rebuff them along with their pretended teacher would have been fully in keeping with Plato’s literary style and especially with his own masterful use of irony. Kahn convincingly demonstrates this circumstance by citing passages from the *Cratylus* and the *Phaedo* in which “the confusion of an undisciplined and disordered mind ... is reflected in a doctrine of universal flux” elsewhere

61. Ibid. 252. Cf. above p. 13ff. Kahn views “both the general cosmic law of birth and death and the particular application of this law to a life for human beings after death” as “authentically Heraclitean” and cites in this point fr. 62: “Mortals are immortal, immortals mortal, living the others’ death, dead in the others’ life” (ibid. 253).

implicitly or explicitly and in any case just as speciously attributed to Heraclitus.⁶² In sum, Kahn sees Plato's caricature of Heraclitus as a "comic exaggeration and distortion" which it is necessary to distinguish "more carefully than Aristotle" from Plato's "deeper understanding of Heraclitus' vision of cosmic order and cyclical change."⁶³

III. LOGOS AND PSYCHE: PLATONISM AS HERACLITEANISM

The sum of these observations entails a radical reorientation of the discussion of Plato's real or supposed Heracliteanism, i.e., of the inherent and the explicit role played by Heraclitus in the formation of Plato's philosophy. Interestingly enough, this shift in emphasis proves analogous to the reorientation sought by Gadamer in the interpretation of Plotinus' relationship to Plato. The analogy, furthermore, is not merely superficial or accidental, and not of mere literary or historical significance, but based on the "thing itself," on a legacy of truth shared by each member of the proportion, one which each develops in his own way, each time bringing to light some new aspect of the tradition of philosophical reflection later to become known as Platonism. For his part, Gadamer sees in Plotinus' doctrine of soul a genuine Platonic legacy and in the precedence of *psyche* in Plato a confirmation of the "continuity of Greek thought from Parmenides to Plotinus."⁶⁴ Though rejecting attempts to "make Plato a witness of ... Plotinian teaching," Gadamer nevertheless finds that the link between the two is "not simply forced" but "extends far beyond every explicit reference," letting "Plato himself appear in a new light."⁶⁵ Gadamer opposes hereby the undue emphasis previously placed on the hypotheses of the second part of Plato's dialogue *Parmenides* as the ostensible source for Plotinus' hierarchical system of hypostases, and argues instead that, with regard to the genuine philosophical link between Plato and Plotinus, "the *Parmenides* hardly plays any role at all ..."⁶⁶ Although Plotinus himself cites the *Parmenides* and especially the first two stages in the dialectical argument of the *Parmenides*, which Plotinus counts as three, to support his doctrine of the hypostases, from the "reference to the dialogue *Parmenides* hardly anything can be learned about the deeper connection which links Plotinus with Platonic thought" and "even

62. Ibid. 257. Cf. *Cratylus* 411b-c; 439c; 440c-d.; *Phaedo* 90c; cf. 79c.

63. Ibid. 258.

64. H.-G. Gadamer, "Plato's *Parmenides* and its Influence" 14; cf. 15: "Although they have been transplanted into a new medium, the impulses which are to be found in a more developed form in Plotinus, are nevertheless truly Platonic."

65. Ibid. 6-7.

66. Ibid. 7. Cf. E.R. Dodds, "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic 'One'," *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 129-42.

less about the true intention of Plato's *Parmenides*.⁶⁷ Rather, Gadamer finds, it is Plato's *Sophist* and its doctrine of the five *megista gene* which "finds a precise and productive development in Plotinus."⁶⁸ In this regard and especially with respect to the interpretation of the categories *kinesis* and *stasis* and their relationship to each other, Gadamer is able to show how the relationship between Plato and Plotinus, and on a broader scale between Plato and Presocratics like Parmenides and Heraclitus, is founded on their doctrine of *psyche*, or rather, on a nascent ontology of soul, the basic contours of which are discoverable in each.

Of the five "greatest categories" of the *Sophist*: sameness, otherness, *kinesis*, *stasis* and being; *kinesis* and *stasis* are given preeminence by Plotinus, who interprets them as thinking and that which is thought. This might be taken as representative of "the Eleatic and Heraclitean contraposition of *stasis* and *kinesis*"; but in fact Plato's treatment of the two categories in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* contradicts the onesidedness of that interpretation.⁶⁹ The "fundamental significance" of *kinesis* and *stasis* for Plato, in their relationship to one another as well as to the other highest genera: being, identity, otherness and their "dialectical interweaving," is not immediately clear from their elaboration in the *Sophist*.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Gadamer finds the notion of a mutual participation of *kinesis* and *stasis* at least potentially represented, in a way which already points to the connection between thinking and that which is thought, between being, life and soul.⁷¹ Whereas Plato, in the *Theaetetus*, "develops a universal theory of flux, an ontology of process, in order to point indirectly from its untenability to the true concept of knowledge and to the opposed Eleatic position as a corrective," the discussion of the *megista gene* in the *Sophist* and the accompanying critique of both the materialists and the idealists calls the opposition itself into question; for "Neither the denial of motionless being nor the denial of motion is thinkable."⁷²

In the *Theaetetus*, it is the soul's ability to unite the disparate sensations furnished by the individual senses and grasp what is common to them as a single, coherent perception which repudiates the theory of flux presented

67 Gadamer, "Plato's *Parmenides* and its Influence" 8.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid. 9

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid. 9, 10. In Gadamer's analysis, although in the *Sophist* an "interweaving" of *kinesis* and *stasis* to correspond to that of the interweaving of being, identity and otherness is not explicitly mentioned (*Soph.* 250a8; 254d7: 255a10ff), a mutual participation of *stasis* in *kinesis* and *kinesis* in *stasis* is at least considered as potentially conceivable (*Soph.* 256b6).

72. Gadamer, "Plato's *Parmenides*" 9, 10.

here as characteristic of "all" the Presocratic philosophers (Socrates mentions "Protagoras and Heraclitus and Empedocles" by name) "except Parmenides" (152D). In the *Sophist*, the Guest from Elea maintains that the materialists—who "drag down everything from heaven and the invisible to earth," asserting that only that thing exists which they can grasp with their hands (246A–B; D)—must first be "made better" than they actually are by getting them to agree to the assumption of the existence of *psyche*, in order that they might participate in the discussion of being and non-being (246E ff.). In fact, however, it is the definition of that which really exists, of being itself, as "everything which possesses any power ... either to produce a change in anything ... or to be affected even in the least degree by the slightest cause" (247E)—a definition corresponding exactly to the differentiation of two kinds of motion in the *Theatetus*, the power to act upon and the power to be affected by anything (156A)—by which the materialists and the adherents of an extreme doctrine of flux are confounded. This definition namely illustrates the original connection between movement and rest, the phenomenon of motion and the processes of thought. Moving and being moved are nowhere separated: *to be* involves both, and their inherent connection is at the same time at the source, or rather is itself the essence of what is called thinking and being thought. Without motion, namely, life, soul and mind cannot be present to absolute being (248 e–249a) and without rest, mind would be removed from itself and all existing things as well, since there would be no "sameness of quality or nature or relations" (249 b–c). Neither can the "friends of the ideas" ignore this connection, for knowing and being known, the only access we have to the realm of ideas, must themselves be identified with a manner of acting and being acted upon, moving and being moved (248d–e).⁷³

Clearly then, if one wishes to resolve the problem of Plato's Heracliteanism, one must address the question as to what, in fact, Plato took *kinesis* to be.⁷⁴ In light of his allusions to a primitive relationship of motion and thought, it is scarcely possible that Plato took motion to be "really only the *me on*, over against which the *on* is true being." If, however, this is the case, if motion for Plato has an integral part to play in the constitution of whatever is in some sense said to be, then it can no longer be possible to view Plato as "an anti-Heraclitean."⁷⁵

Gadamer, for his part, sees in "the structural formula of *metabole*," which in the *Parmenides* is "raised to the level of a true universal" the solution to "the secret of self-motion and thus of life and of the soul." As the transition

73. Cf. *ibid.* 12.

74. *Ibid.* 12.

75. *Ibid.*

from one state to its opposite, namely, which occurs “suddenly,” i.e., not in time, but in an instant, *exaiiphnes*, this aspect of *kinesis* “points beyond the simple nothingness of non-being” toward “a common element and a unity which does not so much separate the opposites from one another as tie them to each other.” The moment of change, conjoining in itself *kinesis* and *stasis*, thus proves to be “no simple becoming other,” but “a becoming other of itself,” that is, an original expression of the phenomenon of self-conscious reflection.⁷⁶ This notion of *metabole* as reflection, as becoming other of and returning upon oneself, is apparently not unrelated to Plato’s understanding of change in Heraclitus. Judging from *Sophist* 242c–243a, namely, where the visitor from Elea makes reference to those predecessors who attempted to define the number and nature of realities or principles, Plato did not in fact identify the theory of absolute flux with Heraclitus. Heraclitus, rather, must be considered to be among the “the more strenuous” of the Ionian Muses, who said that being “*is always simultaneously coming together and separating*,” while his less strenuous followers “relaxed the strictness of the doctrine” saying that one state *followed* on the other. The simultaneity of opposite states, preeminently illustrated by the simultaneous push and pull of opposing forces in Heraclitus’ image of the lyre and the bow,⁷⁷ though analogous to the image of the river which is other and other and yet always the same (fr. 12, 49a), and to the relativity of the way up and the way back which is nevertheless one and the same (fr. 60), introduces an element not contained in a purely logical perspective on the problem of change and permanence in Heraclitus. Whatever exists namely, i.e., whatever is the same or identical with itself, insofar as it shall be anything with life or movement in it, relies on the compresence of opposing forces which, considered individually, seem each to require the annihilation of the other. The same tension or simultaneity of opposites presupposes, however, the actual, instantaneous, extra-temporal exchange of each for the other designated by the concept of *metabole*, here shown to underlie the original phenomenon of reflection.

By linking the problem of motion with the problem of soul Gadamer points the way to an analogous relationship in Heraclitus, one which, if it can be shown to be plausible, must definitively establish the genuine kinship and real continuity between Heraclitus and Plato. If it is the case, namely, that the conflict of opposites depicted by Heraclitus in the fragments regards not only a principle governing the alternation of permanence and change in the physical universe, but also a tension of opposing forces or states inherent to the workings of the human soul, then a renewal or even a critique of old

76. *Ibid.*

77. Diels-Kranz, Fr. 51; Kahn, LXXVIII: “They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.”

formulas like those of De Laguna and Diels, summarily rejected by D.S. Robinson in his 1922 article: "Conflicting Interpretations of Heraclitus,"⁷⁸ will do nothing to ensure a genuine grasp of Heraclitus' thought, much less to resolve the enigma of Plato's Heracliteanism. Neither De Laguna's zealous appraisal of Heraclitus as a "man of science," whose generalisation "that change is universal and continual" "is now part and parcel of our educated common-sense," nor Diels' claim to Heraclitus as "joint-founder" with Plato "of the Idealism which, under the influence of Plato and Christianity has prevailed over other systems" and his consequent relegation of the fragments depicting the world of change to the "husk" of Heraclitus' doctrine, can be seriously considered as approaching an adequate characterisation of either Plato or Heraclitus.⁷⁹ And even though Robinson is correct in asserting that we cannot "explain away Heraclitus' insistence upon the importance of change as the very essence of ultimate reality,"⁸⁰ yet he himself underestimates the subtle complexity of Heraclitus' reasoning—and the paradoxical nature of human experience—when he asserts that the best way of interpreting Heraclitus "is to suppose that he held irreconcilable views without even being aware of their inherent contradiction."⁸¹ Robinson's mistake lies namely precisely in believing that it would be impossible for a consistent thinker to assert "that reality is in its ultimate essence change or becoming and immutable reason."⁸² This, in fact, would appear to be the moot point in Heraclitus, which both repelled and attracted Plato. For even if one assumes a realm of eternal and unchangeable ideas as the ultimately real and absolutely necessary basis of experience and knowledge, there is no eliminating the multifarious and ever-changing content of that experience, which, while defying final or remainder-less conceptual reduction, remains nonetheless our only route of access to permanence and truth. Thus, the side-by-side of permanence and change, *Logos* and Flux, which marks the distinctive character of the fragments of Heraclitus, leads the youthful Socrates, in the famous anecdote of the *Phaedo*, to undertake his "flight to the logoi," the "next-best route" after the infinite regress of cause and effect which a mere observation of the phenomenal world must produce, in order to arrive at the true causes of the coming-to-be and passing away of all things. The assumption in each case, on the basis of the hypothesis of the forms, of the "strongest logos," though it proves indeed to be the *only* viable route by which to penetrate the contents of experience and avoid merely aping the succession and arrange-

78. *Philosophical Review* 31: 63–67.

79. "Conflicting Interpretations" 64.

80. *Ibid.* 66.

81. *Ibid.* 67.

82. *Ibid.*

ment of sense phenomena, nevertheless must fulfill the task of preserving those phenomena for thought, both in describing things and their relationships in the sequence of events and in explaining *why* they are so and why it is best that they are so.⁸³

G. Moyal warns against "ascribing to Heraclitus a view of the intellect which may well have never occurred to him,"⁸⁴ arguing that "we have no justification for ascribing to Heraclitus a distinction between objects and ideas, far less a distinction between things and sense-data"; and that, insofar as Heraclitus uses only "the vocabulary of sense-perception" to refer to the apprehension of the *Logos*, there is no distinction to be found in the fragments between the senses and understanding: "'conceptual' seeing is inextricably woven into the sensory: there is no other way to discover the Logos than by looking."⁸⁵ As Moyal sees it, the absence of an explicit use of concepts for the cognitive faculties "suggests that knowledge and understanding are, for Heraclitus, still un-self-conscious, diaphanous experiences, in which the subject takes little notice of himself as knower."⁸⁶ The subject appears to participate so entirely in the process it seeks to know that his condition may "at best characterized by a kind of isomorphism" Accordingly, says Moyal, "the locus of understanding and knowledge is the locus which the ordinary man gives it: sense perception, i.e., the realm of unreflected experience."⁸⁷

What frs. 1, 2, 17, and 34 have to say about the *distinction* between Heraclitus' understanding of his own endeavours and the condition of the general run of men, *hoi polloi*, with respect to that sort of activity, appears, however, to contradict Moyal's position on this point. In any case, it is obviously mistaken to attribute to Heraclitus the view that the *logos* is "readily accessible within sense-experience."⁸⁸ Moyal's suggestion that in Heraclitus a "shift of attention" is observable away from the objects of unreflected sensory experience, i.e., "from the things which undergo change to the change itself," amounts in itself to an admission that we have in Heraclitus at the very least a rudimentary form of abstraction and conscious reflection.⁸⁹ "The ordinary man," so Moyal, "can begin to understand the Logos by attending to the fissures in his experience both in space and time, where a given object ends and another begins."⁹⁰ Yet that in itself is a description of the process of

83. Cf. *Phaedo* 96a–100b.

84. "On Heraclitus' Misanthropy." *Revue de Philosophie Ancienne*. T. VII, 2 (1989): 131–48.

85. *Ibid.* 137, 138, cf. 139 n. 7.

86. *Ibid.* 134.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.* 135.

89. *Ibid.* 135, 136.

90. *Ibid.* 136.

definition, the determination of what X is, as opposed to other Y, Z etc. which it is not—regardless of whether or not one can say whether the “edges,” “fissures,” “limits” by which an object is distinguished are to be found in the world of objects or in the world of our ideas.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the “apprehension” of the *Logos* in its “unlimited pervasiveness” involves for Moyal no separation of “the knowing soul from what it knows;” on the contrary, “the world out-there *includes* the apprehension we have of it” and this apprehension “is an unreflective one.”⁹² Our own difficulty with conceiving the *Logos* in this way is, according to Moyal, a result of our being heirs to the tradition of rational thought which dates to Plato or perhaps Socrates and our consequent inability “to deal with reality without resorting explicitly to the very notion of a concept or of an abstraction.” Ultimately, however, the attempt to “reconstruct” Heraclitus’ thought “entirely within the domain of sense-experience,”⁹³ must fail. For the power of *differentiation* lies not in the senses, and although it may be said that Heraclitus precedes the discovery of the Forms,⁹⁴ it is Heraclitus who insists on the shared aim of human reason, in a world of change and perpetual exchange of opposites, to *distinguish and set forth in word and deed what each thing is and how it behaves according to its proper nature*. The same task and the same self-understanding, moreover, are at the source of Plato’s theory of ideas.

The question as to whether, as Robbs believed, one can identify in Heraclitus the first contours of an explicit concept of soul or not, is for the matter irrelevant.⁹⁵ It is not terminological advance which is of greatest im-

91. Ibid. 136f.

92. Ibid. 138.

93. Ibid. 140 n. 8.

94. Ibid. 140.

95. Cf. K. Robbs, “*Psyche and Logos* in the Fragments of Heraclitus: The Origins of the Concept of Soul,” *Monist* 69 (1986): 315–51. According to Robbs, while Socrates played a decisive role in the development of the meaning of *psyche* and the last quarter of the fifth century saw a crucial development of Greek ideas on soul it, is “Less widely recognized ... that for the centuries preceding Socrates, the first significant changes in usage and meaning for the word *psyche* are to be found in the text of ... Heraclitus who, in a radical break from popular and Homeric belief, claims that the *psyche* of a living person has a *logos* which is ‘deep’ (B45) and ‘self-augmenting’ (B115) and that its discovery requires extensive exploration on the part of the individual (B45).” Not in Plato, but in the fragments of Heraclitus are to be found “the first non-Homeric usages of *psyche* in the surviving Greek literature which attribute to a *psyche* some activities and functions associated with cognition and/or intelligent speech, or which involve *psyche* in some morally weighted choices” (325). For Robbs, “the departure from Homeric usage is radical” in the *psyche* fragments, although it is important to stress “that neither is this radically non-Homeric *psyche* as yet the immaterial, immortal unitary *psyche* of Plato’s *Phaedo*, that *choristos nous* which, preeminently, is the autonomous human self and whose primary function it is to know the *chorista*, the separated *noeta eide* which Plato (at least) called Forms” (327). However, “some first and very significant steps were being taken in that direction

portance in this matter; the necessary cognitive faculties for attacking the problem of permanence in change (as well as the more intimately Platonic one of knowledge of universals and particulars) are present in Heraclitus *in re*. Thus, a statement like that of fr. 7: "If all things turned to smoke, the nostrils would differentiate them," is meant—consciously and not without a generous dose of Heraclitus' own peculiar brand of irony—to draw attention to the specific human capacity for identifying each thing by dividing or separating it from others on the basis of its characteristics (here διὰ γνοῖεν), as opposed to mere sense perception. Only a superficial reading could suggest that here the "locus of knowledge and understanding" is that of unreflected, sense experience.

In his endeavour to clarify the status of fragments B 12 and B 49a, the so-called river fragments: "to those who step into the same rivers, other and other waters flow" and "into the same rivers we step and step not, we are and are not,"⁹⁶ Vlastos observes that Heraclitus repeatedly employs a "yes-and-no" form to convey identity-in-difference, a vehicle "for which there is no known precedent, though it turns up after him both in his imitators and his great critic, Parmenides."⁹⁷ This device, however, is itself an expression of the processes of division and collection which are the root functions of dialectic and hence of Platonic method. Gadamer, similarly, believed he could recognize in the fragments of Heraclitus one of the great "Vorgestalten der Reflexion,"⁹⁸ i.e., a genuine precursor of the forms and methods of rational thought characteristic of Classical Greek philosophy. For Gadamer, there is always something of self-awareness⁹⁹ in the Greeks' desire for knowledge, the difficulty for the heirs of modernity and the philosophy of subjectivity lying mainly in the attempt, "'reine' Reflexionsbestimmungen einem auf das Begreifen der Welt gerichteten Denken abzugewinnen."¹⁰⁰ Once we have consciously abandoned the effort to extract allegedly "pure" distinguishing characteristics of Platonic and pre-Platonic reflection from their natural and historical contexts and accepted the fact that the most decisive factor in understanding a thing is not to have only the name but the thing to which

by Heraclitus" (ibid.). Cf. also T.M. Robinson, "Heraclitus on Soul," *Monist* 69 (1986): 305–14. Commentary to fr. 45: "As fr. 107 makes clear, for Heraclitus *psyche* ("soul") was seen as a cognitive principle, not simply a biological principle and/or source of our 'emotional,' non-rational selves, as seems to have been thought by most of his predecessors ... he is, as far as is known the first Greek to have adopted such a view" (305).

96. Fragments B 12 and B 49a, Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* 154, 161.

97. G. Vlastos, "On Heraclitus," in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, Vol. I, *The Presocratics* (Princeton, 1995) 127–50; 130.

98. *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd VI, *Griechische Philosophie II* (Tübingen, 1985) 116–28.

99. Ibid. 116.

100. Ibid. 126.

we give the name, i.e., its definition, in common,¹⁰¹ we shall discover that we are justified, on the basis of the arguments presented here, both in speaking of Plato's Heracliteanism and in seeking the origins of Platonism as a philosophical tradition in Heraclitus. In the effort to comprehend the problem of the unity of motion and rest, change and permanence, the Many and the One, the particular and the universal, in the world of our experience, Plato emerges not only not as an *anti-Heraclitean* and not even merely as a *former* Heraclitean, but as a *genuine* Heraclitean, and Heraclitus emerges as a true antecedent of Platonic thought.

101. Cf. Plato, *Soph.* 218c.