THE PRESOCRATIC WORLD-PICTURE[1]

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I recently became aware that I had for a long time entertained certain preconceptions about the way in which Presocratic thinkers saw the world, without ever having seriously considered the evidence on which my belief was based. This I have now tried to do, with the results which are set forth in this paper. Since in any case it will deal, in a fairly general way, with problems concerning the interaction of philosophical and religious thought in early Greece, I hope it will have a certain interest, whether or not its readers agree with the thesis put forward. The perennial fascination of that topic has been enhanced in recent years by the discussion provoked by Werner Jaeger's book on The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers, from which I take this sentence as a kind of text for my own reflections: "Though philosophy means death to the old gods, it is itself religion."

The thesis is this, that in bare but significant outline, a common picture of the nature of the Universe, of living creatures, and of divinity was shared by a surprising number of Greek philosophical and religious thinkers of the 6th and early 5th centuries B.C., in spite of the vast differences of temperament which led them to create systems so varied in detail and in philosophical tendency. This world-picture was not the creation of any one of them, but rather seems to have been assumed by all at the outset, as is also suggested by certain indications in Greek literature that it was shared by the unphilosophical multitude. Moreover, if I am right, to grasp the nature of this framework is essential to an understanding of the solutions offered to the problem of existence both by rationalist cosmology and by mystical religion.[2] I cannot here give all the evidence for its validity, nor attempt to solve the question

[1] This paper has been much improved as a result of discussions with Mr. G. S. Kirk, who must not, however, be thought to agree with every point made in it.

[2] By 'mystical' in this context I mean that type of religion which envisages the possibility of a union, however achieved, between human and divine.

whence it arose in the first place, if it was not from the mind of any single Greek thinker — whether from earlier Hellenic mythology, from Oriental lore, or from some universal trait of human psychology. What I shall do is, first, to describe this outline-picture simply and briefly without reference to any evidence. Then I shall try to show, by means of some examples, how it can be detected behind various philosophical and religious systems of Greece before the time of Socrates, and to estimate its effect upon them.

We live in a world, or universe, to which I shall refer, as did some of the Greeks themselves, by the name of 'kosmos.' The word 'universe' is too wide, suggesting that it contained the whole sum of existence, which I shall argue was not the case. 'World,' on the other hand, might be too narrow, since we sometimes use it to signify only the earth. From the time of Anaximander, the kosmos was usually regarded as spherical, though Anaximenes may have believed it, exceptionally, to be a hemisphere. It was bounded by the sky, whose spherical shape seemed to most to be a plain inference from observation, when its direct impact on the eye was combined with a study of the motions of the fixed stars, which were generally supposed to lie on its circumference. The earth, which might be either spherical or cylindrical in shape, lay at the centre of this sphere, and Anaximander had already advanced to the view that it could float freely in space without the need of any material support. Within the sphere, at different levels, the sun, moon and planets move in their orbits.

Beyond the cosmic sphere — and this is the essential part of my description — there was very far from being nothingness. It floated, as it were, in a circumambient substance of infinite, or at least of indefinite extent. This substance was of a purer, higher nature than those which made up the contents of the kosmos itself. It was alive and eternally so, sentient and intelligent, in fact 'the divine element' (*τὸ θεῖον*). In its pristine purity and perfection, it existed only outside the kosmos, but — what is of the highest importance for religion and philosophy alike — in more or less adulterated form it penetrated the kosmos and was mingled with its creatures.

The contents of the kosmos, apart from any share which they may have in this divine substance, are composed of the four 'op-

posites': hot, cold, wet and dry. To ask whether the neuter adjectives refer to qualities or substances would be anachronistic. The contrary natures of these account for the destructibility of the composite creatures of the physical world, since they are mutually destructive.

> "Hot, cold, wet and dry, four champions fierce,
> Strive here for mastery."

The divine, on the other hand, has none of the contraries in its nature, since it exists eternally, exempt from generation and decay. Whether it is in any sense physical, and if so of what kind of body, is a question which will turn up at various stages of our discussion.

That is the general picture. Can we suppose that it was accepted by such diverse thinkers as the Milesian cosmologists, Heraclitus, the Orphic writers of religious poems, and others? And how did it affect their views on that primary concern of the religious mind, the nature of the human soul and its relation to the universe in which it lives?

The early 6th century B.C. saw a simultaneous outburst of spiritual activity in two spheres which superficially seem widely different. There was the intense intellectual curiosity about the origin and nature of the universe, and attempt to solve its problems by rational means, which is represented by the Milesians Thales Anaximander and Anaximenes; and there was the deeply religious conception of the nature and fate of the human soul, and of the means to its salvation, which is generally called Orphic because there is good evidence that it was taught, even if not exclusively, in certain religious poems attributed to the authorship, or at least the inspiration, of the mythical singer Orpheus.

Since the Milesians assumed that the universe had evolved from a single basic substance, their problem was that of the One and the Many, i.e. in this case what was the nature of this one original substance and how had it become differentiated into the multiplicity which we see today? Concerning the world of Thales, generated from moisture — the precondition of life, as Aristotle noted — we know too little to say whether it fits in with the picture I have outlined. At least the statements attributed to him, that the whole is alive and full of gods or spirits, need not conflict with it.

Anaximander called the first substance the Boundless or the Undefined. According to Aristotle (whom, with Burnet, Ross and others, I am inclined to believe), he argued that none of the physical bodies in the present kosmos could be primary, since owing to their antagonism it would not have produced the others but rather have prevented their ever coming into existence. In this undifferentiated mass, the antagonistic properties were as yet latent. Since it was eternally in motion, it happened that in a certain part of it the 'opposites' began to separate themselves out. Hence arose what Anaximander called the germ (*γόνιμον*) of a kosmos; and I do not think that this use of language appropriate to *organic* nature was metaphorical. It is unnecessary to trace again the development of the embryo world, or re-assess the mixture of unconsciously surviving mythical thought and precociously scientific acumen which it displays. Our interest is in the matrix in which the kosmos was formed, and which still encompasses it all round. It is the *arche*, archetype or original stuff of everything, and must have existed from all time. This one might suppose, in an age of evolutionary science, to be the lowest and most elementary form of matter. Not so the Greek. "And this, they say," wrote Aristotle in describing the views of these early philosophers, "is the divine; for it is immortal and indestructible, as Anaximander and most of the natural philosophers maintain."[3] It was not only said to 'encompass' all things, but also to 'guide' or 'govern' them. For a Greek philosopher of this and later ages the essential mark of life was the power of self-movement. This the *arche* must have if the kosmos is to come to birth within it and there is no prior *arche* to move it. It was then something living. And to all Greeks, whether philosophers or not, everlasting life was the essential mark of a god. 'Gods' and 'immortals' were interchangeable terms. The philosophers had outgrown the anthropomorphic conceptions of their contemporaries, but they had by no means given up the idea of divinity, and that was how they still interpreted it. It may have been Anaximander himself who substituted the more abstract term 'divinity' for the more concrete term 'god,' as Jaeger thinks. It would be in keeping with his other neuter expressions 'the hot,' 'the cold' and so forth. But so long as the idea is retained, other

[3] Phys. iii. 4. 203 b 13.

characteristics besides the bare scientific minimum of self-motion are bound to cling to it. It must for instance be sentient and thinking.

This characteristic of the primal world-stuff comes out more clearly in the thought of Anaximander's younger contemporary Anaximenes, and still more clearly in the 5th century philosopher Diogenes of Apollonia, who followed Anaximenes in holding this substance to be a form of air. For the ability of air to generate other forms of matter, these two appealed to the phenomena of condensation and rarefaction. Moreover since in accordance with the ideas of the time it must also be shown to be the life-principle, they explicitly drew the parallel between its action in the universe and the function of souls in human bodies. "Just as our soul" said Anaximenes, "which is air, is the controlling and unifying principle in us, so breath and air surround the whole kosmos."[4] The genuineness of this particular fragment has been doubted, but largely from a prior belief that such a parallel would not have been drawn until a later date. Since, however, I have been struggling in vain against a growing conviction that this close relationship between the divine principle without and the soul within was precisely a mark of 6th century thought — taken so much for granted that it underlies Milesian cosmology and Orphic theology alike — I naturally do not find this argument strong. Whether or not it is a word-for-word quotation, I take it to be a correct statement of his belief. There is in any case other evidence that Anaximenes described the soul of man as air, which was also for him the self-moving stuff of the whole universe.

Diogenes, his follower, started by repeating the Milesian principle that "all things are differentiations of the same thing,"[5] and naming this thing as air. Like the others he conceived himself to be giving a rational and scientific account, and for the most part his language is correspondingly matter-of-fact. Yet when he comes to describe this primal air, there is a more exalted ring about his phrases. "That which has intelligence," he says, "is in my view what men call air; and by it all are steered, and it has power over all; I believe that this very thing is God, and reaches everything,

[4] Fr. 2 DK.
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and orders all things, and is in all things, and there is not anything which does not partake in it."[6] (Jaeger has drawn attention to the hymnodic form and phraseology of this fragment.) It is consistent with this when Theophrastus ascribes to him the assertion that in living creatures "the air within," i.e. the soul, is "a small part of the god."[7]

If we turn from these attempts at scientific cosmology to the contemporary mystical tradition which I shall call Orphic, we find beliefs like these. The soul is alien to the body, which is to it like a prison or a tomb from which it cries out for release.[8] But it is caught not only in a single body but in a weary cycle of existence which involves its incarceration in a whole series of bodies, animal or human — for all nature is akin. (We may perhaps allow ourselves to be reminded of the single basic substance of the Milesians.) At death it goes to a place of punishment or happiness, according to the life it has led, which is temporary. Every thousand years it must be reincarnated in a mortal body. But performance of the proper rituals and adherence to the prohibitions of the Orphic life could so purify the soul that after ten incarnations, perhaps even after three successive Orphic lives, it could escape from the body altogether. It would then be itself a god, happy, blessed and immortal.[9]

In what kind of cosmology were these events set? Could it have been anything like that depicted by the Milesian rationalists? Aristotle gives us a clue, for he says (De an. 410 b 28) that the Orphic poems teach that "the soul comes into us from the whole as we breathe, borne by the winds." In spite of the sharp antithesis between soul and body, we are not yet at the stage when the former can be thought of as non-material. It is of the nature of air. as in the Milesian tradition, at least when it enters the body. In Greek thought in general, both popular and philosophical, *aer* was the less pure substance which filled the lower reaches of the sky around the earth. It meant cloud as much as air. In the glorious

[6] Fr. 5.

[7] DK ii p. 56 l. 3.

[8] For Linforth's view of this passage (Arts of Orpheus, University of California Press 1941, p. 147), see Guthrie, The Greeks and their Gods (Methuen 1950) p. 311 n. 3.

[9] For the evidence on which this paragraph is based, see Guthrie, Orpheus and Greek Religion (Methuen 1935) ch. v.

outer heavens was not *aer* but *aither*, the name of which is taken from the root of αἴθειν 'to blaze,' so that it was often identified with fire. *Aither* was living and divine. A character in Euripides says that it is what men mean by Zeus, and indeed the fairly general use of the name Zeus to mean the sky points in the same direction. The mystic believed that this was the substance to which man's soul was akin and with which it could be utterly identified if we could slough off the impurities of intra-cosmic existence and realize the divine that was in us. So long as it is caught in the wheel of reincarnation it is, as Empedocles said of himself, tossed about among the four cosmic elements in the regions of *aer*. These elements to the Milesian philosopher were the ceaselessly-warring opposites, and the reason, in Empedocles's doctrine, why the soul is at their mercy is an appropriate one: it is that in its sinfulness it put its trust in the works of strife and bloodshed. Thus the escape from the 'weary wheel' (to use the Orphic phrase) is at the same time an escape outside the kosmos, towards reunion with the pure, divine substance — the δῖος αἰθήρ — that lies outside.

This union of the individual soul with the *aither* may not always have been linked in the Greek mind with the elaborate Orphic doctrine of the cycle of reincarnation. In itself it seems to have been fairly widespread. There are several references to it in Euripides, besides the line of the epitaph on the Athenians who fell at Potidaea in 432:

"*Aither* received their souls, their bodies earth." [10]

If I may be allowed to adduce also a late witness, I think that the description of the next world in Vergil's Aeneid owes much to the Orphic doctrine, and Elysium is there said to lie "in the broad fields of the air." (Aen. vi. 887.) It is explained that at this stage the souls which must submit to reincarnation are not yet sorted out from the more fully purified. These latter, when the circle (*orbis*) of their time is complete, will have sloughed off the last of

[10] I.G. i. 442. If some think this is to read too much into the inscription, I can only state my own opinion, which is based on the general belief in the divinity of *aither*, on parallels like Eur. Hel. 1014 ff. (quoted below, p. 98), and on other considerations which find their place in my text. Their cumulative effect seems to me considerable.

the impurity which clings to them, and what will be left is described as "the aetherial sense, the fire of unmixed ray" (ib. 743 ff.).

In comparative studies it is sometimes said that the Orphic doctrine must always be opposed to any system which involves the annihilation of a soul's individuality after death, since the permanence of individuality is required by the doctrine of reincarnation. It is true that so long as the soul is destined for reincarnation it must retain its individuality. But there is a misunderstanding here which vitiates the comparison, and it is due to a failure to visualize this very widely accepted world-picture which the Orphics shared with others. To them the real contrast was not between life and death — life in the body on earth and life out of it — but between what went on within the kosmos and what outside it. It is between life within the circle of reincarnation — during which, whether in or out of the body, the soul has the taint of the body clinging to it — and the bliss of escape and reunion, which is the only true immortality. Retention of individuality means that the soul is still *airy*, still clogged with the lower elements within the kosmos. The final goal, like that of every true mystic, is the utter *loss* of self in the infinity of the divine.

I hope I have shown that the thinkers so far mentioned shared that general picture of the universe which I described at the beginning. To select (for it is necessary here to be selective) a more difficult case, can we say the same about the enigmatic Heraclitus at the beginning of the 5th century? Most people would say no, and those who might be inclined to agree with me are not on the whole the people who have used the soundest arguments about this remarkable man. Heraclitus seems to have founded his whole cosmology on a ruthless acceptance of the doctrine of opposites with all its consequences. The components of the kosmos were engaged in endless warfare, and each lives by the death of the other (fr. 76 Diels-Kranz). Any apparent stability is as the stability of two armies locked in deadly conflict of which neither has as yet prevailed. Peace and harmony, such as the Pythagoreans desired, would be undesirable even if possible, for they would mean universal death. Flux and change are the conditions of life: war is the father of all (fr. 53, cf. 80). He said that his kosmos was

always and is and will be an ever-living fire, in measures being kindled and in measures extinguished (fr. 30). Clearly he did not believe, like those against whom he fulminates, that it was at any time generated from a single basic substance. The fire which is for ever being kindled and extinguished provided the best description of the everlasting change and mutual destruction by which the kosmos lives (cf. fr. 90).

We may notice, however, that this description is applied to κόσμον τόνδε, 'this order' or 'this organism.' Pythagoras was credited with having been the first to give the word 'kosmos' the definite meaning of 'world,' and we are perhaps not justified in assuming that with a thinker so little later as Heraclitus it had crystalized so as to have that meaning naturally and inevitably. Nevertheless, even if he had in mind, as I have suggested, its more general meaning of 'order' or 'organism,' I have little doubt that the order to which he refers is the world of our direct experience, that in which the natural elements, or opposites, play their parts — in fact that part of the whole sum of existence in which his predecessors too had recognized the presence and interaction of contraries, though without drawing the same uncompromising conclusions as their critic. Yet in view of his tirades against them we must look for something more positive than this if we are going to maintain that he too believed that this was not all, but that there was an ageless and deathless divine substance outside the kosmos. Is there any evidence at all for the existence of something stable and permanent in his system, outside the flux of the 'way up and down'?

We immediately think of that strange conception which he called the *logos*. It is first of all the word or message which he brings, but one with a curiously independent existence, for he can exhort men to listen "not to me but to the logos" (fr. 50). Next, in spite of the doctrine of universal flux, he says that it "exists for ever," (fr. 1)[11] and that "all things come to pass in accordance with this *logos*" (fr. 1). He also identifies it with what he calls "the common" (fr. 2, cf. 113). There is, he says, a world common to all, but men are like sleepers, each living his private dream and not waking up to

[11] Aristotle remarked (Diels-Kranz A 4, vol. i, p. 144, and note on p. 150) that the word ἀεὶ in this sentence might qualify either the preceding ἐόντος or the following ἀξύνετοι. I am inclined to think that H. intended the former, but in any case the permanence of the λόγος is sufficiently evident apart from this particular phrase.

the real world which all share alike (fr. 89). The *logos* describes, the *logos is*, this common element, which clearly therefore has a permanent validity transcending the flux of generated things.

It may still be said that, after all, *logos* only means something like 'word,' 'account' or 'argument,' whereas what we are looking for is a substantial and (so far as we have met it hitherto) material reality. But is that all that *logos* means to Heraclitus? We know at least that the divine and ruling element of the earlier cosmologies was at the same time identified with the primal and everlasting stuff from which the kosmos had evolved. One reason, I am convinced, for the notorious obscurity of Heraclitus is that thought has now reached a stage when matter and spirit (or the abstract) really require to be separated, but the separation has not yet been consciously effected. His ruling principle has become more and more intellectualized, as its name *logos* suggests, but to think of it as non-material is as yet beyond his range. "Wisdom," he wrote, "is one thing, to know the *gnome* — thought — which steers all things through all things" (fr. 41). Thought (and the *gnome* is surely the same thing as the *logos*) is the active principle directing the universe, as in the earlier philosophers, and the word 'steer' (*κυβερνᾶν*) is that already used of the divine substance by Anaximander as also later by Diogenes with his air-god and others. For the next step we have to rely not on an actual fragment of Heraclitus but on a statement of his views by Sextus Empiricus, who has been accused of importing into them at this point the doctrines of post-Aristotelian philosophers like the Stoics. If I do not see the need to associate myself with the accusation, it is because the doctrine in question is one which we have already found in such diverse pre-Platonic thinkers as Anaximenes, the Orphics and Diogenes of Apollonia, and could find also (on Aristotle's testimony) in Democritus; the doctrine, namely, that there is an immortal mind-stuff of which mortal creatures acquire a tincture by breathing it in either as air itself or with the air. Heraclitus, then, said Sextus (Diels-Kranz A 16, vol. i, p. 148), held that "what surrounds us" (*τὸ περιέχον ἡμᾶς*) is rational and endowed with mind, and this divine reason (*logos*), according to him, we draw in by breathing and thus become thinking creatures ourselves. Here again we have the divine substance, though also called by Heraclitus *logos*, ap-

pearing as something akin to air or breath,[12] and we may also safely identify it with the fire which occupied such a paramount place in his system. According to the Christian writer Hippolytus (Ref. ix. 10), Heraclitus "says that this fire is rational and is the cause of the ordering of the whole." The notion of a 'fire' which was 'rational' illustrates well the curious stage of thought when matter and spirit are tugging at the bonds which unite them, but have not yet got free. It is of course true that later philosophies like the Stoic deliberately adopted a materialistic pantheism even after the distinction drawn so sharply by Plato; but when the actual fragments of Heraclitus are compared with the paraphrases of later writers, it is quite clear that he is still at the more naïve stage before any distinction had been consciously drawn. His conception is no more than a development of the living and divine world-stuff of the Milesians.

There is of course no inconsistency in identifying the divine *logos* at once with air and fire. Both in earlier cosmologies and in popular belief, as we have seen, the air around us was only the less pure form of the fiery element — called indifferently fire or *aither* — which occupied the outer regions of the sky. In its pure form it is not visible flame, but something invisible, which Aristotle describes as 'a dry exhalation' (Meteor. 341 b 6 ff). By the time it reaches our nostrils it has of course lost its pristine purity, and therefore the life and intellect which it gives to us, though containing a divine element, have not the perfection of the fiery mind which rules the universe.

This view of the soul's nature is carried out, somewhat quaintly, in the further fragments referring to it. Since its true nature is fiery, therefore "the dry soul is wisest and best" (fr. 118). The wetter a soul the worse it is (the foolish behaviour of drunkards is, in fr. 117, brought into connection with this), and "to become water is death to souls" (fr. 36, cf. 77). But death is not complete extinction. Souls, like the fiery sun and everything else in the kosmos, must continue to alternate on the upward and downward path of destruction and rebirth, and so he continues: "but out of water

[12] R. B. Onians (The Origins of European Thought, Cambridge 1951) has noted that in an age before writing has become familiar, speech and thought are naturally conceived materially, as composed of breath. He brings this idea into connection with Heraclitus's *logos* on p. 77, n. 9.

comes soul." Because the soul is thus involved in the eternal flux, where nothing is the same for two instants together, most scholars have held that Heraclitus could have had no belief in its immortality like that of the Pythagoreans and Orphics. But the law of flux applies only to the kosmos, not to the fiery divinity which in its purity surrounds it. If I am asked how in this particular case I know that in its pure state it lies around, i.e. outside the kosmos rather than within its boundary — that conviction which as I say has been gradually and almost involuntarily growing on me — I can only reply that, were it wholly within it, it would be subject to its flux and change, and could not be steadfast, a λόγος ἐὼν ἀεί.

If then a soul lives a foolish, or wet life, it goes the way of water and its labours in the cosmic treadmill may be endless; but if it is wise, and learns to follow the *logos*, to which it is akin, then by all the habits of ancient thought it will be assimilated to that *logos* and escape outside the kosmos from the cycle of becoming. As a character in Euripides says (Hel. 1014 ff.) echoing one of the more esoteric of contemporary beliefs; "The mind of the dead lives not, yet is its thought (γνώμη) immortal, as it plunges into the immortal *aither*." For all his haughty independence, I do not think that Heraclitus freed himself from this conception of the philosophical religion of his time.

In the slightly later figure of Empedocles we find a unique combination of the scientific and mystical sides of thought. Of him indeed, as Freeman truly said,[13] we hardly know how to speak, and we sometimes feel inclined to echo the verdict of Lucretius that he 'seems scarce born of mortal stock.' Here I must limit myself strictly to what is relevant to my theme. Parmenides had shown up the logical difficulties involved in any theory which derived the world from a single substance. Empedocles therefore promoted the four commonly recognized substances — earth, water, air and fire — to the rank of primary elements, or 'roots' as he called them. The manifold and changing world was the result of temporary combinations of these indestructible root-substances in different proportions. They did not combine of their own independent motion or volition. For the first time the cause of motion is separated

[13] History of Sicily ii. 342.

from the bodies moved. There were two contrary forces working in the world, which he named Love and Strife. In the scientific parts of his writings they appear as purely physical forces of attraction and repulsion. Love, or Harmony, draws portions of the diverse elements together to form composite creatures: Strife separates them into great masses of their own kind like the earth or the sea. The world-process is one of alternating epochs, in which Love and Strife prevail in turn.

Yet not even now, when moving force has been separated from moved bodies, are the forces thought of as non-material. They are in space, like subtle self-moving currents of fluid or vapour. Consequently the time of the triumph of Love, when she holds all the elements in complete fusion, is described in spatial terms as the time when Love has penetrated the kosmos through and through, and driven Strife outside, where it lies all around like an envelope. In due course Strife begins to penetrate again and Love is gradually driven outside. A world such as we live in is of course only possible in the intermediate stages, when the elements are partly separated and partly combined. Our own is the period when Strife is gaining ascendency. At this point we touch the religious side of the system, and learn that the two opposite forces are not only physical but moral in their effects. Love or Harmony is the force of good, and Strife of evil, for Empedocles, following his Pythagorean and Orphic teachers, is a convinced moral dualist. He adapted to his own cosmology the Orphic doctrines of the soul and its doom of reincarnation. It is a fallen *daimon*, a being akin to the gods. When men first appeared on the earth the influence of Love was far stronger, and they were sinless. But Strife corrupted them, and they turned to sin and above all to bloodshed. From that time they are condemned to wander, as he says, "thrice ten thousand seasons from the abodes of the blessed, being born in all manner of mortal forms." He himself is one of these, "an exile from the gods and a wanderer," tossed without rest from one element to another.

Yet it was not too late to turn again to the ways of Love, and the soul which did so might when its allotted time was up win freedom from the cycle of births and rejoin the divinity to which it was akin. Empedocles knew this, and felt that his release was at hand. Hence his proud boast: "I am among you as an immortal

god, no longer a mortal," strikingly echoed by the well-known verses scratched on sheets of gold and interred in the grave of an initiate of a mystic sect in his own Western land. There the soul is assured that if it can prove its initiated status to the guardians of the next world, they will greet it with the welcome: "Happy and blessed one, thou shalt be god instead of mortal."

Now I feel sure that Empedocles's views on the soul were intended to fit into his whole world-system. Some have thought this impossible, on the ground that his scientific views left no room for Orphic doctrines of a reincarnated and potentially divine soul. This is in fact the recognized crux of his thought. Certainly so far as the empirical world was concerned, he was a thorough-going materialist, even extending his materialism to the mechanism of sensation and thought. "To Empedocles" said Aristotle (De an. 427 a 21 ff.) "sensation and thought are alike of the body," and it seems to be true. A line of Empedocles himself mentions the blood about the heart as the reasoning part of man. Thus the nexus of faculties whereby we perceive and draw conclusions about the world around us was clearly considered by him to belong to man in his incarnate state, to be a function of the body and therefore only a resultant of that temporary and perishable combination of the physical root-substances. To suppose that in speaking of the divine and immortal part of himself he meant these sensitive and reasoning faculties of the incarnate mortal is indeed to accuse him of gross inconsistency. But there is no need so to suppose. He appears not to have called the divine self ψυχή, the usual Greek word for the soul. It is a *daimon*, to whom the body and all its organs are alien.[14] "Clothed in an unfamiliar garment of flesh" is how he describes it (fr. 126). There is much earlier lore about *daimones*, which he must have taken for granted. The history of the conception is quite different from that of ψυχή, and in many ways foreign to our own associations with the word 'soul.' Sometimes *daimon* is used interchangeably with θεός, god. Where there is a distinction, as in Plato's Symposium, *daimones* are a race of intermediate beings dwelling in the elements between heaven and earth. They go up and down over the earth clad in *aer*, says Hesiod. Similarly in

[14] This point is made by E. R. Dodds in The Greeks and the Irrational (University of California Press 1951), pp. 152 f.

Empedocles (as Rostagni noted) the drama of the *daimon* is enacted among the elements between heaven and earth; and as he, following the Pythagorean and Orphic tradition, believed, it can for its sins be imprisoned in a mortal body, though itself an alien spirit. This it is which in stories of strange seers like Abaris, Epimenides and Hermotimus, could leave the body temporarily in search of divine knowledge. This it is which in Pindar's words is active when the limbs are sleeping. For its permanent release knowledge is indeed necessary, but not the knowledge of the senses, whose object is the elements within the kosmos, and whose foundation as we have seen is purely material. "With earth we see earth, with water, water." (fr. 109 v. i.) On the other hand "Blessed is the man who has gained the riches of divine wisdom" (fr. 132). Like knows like, and to know the divine means to become divine, and moreover: "It is not possible for us to set the divine before our eyes, or to lay hold on it with our hands." (fr. 133.)

There *is* a divinity outside the natural world. It has no bodily parts at all, but is "only a sacred and unutterable Mind darting through the whole world with rapid thoughts" (fr. 134). To this divinity there is something in ourselves that is akin.

Much must no doubt remain obscure. Even if we possessed the whole of his works, it would not be easy to penetrate the inmost thoughts — the *adyta cordis* — of a man like this. The fragments do not make clear the relationship of the divine Mind to Love, but they must, one would think, have been practically identical, Love representing the work of this Mind in so far as it enters the kosmos, where as we saw it finds itself opposed by the power of evil. Hippolytus (vii. 31), in a passage somewhat overlaid by Stoic preconceptions, speaks of the δίκαιος λόγος in Empedocles as something mediating between the contrasting principles of Love and Strife and working on the side of Love. We know from the fragments the importance of *logos* in his system. Perhaps this, the typically Hellenic spirit of just proportion and measure, is the divine element, the sacred Mind, like the *logos* of Heraclitus. This is speculative, but at least if we recall our general cosmological framework — the spherical kosmos of warring opposites lapped in the circumambient divine, which in a more or less adulterated

form penetrates the cosmic sphere — we can I think find places in it for Empedocles's sacred Mind, his Love, his *daimones* which are fallen gods and at the same time our own true selves. For to mystic and rationalist alike small portions of the divine were imprisoned in animal and human bodies. And Empedocles was both rationalist and mystic.

We must not lose sight of what even a modern authority like Arnold Toynbee calls the "thoroughly scientific nature" of Empedocles's thought, nor forget that in his materialistic physical system there was no room for any divine purpose or intelligent creation. Our kosmos is the purely chance result of the interplay of opposite forces of attraction and repulsion. Things combined "as they happened to run together" (fr. 59). Apparent teleological development is explained on a theory of the survival of the fittest. Have we then at last caught Empedocles thinking in water-tight compartments? It may seem strange, indeed scarcely defensible, to explain the physical universe thus on the lines of a purely mechanistic materialism and at the same time to believe in the existence of a "sacred and unutterable mind darting through the whole kosmos with rapid thoughts." But was it not of the essence of early Greek cosmology and mysticism to hold that the whole matter and order of the kosmos were the enemy of divinity? We may usefully draw a distinction between these ideas as the Presocratic philosophers used them and as they were modified and transmuted by Socrates and Plato.

Plato was immensely attracted by the Orphic view that the soul was alien to the body, something whose true home was not of this world. With that went a belief in the necessary imperfection of the material world in contrast to the perfection of the eternal realities and of deity. But on one point he and Socrates protested vigorously against the world-picture of all their predecessors, rational and mystical alike. For it was a conscious protest against all of them when Socrates in the Phaedo, speaking in particular of Anaxagoras, maintained that if there were a divine mind, then it must have ordered all things for the best. This was only to bring into the open a contradiction of which earlier thinkers seem to have been curiously unaware. It was exactly as Socrates complained. They spoke of a divinity; they even said, in their favorite phrase, that

it 'steered all things'; but when it came to explaining the genesis and maintenance of the physical world, they made no use of the divine principle as a cause, but only adduced, as he said, 'airs and aethers and waters and many other absurdities.' It must be admitted, says Plato in the Timaeus,[15] that because of the irreducible minimum of irrationality in matter, this world of ours can never be perfect or eternal; but because God is the orderer of it, he has ensured that it is the best that any physical world could be — in fact a reflection of the eternal world in terms of time and matter. Here we step from the Presocratic world to the Platonic; and we may judge both of the difference between them and of the extent to which the one prepared the ground for the other.

One general point in conclusion. There is a temptation for us, as historians of Greek religion, to be a little over-analytical in our approach. Regarding rationalist and mystic as contrasting and mutually exclusive terms, we are apt to classify our Greeks as belonging to one or the other class — the Milesians on one side of the fence, the Orphics on the other, with a disapproving frown for Empedocles because he insists on keeping one leg on each side. Surely what Empedocles should teach us is that we are in a period of thought before such distinctions had any meaning. All shared a common background which was neither rational nor mystical exclusively. To ignore or deny this background called for a degree of originality of which few were capable. I have expressed my belief that even the contemptuous and highly individual Heraclitus was unable to free himself from it, and though my examples could not be exhaustive, the Pythagorean idea that the *ouranos* breathes in some of the infinite breath outside seems to presuppose a similar framework.[16] (How for the Pythagoreans anything ἄπειρον could be divine is perhaps a problem, which at present I can only mention.) One man must be admitted to have denied the general scheme, the most self-sufficient and original of them all, whose thought was a challenge to subsequent Greek philosophy. The way of truth according to Parmenides leaves no room for any infinite divine substance beyond the one spherical Being. But I doubt if there is any other clear exception. Aristotle, who perhaps under-

[15] 29 e foll., 37 d.
[16] Aristotle, Phys. iv. 6. 213 b 23.

stood his predecessors better than some modern scholars will allow, showed himself aware of the general view when he wrote that there was indeed a lot of mythical lumber in the thought of the ancients, such as the representation of gods in the form of men and even of animals, but that all alike shared one central idea, namely that "all nature is encompassed with the divine." And in this, he added, they were right.