

Heraclitus on Religion

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ABSTRACT

The article sets out to reinterpret Heraclitus' views on religion and, by implication, his position in the context of the Presocratic philosophers' relationship to the Greek cultural tradition. It does so by examining the fragments in which Heraclitus' attitude to the popular religion of his time is reflected. The analysis of the fragments 69, 68, 15, 14, 5, 96, 93 and 92 DK reveals that the target of Heraclitus' criticism is not the religious practices themselves, but their popular interpretation. Heraclitus' fragments are simultaneously shown to identify the underlying structure of the 'unity of opposites,' inherent in various religious practices. Heraclitus appears to reinterpret religious practices in terms of the conceptual structures of his own philosophy. On the other hand, religion provides him with the categories for the construction of his philosophical theology. Thus Heraclitus' treatment of religion is shown to be analogous to his treatment of ethics and politics, which he also tries to incorporate into his highly integrated vision of reality. In contrast to Xenophanes' radical critique of the traditional religion, Heraclitus emerges not as a reformer or an *Aufklärer*, but as an interpreter, who tries to discern the structures of meaning inherent in the existing practices, and to assume them into his own philosophical project.

In accounts that deal with the relationship of early Greek philosophy to traditional Greek religion, Heraclitus is assumed to be an heir to Xenophanes' programme of rationalist theology based on the critique of anthropomorphism, beliefs and practices of the popular religion of his time. To recall the dismissive remark in one of the more recent books on the subject: 'Heraclitus [. . .] certainly deserve[s] mention as at least loosely allied to the tradition established by Xenophanes, but Heraclitus provides no fresh arguments. . . .'¹ And even Burkert writes: 'Heraclitus, the most original and self-willed of the Pre-Socratics, also [*i.e., as well as Xenophanes*] combines radical criticism with the claim for a deeper piety to be derived

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The numbering of the fragments corresponds to the Diels-Krauz edition. The English translation is based, sometimes with substantial modifications, on Kahn's English version.

¹ L.P. Gerson. *God and Greek Philosophy*. Studies in the early history of natural theology. London & New York: Routledge, 1990. P. 249 n. 60.

from insight into the essence of being.² That is in spite of the explicit antagonism, on Heraclitus' part, to Xenophanes' intellectual enterprise (cf. fr. 40).

If we turn to Heraclitean scholarship, the dominating picture appears to be even more unequivocal. Heraclitus is credited with *illuministico radicalismo* in matters of religion by Marcovich,³ whereas according to Kahn, 'He is a radical, an uncompromising rationalist, whose negative critique of the tradition is more extreme than that of Plato a century later. [. . .] He denounces what is customary among men [. . .] as a tissue of folly and falsehood'; also, 'in this polemic Heraclitus' predecessor is Xenophanes. . . .'⁴ Conche also sees in Heraclitus' thought continuation of Xenophanes' project: *L'absurdité, la déraison des dieux de la religion populaire sont le reflet du délire et de la déraison, voire de la cruauté de l'homme, leur auteur. Cela avait déjà été indiqué, avant Héraclite, par Xénophane dans ses Silles.*⁵

Why should the way Heraclitus related to the practices and beliefs current in the popular religion of his time be so important? At stake is, I propose, the relationship between philosophy *in statu nascendi* and one of the more important aspects of the Greek cultural tradition. Were all the early philosophic attempts characterised by emancipation from traditional piety, as the conventional opinion of scholars would have us believe? Or was there a more complex pattern in the relationship to traditional religion, represented by one of the most prominent proponents of the enterprise that had yet to define itself as 'philosophy'?

In what follows, I shall provide an alternative interpretation of the fragments dealing with the rituals and cults of traditional Greek religion.⁶

² W. Burkert. *Greek Religion. Archaic and Classical*. Transl. by J. Raffan. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985. P. 309.

³ Eraclito. *Frammenti*. Introduzione, traduzione e commento a cura di M. Marcovich. Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1978. P. 284.

⁴ C.H. Kahn. *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary. Cambridge University Press, 1979. P. 263, 266.

⁵ Héraclite. *Fragments*. Texte établi, traduit, commenté par M. Conche. Paris: PUF, 1986. P. 173.

⁶ This intention, as well as certain features of exegesis, notably of the fr. 5, are anticipated by Catherine Osborne's chapter on Heraclitus in the recent *Routledge History of Philosophy* (see *Routledge History of Philosophy*. Vol. I. From the Beginning to Plato. Ed. by C.C.W. Taylor. London & New York: Routledge, 1997. P. 90-95). However, in a way that will become apparent in the course of the present analysis, I disagree with her conclusion concerning the overall implications of Heraclitus' utterances on religion: '[Heraclitus] argues that [religious practices] make sense only

Most of the extant fragments of Heraclitus dealing with the forms of traditional Greek piety were quoted during the religious controversies concerning pagan religion, from the 3rd century AD onwards. Curiously enough, the fragments of Heraclitus were employed by both the opponents and the apologists of paganism. The authors who sought Heraclitus' support in that debate were Christian writers – Clement, Arnobius, Origenes, Gregory of Nazianzus, the author of *Theosophia Tubingensis*, Elias of Crete – as well as pagans: Iamblichus, Celsus, Apollonius of Tyana.

Looking at the fragments themselves one cannot avoid realising how exhaustive they are in representing popular Greek religious practices, the list whereof reads not unlike an attempt at systematic classification: sacrifices (fr. 69), mystery cults and initiation rites (fr. 14), worship of effigies of gods and heroes (fr. 5) and prayers to them (*ibid.*), phallic processions and, probably, certain other ritual obscenities (fr. 15, 68), sacred chants (fr. 15), religious festivals – viz., Lenaia (fr. 15), purification rites (fr. 5), oracles – both temple-centred, like the Delphic one (fr. 93), and practised by the itinerant priestesses (fr. 92). Besides, as I shall argue below, fr. 96 may have contained references to funerary rites. We are already a long way from Xenophanes' theology, for the concentration upon the 'superficial,' performative aspect of religious practices does not come into theoretical focus in Xenophanes' critique of the traditional religion. Xenophanes' critical reflection is riveted by the contradictions in the *doctrine*, and, correspondingly, in the *nature* of gods that it postulates, and by the issuing theory of anthropomorphic representation. Heraclitus has almost next to nothing to say concerning the nature of gods as it is represented by the traditional religion, but concentrates a good deal upon the religious practices – with thoroughness that is reminiscent of an early attempt at 'systematisation.' I am not unconscious of the danger of over-interpreting what may be merely a random collection of references as an attempt at systematic classification. It seems, however, that the use of the word 'systematic' in this case is justified insofar as the religious phenomena that appear in Heraclitus' fragments (a) are of the same order – they almost exclusively refer to the performative rather than the doctrinal aspect of religious practices (particular gods are mentioned either in connection to some of the aforementioned practices, as Hades and Dionysus in fr. 15, Apollo in fr. 93, or in the context of relating Heraclitus' own philosophical theology to the deities of the traditional religion, as Zeus in fr. 32);

within their context, and that the judgement of what is or is not right depends on understanding that context' (*ibid.*, p. 95).

(b) refer to an extensive and non-overlapping range of practices. This presupposes a considerable degree of theoretical articulatedness and classification, and although the articulation itself may not be complete (in the sense that as a descriptive catalogue the list of the religious practices is not exhaustive), it is still justifiable to call it 'systematic' in virtue of the categorising procedure that made it possible.

Was it due to the effort at a systematic refutation of conventional religion? This, however, seems unlikely, insofar as at least some of the fragments are obviously endorsing the religious phenomena they refer to (most notably, fr. 93, also fr. 92 and, by implication, fr. 15). Was it, then, perhaps Heraclitus' intention to comprehend religion systematically in order to examine its structures of meaning in the light of the categories that his own philosophy generated – and, maybe, to give thereby another justification to his own philosophising? The answer may be found by the careful reading of the fragments themselves.

Before we embark upon the reinterpretation of the relevant fragments, let us linger awhile on a fragment that does not yield very far to interpretation. Fr. 69 consists of Iamblichus' *en passant* mention of Heraclitus as he discusses forms of sacrifices: καὶ θυσίων τοίνυν τίθημι διττὰ εἶδη· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀποκεκαθαρμένων παντάπασιν ἀνθρώπων, οἷα ἐφ' ἐνὸς ἄν ποτε γένοιτο σπανίως, ὡς φησιν Ἡράκλειτος, ἢ τινων ὀλίγων εὐαριθμῶτων ἀνδρῶν, τὰ δ' ἔνυλα καὶ σωματοειδῆ κτλ. There is no reason to doubt the connection, made by Iamblichus, of the original Heraclitean saying with sacrifices,⁷ and, in all probability, the words οἷα ἐφ' ἐνὸς ἄν ποτε γένοιτο σπανίως more or less closely paraphrase a segment of the original fragment which thus must have contained the opposition of 'one vs. many', with the paramount axiological emphasis on the 'one.' It is difficult to fail to notice the parallels that this fragment has with the so-called 'political' fragments and with Heraclitus' vision of society in general. Heraclitus perceives society as an interaction between 'one' or 'few' worthy individuals on the one hand, and of the ignorant worthless multitude on the other. The polarity of 'one vs. many,' that is fundamental to Heraclitus' doctrine of 'unity of opposites,' thereby reasserts itself in the sphere of the political organisation of the society. In fact, as Kahn argues, the tension of 'one vs. many' in the political sphere constitutes a 'political' version of the structure of 'unity of opposites' in Heraclitus' thought (cf. fr. 114, 44, 33, 29, 49, 104;

⁷ *Aliter* D. Babut. 'Héraclite et la religion populaire (Fragments 14, 69, 68, 15 et 5 Diels-Kranz)', *Revue des Études Anciennes* 77 (1975), p. 36.

and Kahn's *comm. ad loc. (op. cit.)*). Therefore it is reassuring to find the same polarity reappearing in the context of the discussion of religious practices.

I shall concentrate first of all on the group of fragments that can be linked together as belonging to the context of mysteries and Dionysiac rituals. Fr. 14 ('The mysteries current among men initiate them into impiety,' as Kahn eloquently translates it) has been considered downright antireligious, fr. 15 (v. *infra*) as showing an ambiguous, but probably negative attitude to the Dionysiac celebrations. One word, quoted by Iamblichus and surviving as fr. 68 DK, however, will serve as a clue to the reinterpretation of the whole group of fragments.

In Ch. 11 of the Book I of the *Mysteries of the Egyptians*, Iamblichus attempts to explain, in a rationalising way, the obscene rites – viz., the erection of phalli (τῶν φαλλῶν στάσις (38, 14-15)) and the obscene language (αἰσχρορημοσύνη (39, 3-4)) – practised in the context of mystery religion. Having offered an allegorical explanation of the phalli as a symbol of generative powers of the cosmos (38, 15-39, 3), and having interpreted the obscenities as an 'indication' (ἔνδειγμα) of the fact that matter is deprived of beauty, and of the formlessness of the to-be-formed (39, 4-13), Iamblichus continues: 'And yet these practices have another reason that follows' (39, 14). There follows an account of the cathartic function of obscene rituals, ultimately descending from Aristotle's account of *katharsis* in the *Poetics* (cf. 6, 1449b27-28) and the *Politics* (VIII, 1341b38-1342a15): just as the attempt to constrain passions intensifies them, so, to an equal degree, short and limited indulgence appeases, purifies the passions and reduces their strength. Just as the contemplation of the 'passions of the others' in tragedy and comedy helps to stabilise, make more orderly and purify one's own passions, likewise 'in certain sacred visions and hearings of obscene things, we are liberated from the harm that follows those things if they are practised' (39, 14-40, 8).

It is in this context that the reference to Heraclitus occurs: 'And therefore Heraclitus fittingly called them "remedies" (ἄκεα), since they remedy the dangers and render souls healthy from the calamities of becoming (τῶν ἐν τῇ γενέσει συμφορῶν)' (40, 12-15).

There is no reason to distrust what Iamblichus implies – that Heraclitus applied the word ἄκεα to the obscene rituals (fr. 15 testifies Heraclitus' interest both in phallic processions and in hymns dedicated to the αἰδούα). It would be difficult, however, to disentangle any specifically Heraclitean sense from this meagre reference, if we did not possess fr. 58, speaking

of medical activities: 'Doctors who cut and burn complain that they do not receive the reward they deserve.'⁸

The paradox that Heraclitus uncovers in medical activities is an instance of the governing structure of the 'unity of opposites': medical activity appears as the paradoxical unity of both the disease and health; by inflicting pain (a characteristic of disease) it heals (i.e., removes pain). Similarly pain may be treated as a single phenomenon that extends over two contrary states: disease and health. Despite being a characteristic of disease, it is also productive of health (in the activity of doctors). Thus medical activity can be described as the 'healing of pain with pain.'

Designating obscene rituals as 'remedies,' Heraclitus, in all probability, identifies in them this same structure of the 'unity of opposites.' Obscene rites, to continue the medical analogy, are designed to cure analogous actions or inclinations (whatever in Heraclitus' view these may have been) in the performers of those rites. To speculate on the nature of actions Heraclitus would have expected the ritual 'remedies' to cure would be an over-interpretation of the analogy reported by Iamblichus.⁹

Having established the presence of an analogous structure in the functioning of both ritual and medical processes, it is worth examining in that respect other Heraclitean statements on ritual.

Fr. 15. εἰ μὴ Διονύσω πομπὴν ἐποιεῖντο καὶ ὕμνον ἄσμα αἰδοίοισιν, ἀναιδέστατα εἶργασται· ὡὐτὸς δὲ Ἅιδης καὶ Διόνυσος, ὅτεφ μαίνονται καὶ ληναίζουσιν 'If it were not Dionysus for whom they arrange the procession and chant the hymn to the shameful parts, they would act in the most shameless way;¹⁰ but the same are Hades and Dionysus, for whom they rave and celebrate Lenaia.'

⁸ The limits of the authentic text in Hippolytus' quotation are difficult to establish. For my present purposes I assume as authentic the minimal text, the authenticity of which can hardly be contested. The boundaries of the text, however, do not influence the overall interpretation of the fragment.

⁹ Babut suggests that ἄκος in Heraclitus' fragment has 'neutral' rather than positive value, and thus the fragment must have constituted a disinterested observer's remark on the therapeutic function of the religious rites: *les rites dionysiaques sont des ἄκεια que les hommes ont imaginés pour remédier à leurs maux. Pour Héraclite, naturellement, ces moyens sont inefficaces . . .* (op. cit., p. 40). The example, however, that Babut adduces to prove the possibility of a negative meaning of ἄκος: εὐφρημα φώνει· μὴ κακὸν κακῶ διδοῦς / ἄκος πλέον τὸ πῆμα τῆς ἄτης τίθει (Soph. Aj. 362-363) operates on the paradox that the remedy can be worse than the disease, and not on a negative semantic potential of the word. For more examples of the same paradox in the Greek literature, see J.C. Kamerbeek. *The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries*. Part I. The *Ajax*. Leiden: Brill, 1963. P. 85-86.

¹⁰ Marcovich proposes to construe μὴ as qualifying ἐποιεῖντο and ὕμνον, and not

Exegesis of this fragment requires an answer to the following questions: Why is it the case that the actions which otherwise would be ‘most shameless’ are not such if they are performed for Dionysus? What is the reason for the identification of Dionysus with Hades? What is the connection between the Dionysiac rituals referred to, and this identification?

An attempt may be made to explain the identification of Dionysus with Hades in terms of Greek mythological representations: Dionysus, traditionally linked with the symbolism of vitality and fertility, often appears in the context of mythological representations of death (the death of his mother, Semele, immediately after Dionysus’ conception; the myth of Dionysus Zagreus, killed by the Titans, as well as the role of Dionysus in the Bacchic mysteries of afterlife; see Burkert, *op. cit.*, p. 165, 295). Besides, the reason for the identification of Dionysus, god of vitality and fertility, with Hades, the lord of the dead, may be based on the identification of life and death apparent from Heraclitus’ fr. 20: ‘Having been born they want to live – and to have their portions of death (μόροι); and they leave children behind so that [new] portions of death may come forth,’ as well as fr. 88: ‘The same in us (?) is living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old; for these transposed are those, and those transposed again are these’ (cf. also frr. 26, 62). The mutual interdependence of life (generation) and death in fr. 20 (the generation of new lives amounts to the generation of new μόροι, new ‘portions of death’) probably accounts for the identification of living and dead in fr. 88; the formula Heraclitus uses here (‘the same is A and B,’ or ‘X is [both] A and B,’ where B is in a certain sense ‘opposite’ to A) is his conventional means of referring to the structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ (cf. frr. 59, 60, 103, 61, 67). Also, the recurrent alliteration *aid(z)* underlines the identity between the cultic representation of Dionysus in phalli (*aidoia*) and Hades (*Haidēs*).¹¹

the word Διονύσωφ: ‘If they did not arrange the procession to Dionysus and did not chant the hymn to the shameful parts, they would act in the most shameless way . . .’ One can only object that, as Wilamowitz correctly observed, the behaviour in such case could be called ἀσέβεια, and not ἀναίδεια (U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf *Der Glaube der Hellenen*. B. II. Berlin, 1932. S. 207 n. 1). Besides, the statement by Marcovich, that the traditional reading *contraddice in pieno la logica del frammento* (*op. cit.*, p. 178), is, as Serra remarks, *petitio principii* (see Eraclito. *I frammenti e le testimonianze*. Testo critico e traduzione di C. Diano. Commento di C. Diano e G. Serra. Milano: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1980. P. 193).

¹¹ The alliteration is most evident in the unaccented uncial that would have been used in Heraclitus’ time: [. . .] ΚΑΙ ΥΜΝΕΟΝ ΑΙΣΜΑ ΑΙΔΟΙΟΙΣΙΝ ΑΝΑΙΔΕΣΤΑΤΑ ΕΙΡ-ΓΑΣΤΑΙ· ΩΥΤΟΣ ΔΕ ΑΙΔΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΔΙΟΝΥΣΟΣ ΟΤΕΩΙ ΜΑΙΝΟΝΤΑΙ ΚΑΙ ΑΗΝΑΙΖΟΥΣΙ.

Further, it is reasonable to suppose that the identification of Dionysus and Hades in the second part of the fragment explains the contention of the first, that the performance of phallic rituals is not ‘the most shameful’ if (and only if) they are performed in honour of Dionysus. The only plausible interpretation is that by celebrating Dionysiac rituals people celebrate the identity of Dionysus and Hades, an identity of the opposites of life and death, and it is precisely the presence of the structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ that makes the Dionysiac rituals acceptable.

Thus the fragment of Heraclitus combines, on the one hand, a critique of the superficial understanding of the ritual, the understanding that is presumably endorsed by the οἱ πολλοί, with an insight into the underlying structure of the ‘unity of opposites.’

Finally, there does not seem to be a compelling reason to see in fr. 14: τὰ νομιζόμενα καθ’ ἀνθρώπους μυστήρια ἀνιερωσὶ μνεῦνται ‘Initiation into the mysteries *practised among men* proceeds in an unholy way’¹² – an evaluative judgement, a condemnation of the mysteries, rather than a formulation of the principle that was known to, and endorsed by, the participants of the mysteries. Heraclitus is pointing to the fact that initiation (μύειν) into the mysteries, in itself a ‘sacred’ process, the process of ‘consecration’ of the candidates,¹³ is achieved by performing actions that are ‘unholy.’ The fact that the participants of the initiation rituals participated in practices that would be deemed immoral in other social contexts must have been general knowledge.¹⁴ The rite of initiation transpires to be the unity of the ‘holy’ initiating action and the unholy mode through which it is achieved. It is one more example of the ‘remedy’ (ἄκεα) that achieves its ‘holy’ result ‘by unholy means’ (ἀνιερωστί).

Fr. 5a¹⁵ – καθαίρονται δ’ ἄλλω αἵματι μαινώμενοι, ὀκοῖον εἴ τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῷ ἀπονίζοιτο· μαίνεσθαι δ’ ἂν δοκίει εἴ τις μιν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιφρά-

¹² In all probability, only the words μυστήρια ἀνιερωσὶ μνεῦνται belong to the *verba ipsissima*. For the discussion of the translation of the fragment see Babut, *op. cit.*, p. 31-2, although I am disinclined to think that the question as to whether we take μυστήρια as a subject of μνεῦνται, or as an internal object with an undicated plural (πολλοί? ἄνθρωποι?) as a subject, significantly affects its interpretation.

¹³ The initiates (μύσται) are often called ‘sacred,’ ἱεροί (cf. W. Link. ‘Ἱεροί’ in: *RE VIII* 1471-1475).

¹⁴ Cf. Burkert, *op. cit.*, p. 277, 262-264, 292; as well as his *Ancient Mystery Cults*. Cambridge (Mass.) & London: Harvard University Press, 1987. P. 103-106.

¹⁵ For the purposes of exegesis I shall separate the first and the second parts of fr. 5 and refer to them as fragments 5a and 5b.

σαιτο οὕτω ποιέοντα ‘They purify themselves by polluting themselves with further blood, as if someone who stepped in mud should try to wash himself with mud. He would seem to be mad if any of men noticed him doing this,’¹⁶ – is often considered to be one of the clearest and least ambiguous fragments in the Heraclitean corpus. According to Kahn, the fragment ‘is remarkable for its length and its clarity. The absence of anything enigmatic in this text might almost cast doubt on its authenticity. . . . If Heraclitus speaks here with unusual clarity and undisguised sarcasm, perhaps for once his spontaneous indignation breaks through the restraints of an indirect and allusive style’ (*op. cit.*, p. 266). I shall try to show that far from being totally perspicuous, the fragment speaks, in an indirect and paradoxical manner, of the ambiguity inherent in the ritual action.

The ritual described is the Apollonian ritual of purification from murder – a piglet was killed over the murderer’s head, so that the blood would drip onto his head and hands (the ritual is described in Apollonius’ *Argonautica* 4, 685-717). According to Burkert, the logic of this ritual must have been the following: ‘the person must discover the action which has brought about the pollution and must eliminate the *miasma* through renewed action’ (*Greek Religion*, p. 147); ‘the essential aspect seems to be that the person defiled by blood should once again come into contact with blood’ (*op. cit.*, p. 81).

Further examples adduced by Parker show that this logic was an element constantly underlined in the descriptions of the ritual.¹⁷ ‘Heraclitus

¹⁶ The emendation of ἄλλως (adopted by the majority of editors) into ἄλλφ, first proposed by Fränkel (H. Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums*. München: Beck, 1962. P. 451) and accepted by Kranz and Walzer, will be discussed later. At present it is necessary to indicate certain grammatical features of the text that will be important to its interpretation. The word αἵματι, as most interpreters agree, in a characteristically Heraclitean fashion relates both to καθαίρονται and to μαινώμενοι. (The cultic reality mentioned is the purification from murder by blood – *v. infra*.) There is no need to understand the present participle μαινώμενοι in the perfectual sense (= μεμιασμένοι, μισθόντες), as Marcovich does (*op. cit.*, p. 319-320)./ The translation of the last phrase by Catherine Osborne: ‘But any human who claimed that the person was doing that would be considered insane’ (*op. cit.*, p. 91) is implausible; it is more plausible to construe δοκέει as characterising the performer of purification that is referred to as μιν, and ἐπιφράσαιτο is better translated as ‘noticed.’ Another possibility is to construe δοκέει with the second τις: ‘Any of men who noticed him doing this would think he was mad’ (Kahn), but since the verb δοκέει precedes τις (ἀνθρώπων) it would be more natural to read it as belonging to the τις that is the subject of the second clause of the previous sentence.

¹⁷ Cf. ‘to wash away foul blood by blood’ (Eur. *IT* 1223-1224), ‘he washed the trace of killing from my hand by slaughtering fresh blood upon it’ (*Stheneboea*, prol.

was only emphasising a paradox of which all who thought about the rite were aware, and which seems to have been essential to its meaning' (Parker, *op. cit.*, p. 372).

The text of fr. 5a is quoted by *Theosophia Tubingensis* (full text, fr. 86a Marcovich) and by Elias of Crete (καθαίρονται – ἀπονίζοιτο, fr. 86d Marc.). Reference to the purification of mud by mud is made by Gregory of Nazianzus (θυσίας πηλῶ πηλὸν καθαιρόντων, ὡς αὐτῶν τινος ἤκουσα λέγοντος, fr. 86e Marc.), and a loose paraphrase is given in *Letter 27* by Apollonius of Tyana (fr. 86f Marc.). It is noteworthy, however, that all the authors fail to identify the archaic ritual referred to by Heraclitus, assuming the 'blood' mentioned by Heraclitus to be that of sacrificed animals.¹⁸ The quotations by the author of *Theosophia* and Elias of Crete that are the basis of the reconstruction of the text of the fragment deserve closer analysis.

Although Elias of Crete (active at the end of the 11th – beginning of the 12th century)¹⁹ is one of the latest sources for Heraclitus' fragments, writing a commentary on Gregory of Nazianzus' sermon *in Heronem philosophum* (= *or.* 25) he was able to identify correctly the source of Gregory's allusion,²⁰ and quote a significant chunk from the beginning of fr. 5.

The commentary by Elias of Crete on *Sermon 25* of Gregory of Nazianzus, contained in the *codex Vaticanus* Reg. gr. Pii II 6, has not been published in its entirety. Here is the quotation of Heraclitus, transcribed alongside with its context²¹ (fol. 90^r):

25 von Arnim), (you will not be clean) 'until the slaughter of a young animal, by a man who purifies from the stain of blood, bloodies your hands' (Aesch. *Eum.* 449-450), 'until Zeus himself stains you with drops of pig's blood' (Aesch. fr. 327; all the references from: R. Parker. *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983. P. 372 & n. 11). Cf. also: 'But despite the "defiling" the process is a washing,' and the references that follow (*ibid.*).

¹⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus speaks (criticising the superstitions of the Greeks) of τῶν αἰσχροῦς μύθους καὶ τὰς αἰσχροτέρας θυσίας πηλῶ πηλὸν καθαιρόντων (*orat.* 25, 15); the context of Apollonius' accusation: αἵματι βωμοὺς μιαινουσιν ἱερεῖς (*ep.* 27, p. 114 Hercher) – is also clear; in his letter to Delphic priests he reproaches them for their bloody sacrifices.

¹⁹ Cf. V. Laurent. 'Élie, métropolitte de Crète' in: *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques*. T. 15. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1963. P. 185-187.

²⁰ With more precision than, e.g., the editors of Gregory's sermon in the *Sources Chrétiennes* series in 1981 – Prof. Mossay refers to Plato, *Rep.* II 363d & *Phd.* 110a, 111d (Grégoire de Nazianze. *Discours 24-26*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par J. Mossay. Paris: Cerf, 1981. P. 192 n. 2).

²¹ Previously only the most immediate context (from the words οὐς διαπαίζων

τίνες δὲ οἱ παλαιοὶ

παρ' Ἑλλησι θεοὶ καὶ τίνες οἱ νέοι; παλαιοὶ μὲν οὖν οἱ περὶ Κρόνον, νέοι δ' οἱ ἅπ' ἐκείνων, καὶ ἐξῆς μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων ἡρώων· ἢ παλαιούς μὲν λέγει τοὺς δώδεκα κατ' ἐκείνους, νέους δὲ Διόνυσον Ἡρακλέα Ἀσκληπιὸν καὶ τοὺς λοιπούς, οὓς δὴ πάντας συγχεῖν ὡς πρώην προτρέπεται ὁ φιλόσοφος,¹ καὶ τὰ 5 περὶ τούτων αἰσχροῦς μυθεύόμενα, τοὺς ἀλλοκότους ἔρωτας αὐτῶν καὶ τοὺς εἰς ποικίλα εἶδη μετασχηματισμοὺς διὰ τοὺς αἰσχροὺς καὶ ἐμπαθεῖς ἔρωτας, καὶ τὰς αἰσχροτέρας θυσίας, αἷς θεραπεύειν τοὺς αὐτῶν θεοὺς ἐνόμιζον, οὓς διαπαίζων Ἡράκλειτος, Καθαίρονται δέ, φησίν, αἷματι μαινώμενοι ὥσπερ 10 ἂν εἴ τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῷ ἀπονίζοιτο. τὸ γὰρ τοῖς τῶν ἀλόγων ζῴων σώμασι τε καὶ αἵμασιν, ἃ τοῖς θεοῖς αὐτῶν προσέφερον, οἶσθαι καθαίρειν τὰς τῶν ἰδίων σωμάτων ἀκαθαρσίας τὰς ἐκ τῶν μυσαρῶν καὶ ἀκαθάρτων μίξων ἐγκεχρωσμένας αὐτοῖς, ὅμοιόν γε (καί)² τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πηλοῦ ἐμπεπλασ- (fol. 90^v) μένον ῥύπον τοῖς σώμασι πηλῷ πειράσθαι ἀπορῥύπτειν.

¹Scil. Hero ²καὶ ins. Bywater

As this text shows, Elias assumes that Heraclitus speaks about the immolation of sacrificial animals for the atonement of one's sins. He has some difficulties in explaining how the reduplication of 'mud' is to be understood – therefore he takes 'mud' to mean the impurity of the bodies polluted by sin in the first instance, and, somewhat allegorically, 'bodies and blood of irrational animals' in the second instance. (It is also clear that he understands μαινώμενοι in a half-participial sense: 'They purify themselves by defiling / as they defile themselves with blood' – v. *supra*, n. 16.)

The author of *Theosophia*²² also understands Heraclitus' fragment as a reference to sacrifices: "Ὅτι Ἡράκλειτος μεμφόμενος τοὺς θύοντας τοῖς δαίμοσι ἔφη· (the text of the fragment follows).

If, as Fränkel maintains (*op. cit.*, p. 451), the original fragment of Heraclitus had καθαίρονται δ' ἄλλω αἷματι μαινώμενοι, it explains the

onwards), transcribed at Bywater's request by Ignazio Guidi, was available in Greek (I. Bywater. *Heracliti Ephesii Reliquiae*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1877. P. 50).

²² Written between 474-491 AD (cf. *Theosophorum Graecorum Fragmenta*. Iterum recensuit H. Erbse. Stuttgart & Leipzig: Teubner, 1995. P. xiv). §§ 66-68 of *Theosophia* containing the quotations from Heraclitus survive only in the *codex Tubingensis* M b 27 (= T Erbse), copied in the 16th century from the early (and imprecise) epitome contained in the *codex Argentoratensis* that perished in a fire in 1870 (see Erbse, *op. cit.*, p. ix-xi, xvii). It may be relevant to the history of the transmission of the text of Heraclitus' fr. 5 that in §66 (immediately before the quotations from Heraclitus) there is a reference to Iamblichus (the only one in *Theosophia*) that does not serve any obvious purpose in terms of the argument of *Theosophia*: "Ὅτι Ἰάμβλιχος ὁ Χαλκιδεὺς Πορφυρίου μαθητῆς (the previous §65 reports theological opinions of Porphyrius). Although the data are too scanty to propose any hypothesis, it would seem that the way Heraclitus' fr. 5 reached *Theosophia* was somehow related to Iamblichus.

difference between the versions given by *Theosophia* and by Elias of Crete. Although it was possible (as Elias did – *v. supra*) to explain away the double occurrence of ‘mud,’ there is no sense, in the context of ordinary animal sacrifices, in which the reference to ‘other,’ ‘further’ (ἄλλος) blood could have been understood. Therefore, it is quite plausible to maintain that the word ἄλλωφ of the original text could be omitted by Elias (or his source) and corrupted into ἄλλως by the author of *Theosophia* (or his source). This corruption makes better and more obvious sense in terms of the project of that section of *Theosophia* (§§ 67-74): the author is attempting to show that the Greek gods were held in contempt by some of the Greeks. Thus, the pejorative ἄλλως ‘in vain’ would suit his purpose better. Besides, in some hands of the early Byzantine sloping uncial that would have been used for private notes the *iota adscriptum* in ΑΛΛΩΙ could easily have been mistaken (or ‘corrected’) into *sigma* (thus resulting in ΑΛΛΩΣ), since the difference between *iota* and *sigma* is minimal (for a later example of this style, see Pl. 5 (facing p. 2) in Barbour’s collection).²³ In support of that assumption stands the fact that the manuscript T of *Theosophia* is far from reliable (in the text of fr. 5, there are the following obvious mistakes: μιν Snell: ἀντων T αὐτὸν Buresch, Diels; τουτέοισιν] τοῦ τέοισι T; εὔχονται] ἔχονται T; οὐ τι Diels (ex Origene): θύειν T). On the other hand, if we assume that the original text had ἄλλως, it is almost impossible to explain the omission of it by Elias, since it is most likely that in the context of emphasis on the ‘derision’ of pagan rituals (cf. διαπαίζων Ἡράκλειτος . . . φησί) he would have retained the word which implies a condescending, derisive attitude.

Thus the beginning of the fragment introduces a paradoxical statement – ‘They purify themselves by polluting themselves with further blood’ – that reveals the structure of the ‘unity of opposites’: purification and defilement are, from the habitual point of view, contrary activities. Nevertheless, both pollution and purification are performed by blood, and thus blood exhibits contrary properties in that it is both polluting and purifying.

²³ R. Barbour. *Greek Literary Hands. A.D. 400-1600*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981. Apart from the copyists, the mistake could have been made either by the epitomator who seems to have dealt rather carelessly with the text of the original *Theosophia* (see Erbse, *op. cit.*, p. xi-xii), or by Bernhard Haus M.A., who transcribed it from the *Codex Argentoratensis* in 1580, and who, according to Erbse, *illum brevem tractatum [. . .] postquam in codice eum deprehendit, accurate descripsit, nonnullos locos corruptos vel laesos brevibus notis illustravit, interdum correxit* (*op. cit.*, p. x; emphasis added).

It is useful to recall, in this connection, fr. 61: ‘The sea is the purest (καθαρώτατον) and the most polluted (μιαρώτατον) water: for fish drinkable and life-sustaining; for men undrinkable and deadly’. Speaking of sea water, Heraclitus operates with the notions of ‘purity’ and ‘defilement’ that in fr. 5a are applied to the contrary states, transition between which is achieved by blood: transition from purity to defilement in murder, and from defilement to purity in the *rite de passage* of purification. ‘Blood’ in fr. 5a is a substance that exhibits the structure of the ‘unity of opposites.’ In it and through it, purifying and defiling actions are united in a way that is very similar to the ‘unity of opposites’ in ‘sea water’ in fr. 61.

Also, the function of ‘blood’ in fr. 5a resembles very much the functioning of ἄκεια ‘remedies’ (see fr. 68) to which the operation of mystery rites is likened. It ‘purifies blood with further blood’ in a way that is in principle identical with the healing of pain by inflicting further pain. In both cases it is easy to discern the structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ that, in Heraclitus’ view, constitutes the essence of such practices.

The part of the fragment that follows – ὁκοῖον εἴ τις εἰς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς πηλῷ ἀπονίζοιτο· μαίνεσθαι δ’ ἂν δοκέοι εἴ τις μιν ἀνθρώπων ἐπιφράσαιτο οὕτω ποιέοντα – draws a parallel to the purification by blood, likening it to the ‘washing of mud by mud.’²⁴ Although most of the commentators regard it as a remark on the absurdity of the practices of purification by blood, there is a slight anomaly of phrasing that helps us to decipher the intended meaning. The phrase εἴ τις ἀνθρώπων has been regarded as redundant in Greek where it would have sufficed to say εἴ τις. Wilamowitz even suggested deleting ἀνθρώπων as a dittography (*op. cit.*, S. 206 n. 2). Marcovich (*op. cit.*, p. 320), on the other hand, tries to explain the redundancy away, stating that the meanings of the two expressions are identical, and for support adducing two examples from the *Odyssey* that are supposed to have identical meaning (cf. μηδέ τιν’ ἀνθρώπων προτιόσσειο μηδ’ ἐρέεινε at VII 31, and μηδέ τινα προτιόσσειο μηδ’ ἐρέεινε at XXIII 365). It is precisely these examples that help us to see the difference between the two expressions. At VII 31 it is the *goddess* Athena that in disguise speaks to Odysseus, therefore it is quite understandable that she advises him not to engage in talk with any among *men*. In the second case, Odysseus speaks to his wife, therefore it also makes perfect sense that there is no qualification similar to that in Athena’s remark.

²⁴ Although the ritual practices of purification by mud are attested (Burkert, *op. cit.*, p. 78), it is unlikely, in the context of this fragment, that Heraclitus referred to them as such.

By saying that ‘such a man would seem to be raving, if any among *men* should notice him doing it,’ Heraclitus postulates the difference between the perspective of ‘men’ and that of ‘gods,’²⁵ drawing attention to the different meaning the same action acquires in profane and in ritual contexts.²⁶ The ritual practice, characterised by the structure of the ‘unity of opposites,’ from a secular perspective has as much (or rather, little) sense as the washing of mud with mud – in the religious context, however, it is the structure of the unity of opposites that prevails and makes sense.²⁷

²⁵ One could point, in this context, to fr. 78: ἦθος ἀνθρώπειον οὐκ ἔχει γνώμας, θεῖον δὲ ἔχει, and to fr. 102 (although authenticity of the latter is not without question): τῷ μὲν θεῷ καλὰ πάντα καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ δίκαια, ἀνθρώποι δὲ ἃ μὲν ἄδικα ὑπειλήφασιν ἃ δὲ δίκαια. On the other hand, the plural ἄνθρωποι in the fr. 5 may share in the epistemologically pejorative connotations of ‘multitude’ implicit in Heraclitus’ use of οἱ πολλοί and δῆμος (fr. 2, 17, 29, 57, 104, and cf. fr. 1).

²⁶ Ita Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 91. Also, for an attempt to interpret this fragment along these lines, see: Hérakleitas. *Fragmentai*. [Ed., with a transl., introd. and comm., by] M. Adomėnas. Vilnius: Aidai, 1995. P. 254, 259-260. The attempt, however, to read a positive sense into the text of the fragment retaining ἄλλως ‘in vain; differently’ does not seem convincing.

²⁷ Edward Hussey has drawn my attention to the connection between this interpretation of fr. 5a and the ‘animal fragments’ 13 & 37. In both fragments a substance that is conventionally thought to be ‘unclean’ or ‘polluting’ by men (mud, dust and ashes) is represented as ‘clean’ or ‘purifying’ for certain animals (pigs and chickens). In addition to the traditional reading that sees in these fragments a paradox (or contradiction) in terms of value-choice, one may wonder whether it was not Heraclitus’ intention to trace the presence of the identical rationale, or λόγος, not only in the human, but also in the animal world, *scilicet* in the whole realm of living beings. For, if one reflects solely upon the performative aspect of the animal practices without any overtones of evaluative preconceptions (as Heraclitus seems to have done in the case of the human religious practices), it is evident that animals *do* actually wash themselves with mud and dust quite in the same sense as the sea-water, ‘most impure’ as it is for humans, is *actually* ‘most pure’ for the fish in the fr. 61. On this reading, the structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ reveals itself not only in the fact that the same substance exhibits contrary properties vis-à-vis different percipients, but also by the coincidence in it of the contrary functions. On the other hand, although the practice itself (viewed from a purely formal, performative aspect) may be validated by the presence of the structure of ‘unity of opposites,’ the blind performance by the uncomprehending, ‘absent while present’ (fr. 34), has no merit in it (cf. fr. 5b, 15, and the complex of fr. 1, 89, 73, 34, as well as, under a slightly different aspect, fr. 107), and thus one might conjecture that just as gods recognise the validity of human rituals (*v. supra ad* fr. 5a), humans recognise the *logos* of animal practices (humans stand in relation to animals as gods stand to humans in fr. 82 & 83).

(One should notice that in this fragment, as well as in fr. 15, Heraclitus repeatedly characterises the actions of the participants of the ritual as *μανία*, thus drawing attention to the ambiguity inherent in the phenomenon. What appears to be ‘madness’ from the secular perspective, acquires meaning as the embodiment, in the sphere of ritual, of the structure of the ‘unity of opposites;’ and although those that take part in the Dionysiac processions are said to ‘rave’ (*μαίνεσθαι*), it is not, after all, ‘most shameful’ action, which it would be, were it not performed in honour of Dionysus. I shall return to discussion of the significance of *μανία* in connection with fragments 92 & 93.)

So, the main conceptual scheme of Heraclitus’ philosophy – the unity of opposites – is shown not only to be present in the rituals, but, in fact, to constitute the essential structure of the ritual action.

Fr. 5b – *καὶ τοῖς ἀγάλμασι δὲ τουτέοισιν εὐχονται, ὁκοῖον εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσηνεύοιτο, οὐ τι γινώσκων θεοὺς οὐδ’ ἥρωας οἴτινές εἰσι* – closely resembles the critique of popular religion and the attack on the veneration of images. However, the qualifying clause at the end of the fragment – ‘not knowing what gods and heroes are’ – renders it unlikely that what is intended is unconditional censure.²⁸

The conventional translation runs as following: ‘And they pray to these images as if someone was chatting with houses, not knowing what gods and heroes are.’ The very metaphor Heraclitus uses, likening images of gods to ‘houses’ (*δῶμοι*), testifies that what he has in mind is slightly different from the classic criticisms of idolatry (one such example would be the interpretation of Clement, who says that in this fragment Heraclitus ‘reproaches statues for their insensitivity’ (*τὴν ἀναισθησίαν ὀνειδίζοντος τοῖς ἀγάλμασι, protrept. 50, 4*)). Instead of likening the statues of gods to lifeless stones or pieces of wood (as was the habit of the Christian writers that drew on *Isaiah 44, 9-20*), Heraclitus speaks of ‘houses’ – he seems to imply a distinction between the ‘house’ and the ‘inhabitant’ that is in a certain way related to, but not identical with, the ‘house.’ The fault of

²⁸ That the object of the critique is not the practice of image-worship, but rather the naïve attitude involved in the identification of images with the gods themselves, is the way in which Celsus (ap. Origenem *c. Cels. VII 62* = fr. 86b Marc.) interprets Heraclitus’ saying. Clement (*protrept. 50, 4* = fr. 86c Marc.) interprets it as a critique of idolatry, but then it is rather symptomatic that he omits the end of the fragment (the words *οὐ τι γινώσκων θεοὺς οὐδ’ ἥρωας οἴτινές εἰσι*) that survives only in the excerpt of Celsus quoted by Origenes.

hoi polloi, then, seems to consist in the failure to distinguish gods that are in some – as yet unspecified – way related to, and accessible through, their images, from the images themselves. The ultimate qualifying clause confirms the suggestion that the object of Heraclitus' critique is some failure to recognise *what* gods and heroes are. Since, however, the fragment, apart from this negative observation, does not specify their nature (and there is no reason to suppose it ever did), the present reading seems to end in a certain hermeneutic impasse. Thus the hypothetical reader is referred back to the metaphorical comparison that occupies the central position in the fragment – ὁκοῖον εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο – for the explanation as to 'what gods and heroes are.' Can this analogy shed any further light as to why prayers to statues are a sign of ignorance?

I suggest that it is at this stage, on a deeper scrutiny, that an alternative meaning of the phrase ὁκοῖον εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο is activated: it can also be plausibly translated 'as if someone was having a conversation *at home*.'²⁹ After all, τοῖς δόμοισι can quite naturally be read in a locative sense.

How plausible is this scenario of reading? The validity of the first way of reading is confirmed by the fact that it is adopted by the ancient authorities that are our sources of the fragment – by Celsus, Origenes, and, in all likelihood, by the common source of the *Theosophia* and the *Acta Apollonii* (cf. fr. 86 b, c, g¹, g² Marc.). The syntactical parallelism of the dative constructions – τοῖς ἀγάλμασι . . . τουτέοισιν εὔχονται in the first part, and τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο in the central phrase of the fragment – seems to impose a parallelism of meaning that stems from a certain momentum of understanding as one reads the fragment for the first time: just as one prays *to* the statues, so the conversation is made *to*, or *with*, the houses. (The syntactical parallelism is strengthened by the alliterative links between the two phrases: τοῖς ἀγάλμασι δὲ τουτέοισιν εὔχονται, ὁκοῖον εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο.) On the other hand, as the first reading yields no positive sense apart from the very fact of the condemnation of prayers to statues, the last phrase redirects the hypothetical reader back, to a re-reading of the central phrase, and, syntactical parallelism apart, the locative reading of δόμοισι is otherwise more 'natural,' and reasserts itself on the second reading. Thus the fragment seems to be deliberately constructed in such a way so as to call forth two alternative readings. Fur-

²⁹ I am grateful for this suggestion to Edward Hussey and Malcolm Schofield, who almost simultaneously drew my attention to this possibility, and also suggested some other features of the exegesis of the present fragment.

thermore, there are no methodological reasons to maintain that any one reading ought to be privileged over another, and it is quite in keeping with Heraclitus' practice elsewhere that *both* of them would be intended – Heraclitus, after all, is notorious for intentional ambiguities (see Kahn's analyses in his 'On reading Heraclitus,' *op. cit.*, p. 91-95, and *comm. ad fr.* 48, 33, 114, 108).³⁰

Thus it remains to decipher the implications of the central phrase – what is wrong with 'conversation at home'? In what way can Heraclitus' metaphor enlighten us about the proper relation with 'gods and heroes'? One must notice, at this point, that *λεσχηνεύεσθαι* does not just mean 'to chatter.' In the view of its connection with *λέσχη* (meaning 'public bath; any public building or hall,' and, subsequently, 'council-chamber' or even 'council' – see LSJ *s.v.* *λέσχη* I. 3.), *λεσχηνεύομαι* bears a connotation of 'conversation *in public*.' (Even if it only means 'gossip' or 'chatter,' we may note that these are – both phenomenologically and by definition – primarily 'public' phenomena.) It would seem – although the scarcity of occurrences makes the verification of this view impossible – that the very practising of *λεσχηνεύεσθαι* 'at home' would involve certain contradiction, and that there is certain inappropriateness in the semantic combination of the two words. Is this the same inappropriateness that makes the prayers to the statues inappropriate, as well? In order to answer this question, we should first have to translate the implications of Heraclitus' metaphor.

Even if in the given context *λεσχηνεύομαι* does not bear the connotations of the 'public' conversation, the most immediate semantic opposition that springs to mind in this connection is that between what is 'at home' and what is 'public,' between the 'privacy' of home and the 'communal space' of the *polis*. (It is the same semantic opposition that resurfaces in the *ιδίᾳ* / *δημοσίᾳ* distinction of the later writers.) 'At home' seems to imply a certain seclusion from what is 'public.' The only thing that can be wrong with conversation 'at home' is that it does not attain to the universality of the *polis*, that it substitutes 'domestic' concerns for the 'common' ones (see the emphasis on the need to rely on *νόμος*, the expression of the 'universal' (*ζυνόν*) in the domain of the political, in *fr.* 44 & 114).

Therefore we may tentatively surmise that the opposition 'public vs. at home' that is implied in Heraclitus' comparison yields itself to translation

³⁰ For a very good description of a similar technique of 'retrospective correction of meaning' applied to *fr.* 48, see R. Dilcher. *Studies in Heraclitus*. Hildesheim: Olms, 1995. P. 129-130.

in terms of the opposition ξυνόν (κοινόν) vs. ἴδιον, which is of cardinal importance for Heraclitus (see fr. 2, 89, 72, 1, 17, 113, 114), and which can be somewhat imprecisely translated as that of ‘universal’ vs. ‘private,’ when by ‘private’ is meant the privation of truth, the seclusion of ignorant humans from what is universal. (The particularity of their own illusionary worlds is described as sleeping and having dreams in fr. 1, 89, 73 (and probably 26). The seclusion of the multitude from the universal truth of *Logos* is likened to the privation of the common world of experience caused by deafness (fr. 34) and (Homer’s) blindness (fr. 56, by implication). It is probable that ‘being at home’ in fr. 5b is yet another – ‘political’ – metaphor for seclusion from the ξυνόν.) On this reading, the prayer to the statues entails certain confusion between what is universal and what is ‘private’, or particular; apparently, it is a case when behaviour that is proper vis-à-vis what is universal is conducted in a situation that is ‘private.’ If we move within the trajectory of the reading that identifies the opposition *xunon / idion* as solely and exclusively an opposition between the universality of the philosophical truth as opposed to ‘privacy’ of separatedness from the universal *logos*, then the parallel drawn between the prayers to statues, and between a conversation (that is usually held in public) carried out at home is merely yet another condemnation of the practice. On this understanding, the fragment’s meaning can be paraphrased as: ‘And they pray to the statues, lost in their delusions and thinking they are in the possession of the truth, though they do not know what gods and heroes are’. Then it does not contain an answer to the question implied by the concluding phrase of the fragment – the question as to ‘what gods and heroes are’.

One is, however, tempted to extend the meaning of the opposition *xunon / idion* in fr. 5b. There are two reasons for it, neither of which is a sufficient in itself, but combined they provide a certain justification for doing so. First, the central place occupied in the fragment’s composition suggests that the phrase ὁκοῖον εἴ τις τοῖς δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο ought to provide a clue both as to why the prayer to the statues is absurd, and as to what gods and heroes are. Second, in the context of the *xunon / idion* opposition the reported saying of Heraclitus springs to mind, in which gods are characterised by ‘universality’ in the sense of omnipresence: εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα θεοῦς (*De part. an.* A 5, 645a21 = A 9 DK).

(A detour may be due here in order to answer the question: What was Heraclitus doing when he uttered these words? According to the existing editions of the *De partibus animalium* and the prevailing interpretation of

the passage (645a17-21), as the visitors entered, he was 'warming himself by the fireplace' (εἶδον αὐτὸν θερόμενον πρὸς ἰπνῶ). One of the subtler exegeses of the anecdote in its present form was proposed by Louis Robert:³¹ the visitors, having entered the house and stopped by the hearth, ἔστια, saw Heraclitus warming himself by the kitchen fire, ἰπνός, admittedly the more vulgar and utilitarian fire of the two, as well as devoid of the religious connotations characteristic to ἔστια. Hence their surprise at the occupation that seemed to be unworthy of a philosopher, and the ensuing remark by Heraclitus. However, Aristotle adduces the story as an encouragement to overcome disgust that follows upon the study of the baser animals (cf. διὸ δεῖ μὴ δυσχεραίνειν παιδικῶς τὴν περὶ τῶν ἀτιμωτέρων ζῴων ἐπίσκεψιν (15-16); πολλῆς δυσχερείας (28); [ζῴοις] μὴ κεχαρισμένοις πρὸς τὴν αἴσθησιν (7-8); προσιέναι δεῖ μὴ δυσωπούμενον (22)), and, as Robertson observed, the tale in question, 'if taken literally, is singularly flat as an illustration of the necessity of overcoming instinctive disgust in the search for beauty and truth'.³² Nor does this reading explain the logic of the story – why the visitors had to be 'ordered to enter bravely' (ἐκέλευε γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰσιέναι θαρροῦντας). Robertson, referring to the usage of ἰπνός 'fireplace; room where the fireplace is, i.e. kitchen' as a euphemism for κοπρῶν 'lavatory,' attested in Aristophanes (see Pollux, v 91; Hesychius, s.v. ἰπνός), suggests that θέρεσθαι πρὸς ἰπνῶ was a euphemism for 'to be in the lavatory' (*ibid.*; the rise of the euphemism may have been occasioned by the fact that in some Greek houses the kitchen used to be next to the lavatory; cf. also the glosses equating *culina* with *latrina* in *TLL* s.v. *culina*). This interpretation, though endorsed by Martin West,³³ does not explain sufficiently the presence of θερόμενον. Besides, it is more plausible to suppose a euphemistic substitution of 'lavatory' with 'kitchen' (very much in the way that 'lavatory' or 'bathroom' is itself a euphemistic substitution), than the existence of the 'complex,' or phraseological, euphemism – θέρεσθαι πρὸς ἰπνῶ – for the whole activity in question. In my view, the suggestion by Mouraviev gives a satisfactory solution to the problem. He proposes that θερόμενον is a corruption of θρώμενον (from

³¹ See L. Robert. 'Héraclite à son fourneau. Un mot d'Héraclite dans Aristote (*Parties des animaux*, 645a),' *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études* (IVe section: Sciences historiques et philologiques) 98 (1965-66), p. 61-73.

³² D.S. Robertson. 'On the story of Heraclitus told by Aristotle, *De part. animal.* 645 a 15-23', *PCPhS* 169-171 (1938), p. 10.

³³ M.L. West. *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971. P. 145 n. 3.

the rare word *θράομαι* 'to sit', cf. Philetas, fr. 14 *ap.* Athen. V, 192 e),³⁴ or, better still, of its Ionic form *θρεόμενον*.³⁵

To return to Heraclitus' discussion of the religious images, could the reason for the condemnation of the prayers to statues be that those who pray to statues address gods that are omnipresent, *xunoi*, in a 'particular,' in this-or-that statue, deeming it to be more privileged with access to the deity over other places or things, not realising that what they address in their prayers is but what an empty house is to someone who is looking for its inhabitant? In such case they would indeed be like someone who tried to have a public conversation in the seclusion of their home.³⁶

In this fragment we get closest to what could be termed a critique of the religious practices. Yet failure to recognise, and seclusion from, the universal *logos* that is always at hand is a common predicament of the ignorant multitude (cf. fr. 1, 72, 17, 2 *et al.*). Thus it would seem that the fragment condemns the ignorance of the multitude rather than the religious practice itself. If our reading of the fragment is correct, then the prayer specifically *to* the statue is futile – for gods are everywhere – but is it really to be condemned? For gods are *there also*. Finally, someone who knows 'what gods and heroes are' will realise the paradoxical coincidence of the 'universal' and the 'particular' that appears in the practice of praying to statues (when a 'universal,' ubiquitous god is 'represented,' for cultic purposes, by this or that statue), and which echoes the structure of the unity of opposites that frames human existence in general: trapped in the limitations of the mortal condition, reaching out towards the universal and everlasting truth of the *Logos*. The general tenor of the fragment seems to be analogous to that of fr. 15: if the only meaning of the practice was that which the multitude gives to it, it would really be *ἀναιδέστατα*, but the practice is justifiable insofar as in it there is

³⁴ See S.N. Mouraviev, 'Geraklit: sovremenniki, legenda, ikonografiya,' *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* No. 1 [131] (1975), p. 35-36.

³⁵ *Idem.*, 'Traditio Heraclitea (A). Svod drevnikh istochnikov o Geraklite,' *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii* No. 2 [193] (1990), p. 44.

³⁶ Provided that Aristotle's reference ultimately derives from Heraclitus' *œuvre* (and there are no positive grounds to doubt its authenticity – *contra* Marcovich, *op. cit.*, p. 276-277), it does not matter for our interpretation whether Aristotle's anecdote stems from a certain unknown Heraclitean saying, or whether – as is unlikely – fr. 5b was its inspiration. (For an informative account of how Heraclitean fragments gave rise to anecdotes of Heraclitus' death, see J. Fairweather, 'The Death of Heraclitus,' *GRBS* 14 (1973), p. 233-239.) If the latter case is true, it testifies that at an early stage the reading of fr. 5b analogous to the one proposed here must have been in circulation.

a deeper meaning that can be described in terms of Heraclitus' own philosophy.

Fr. 96 – νέκυες κοπρίων ἐκβλητότεροι – has earned the title of 'a studied insult to ordinary Greek sentiment' from Dodds,³⁷ and many an interpreter has wondered why the dead body should excite such a fierce censure by Heraclitus. To think along these lines, however, means to overlook the possibility that the three words of the fragment may not, after all, be intended as an insult, but as a statement of fact which assumes rather than subverts the existing practices of the Greek funerary rituals. On the phenomenal level, towards the end of the *prothesis* in the Mediterranean climate it must become more and more self-evident that, because of the incipient putrefaction, corpses are, indeed, 'more to be thrown away than dung.' The logical emphasis of the fragment may have been placed on the contradiction between this state of affairs and traditional funeral practices. The surviving words may have constituted a first part of the fragment that would have run something like the following: 'Corpses are more to be thrown away than dung, and yet they are afforded various ritual honours / almost god-like veneration / sumptuous funerals *vel sim.*' On this reading, one does not have to conjecture about 'the absence of the fiery element' or other considerations that could have aroused Heraclitus' animosity against νέκυες (although it does not preclude the possibility of such an interpretation). And if the proposed reading is correct, then we have one more instance of Heraclitus' reference to a widespread practice that conforms to the structure of 'unity of opposites' – viz., a very humble object is treated with almost religious honours. Besides, Heraclitus may be exploiting the ambiguity that was inherent in the Greek attitude to the dead body – in spite of all the funerary honours and veneration, the touching of the corpse causes pollution (see Parker, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2: 'Birth and Death,' esp. p. 32-48).

Although, due to the lack of evidence, this reconstruction must remain conjectural, it is not an entirely speculative conjecture. We have an explicit reference to the honours accorded to the dead in fr. 24: ἀρηϊφάτους θεοὶ τιμῶσι καὶ ἄνθρωποι. Furthermore, Epicharmus' (?) fr. 64 DK, apparently reminiscent of Heraclitus' fr. 96, stresses both 'dung-like' and 'god-like' aspect of the dead body: εἰμὶ νεκρός· νεκρὸς δὲ κόπρος, γῆ δ' ἡ κόπρος ἐστίν· εἰ δ' γῆ θεός ἐστ', οὐ νεκρός, ἀλλὰ θεός (it seems likely that the

³⁷ E.R. Dodds. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951. P. 181.

'earth' that functions as a medium of identification of dung with god is a later Epicharmean (?) addition in order to reduce Heraclitus' paradox into a comic absurdity). And finally, after the radical devaluation of body as such that has become a *locus communis* since Plato, it would not be surprising if the same sentiment was read into Heraclitus' fragment, simultaneously failing to notice its paradoxical content, and only its memorable opening was transmitted through quotations.

It remains to discuss two fragments dealing with another aspect of popular religion – the practice of oracles and prophecy. Fr. 93 speaks of Apollo's oracle at Delphi: ὁ ἄναξ οὐ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει ἀλλὰ σημαίνει 'The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign.' Fr. 92 is the first extant mention of the Sibyl: Σίβυλλα μαινομένῳ στόματι ἀγέλαστα [καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα] φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν 'The Sibyl with raving mouth utters things mirthless [and unadorned and unperfumed], and her voice carries through a thousand years because of the god (*scil.* that speaks through her).'³⁸

Since Antiquity it has been assumed that in fr. 93 Heraclitus, describing the practice of the Delphic oracle, formulates a hermeneutic principle that is to be applied in order to understand his own oblique mode of communication which is, in its turn, grounded in the very structure of reality (fragments 56, 123, 54, as well as 107 seem to testify in favour of this view). 'The giving of a sign,' a mode of communication proper to Apollo, that is said to be 'neither declaring nor concealing,' is, of course, simultaneously *both* declaring and concealing. Speech that conceals its real meaning, and incomprehensible paradox that reveals its meaning to those who know how to read it, seem to be essential features of the Pythian communication.³⁹ Again one can see the contour of the ubiquitous 'unity of opposites' lurking in the background.

If the gist of the paraphrase by Plutarch is correct (and there is no com-

³⁸ The fullest version survives in a paraphrasing quotation by Plutarch (*de Pyth. orac.* 397AB). The boundaries of the authentic text are far from obvious (for discussion of the text see Marcovich, *op. cit.*, p. 281, Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 124-125, Conche, *op. cit.*, p. 154-155). The text presented here reflects a certain consensus of the editors. It seems, however, that Plutarch, although he does not retain Heraclitus' original wording in the second part of the fragment, faithfully paraphrases the sense.

³⁹ H.W. Parke, D.E.W. Wormell. *The Delphic Oracle*. Vol II: The Oracular Responses. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1956. P. xxvi-xxvii (and cf. p. xxiii-xxviii *passim*).

elling reason to disbelieve him, in view of the consensus of other ancient authors quoting or alluding to this fragment (see fr. 75 a¹, b¹, c Marc.), in fr. 92 Heraclitus is contrasting the exterior aspect of Sibylline prophecies with the god-given truth they carry. Viewed from an ‘everyday perspective’ the Sibyl appears to speak ‘with a raving mouth,’ that is to say, in a crazy and absurd way – nonetheless, this is the way that the prophecies coming from Apollo are communicated. Meaningless ‘raving’ of the seemingly mad woman is at the same time a highly meaningful activity in terms of its religious context. In the Sibyl’s discourse, the meaninglessness (that appears looking from an ‘everyday,’ ‘secular’ perspective) combines with a deep, supra-human prophetic meaning.

In fr. 92 Heraclitus employs *μανία*, ‘madness’ or ‘raving,’ in a way that in general terms resembles the usage of this concept in fr. 5 and, most probably, fr. 15: for Heraclitus *μανία* represents the absurdity and paradoxicality of religious practices, apparent when they are viewed from a secular perspective. This absurdity, however, appears to be grounded in the fundamental impossibility of ‘translating’ supra-human reality into human everyday language (cf. in that connection fr. 78, 79, 70, 102 *et al.*). (This impossibility must be akin to the ‘hermeneutic gap’ announced in the very first sentence of Heraclitus *σύγγραμμα*: τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ’ ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι.) Therefore the prophecies of the Sibyl have to be uttered ‘with raving mouth,’ and the lord of Delphi cannot communicate the divine truth other than by ‘giving a sign.’

Conclusions

Instead of ‘Enlightenment radicalism’ we encounter in Heraclitus’ thought the beginnings of the philosophy of religion. Heraclitus tries to give an interpretation of traditional religious practices in terms of his own philosophy, identifying in those practices a structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ that plays a prominent role in his account of reality. Far from being reductionist, Heraclitus treats religious practices in a way similar to his treatment of ethics and politics, which he also tries to incorporate into his highly integrated vision of reality, whereby a universal principle (identical with the content of the *logos* that Heraclitus announces) governs both the cosmos and human society.

Although there seems to be an element of criticism in respect of the religion of the vulgus, Heraclitus seems to resist not the religious practices themselves, but, very much in keeping with his antipopulist ethics (cf. fr. 104, 29, 121), their popular interpretation. Far from rejecting

traditional forms of religion and the mythological representations that underlie them, Heraclitus treats religious practices as one of the human practices in which the structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ operates (other such practices are healing (fr. 58), value choices (fr. 110-111), and the begetting of children (fr. 20)). He supplies a single rationale that explains and structures all the human practices – religious as well as social. The structure of reality that is expressed by this single rationale is also what makes human practices possible: the division into ‘gods’ and ‘men’ (fr. 53) is the condition of the possibility of religion in a way similar to that in which division of humankind into ‘slaves’ and ‘free men’ (fr. 53), or into ‘bad that are many’ and ‘good that are few’ (fr. 104) makes possible social structures and practices in which ‘rule of the one’ or ‘one divine law’ dominates over the ‘many’ (cf. fr. 49, 114, 29, 44, 33, negatively – fr. 121). In this sense, one could agree with Burkert that ‘thus the bridge to tradition is rebuilt’ (*op. cit.*, p. 309). However, the traditional accounts, as well as ordinary human understanding, are criticised inasmuch as they fall short of realising the *logos*, the rationale or the formal structure which is both inherent in human practices and simultaneously transcends them (see fr. 108: ὁκόσων λόγους ἤκουσα, οὐδείς ἀφικνεῖται ἐς τοῦτο ὥστε γινώσκειν ὅτι σοφόν ἐστὶ πάντων κεχωρισμένον, and the beginning of fr. 1).

The interpretation of Heraclitus’ attitude to religious practice offered in the present text differs from that of Catherine Osborne in that I do not think that Heraclitus postulates two rationales – a secular and a religious one – for human practices (cf. Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 93). According to her, religious practice acquires sense only when interpreted within religious context, whereas most people mistakenly interpret religious practices within a secular context (*ibid.*, p. 92-93). In my view, Heraclitus attempts to identify a single rationale – the inherent structure of the ‘unity of opposites’ – that lies behind religious, as well as secular, practices and which the majority of people do not recognise, just as they do not understand the *logos* (fr. 1).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ There are certain more general objections to the way Heraclitus’ thought is interpreted in the aforementioned text by Catherine Osborne. To describe the central categories of Heraclitus’ philosophy she adopts the conceptual structure of ‘context-dependence of significance’ as the most adequate means of description. In itself, it is merely a mildly more anachronistic description of the pattern in Heraclitus’ reasoning that is usually described as the ‘relational constitution of properties.’ It is employed by Heraclitus in several fragments (e.g., fr. 60, 61, 9, 13, 37, 4, 58, 79). However, identifying it as central to Heraclitus’ thinking, Catherine Osborne misinterprets, in my view, the starting point and the goal of Heraclitus’ speculative project. This

It is the presence (and recognition) of the structure of 'unity-in-opposites' that validates religious practices. One must be aware, however, that for Heraclitus the ultimate principle of reality transcends deities involved in the ritual and cult of the traditional religion (in fr. 53, 'War,' Πόλεμος is said to be a 'father' of both 'men and gods;' the 'one wise' 'does not want and want to be called by the name of Zeus' (fr. 32)). 'Mortals and immortals' (fr. 62), 'men' and 'gods' become pairs of opposites in the context of overall unifying structure that lies beyond the division into 'human' and 'divine.' In formulating it, Heraclitus employs images and formulae taken over from traditional religion (the traditional formulaic appellation of Zeus (cf. *Il.* I 544, *Soph. Tr.* 275, *Hes. Theog.* 886, *Pind. O.* VII 34) is employed to introduce the Heraclitean principle, 'War,' in fr. 53). The structure of 'unity of opposites' functions as a formal structure of the ultimate principle of reality that is identified with the cosmic god ('The god: day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. It alters as <fire>, when mingled with perfumes it is named according to the scent of each one' (fr. 67)). Is there, however, any continuity (or transition) between ritual practices and that ultimate reality apart from the identity of the formal structure?

The evidence is too scanty for any certainty on this question. On the other hand, if we attempt to articulate the existing data under the relevant aspect, the picture that emerges would seem to indicate the presence of hierarchically ordered structure of 'unity-of-opposites,' whereby a 'unity' of the lower order becomes one of the 'opposites' in the higher-order structure. The extant mentions of individual gods indicate that for Heraclitus each of them represented a certain unity of opposites. In fr. 15 Dionysus, who is said to be identical with Hades, clearly expresses the unity of

identification implies that the 'unity' of reality is epistemologically prior, and that Heraclitus merely points out how this pre-assumed unity differentiates itself in various contexts. Whereas on my view, Heraclitus starts from fragmented empirical 'givens' and, identifying in them the prevailing structure of the 'unity in opposites,' arrives at a unified account of reality (cf. fr. 110: οὐκ ἐμοῦ ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφὸν ἔστιν ἐν πάντα εἶναι). (The 'context-dependence of significance,' or the 'relational constitution of properties' is, for Heraclitus, one of the instances of the functioning of the structure of the 'unity of opposites.')

Unity results from application of the structure of the 'unity of opposites' as a universal 'law' that unifies reality by providing it with a formal structure of division into opposites. The 'God' in fr. 67, then, is not to be interpreted in the sense: 'There may be one god, but we give the one god a name according to the context we encounter it in' (Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 96), but ought to be understood, if one may draw such an analogy, as a Kantian 'regulative idea' of the ultimate unity of both reality and experience.

life and death, and Apollo is a figure of the unity of truth (or prophetic insight) and madness (fr. 92), as well as of revelation and concealment (fr. 93). If we move to the higher order, the 'gods' of the traditional worldview emerge as one of the elements of a more comprehensive opposition between 'gods' and 'humans' (frr. 53, 62; cf. frr. 30, 24). The opposition between 'gods' and 'humans' reaches its unity in the Πόλεμος, one of Heraclitus' names for the ultimate reality that is described through employment of the traditional religious language (v. *supra*), and is apparently identified with the cosmic 'god.' This ultimate unity of opposites unifies the most fundamental categories of existence (fr. 53) and of experience (fr. 67).⁴¹

Furthermore, if we accept the view that fr. 10 states the general principle of Heraclitus' theoretical procedure, and that the first pair of terms – συλλάψεις· ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα – could be interpreted as an attempt to describe the dialectical movement of thinking, whereby each newly comprehended 'unity-of-opposites' constitutes simultaneously a 'whole' (in the sense that it is internally complete structure) and 'non-whole' (in the sense that it can be assumed into further synthesis, the previous 'unity' thus becoming an element of a larger structure of the 'unity of opposites', and the process is incomplete until the total synthesis is reached),⁴² then the previously outlined hierarchic structuring of Heraclitus' treatment of gods and rituals exemplifies a pattern of precisely such a dialectical movement. On this view, it would seem more likely that Heraclitus presumes not only an analogy of formal structure, but also a theoretically envisaged continuity between cultic practices and the ultimate reality of his philosophical theology.

Once that is said, the difference between Heraclitus' and Xenophanes' projects becomes more apparent. Xenophanes rejects false anthropomorphic theology, current in contemporary religious practices, in an attempt to construct a non-anthropomorphic one. Although there is no evidence in the extant fragments, it is fairly obvious that the construction of such a theology would have required a reform of worship, since religious prac-

⁴¹ Ita Serra, *op. cit.*, p. 140-141; Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

⁴² On 'dialectical' interpretation of fr. 10, see Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 282-284, *similiter* Robinson (Heraclitus. *Fragments*. A text and transl. with a comm. by T.M. Robinson. Toronto a. o.: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 81-82, and, for a slightly different approach, Dilcher, *op. cit.*, p. 112-116. Stokes treats the fragment as a 'transition from the unity of pairs of opposites to the unity of all things' (M.C. Stokes. *One and Many in Presocratic Philosophy*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1971. P. 100 (and see p. 100-102)).

tices are continuous with the underlying theology. Heraclitus, on the contrary, is not a reformer or an *Aufklärer*, but an interpreter, who tries to discern the pattern inherent in the existing practices, and exploit it in the construction of his own philosophical theology.

Heraclitus finds in the traditional religious practices the expression of the *logos*, of the ontological and epistemological structure of reality. In particular, they reflect the structure of human existence – its fundamental limitations and the separation of the ignorant majority from the universal truth of *logos*, on the one hand, and, on the other, the possibility of self-disclosure of this truth to a philosopher who knows how to decipher the hints that the human condition contains. Therefore religious practices, as well as other human practices and institutions – such as city and family, or language – are faithful articulations of the principle that fashions both human existence and the whole of the reality. The main vehicle of Xenophanes' critique of traditional religion, the distinction between 'man-made' religion and the 'true' state of things (a distinction that will later resurface in the νόμος / φύσις antinomy) is overcome.*

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