

HERACLITUS AND THE MYSTERIES

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Serge Mouraviev

Kryptein amathiên kresson ê es to meson férein “Hiding one's ignorance is better than making a show of it”, Heraclitus said. This is a wise piece of advice which unfortunately I shall have to completely ignore today. In fact it is my duty to tell you from the start that I am still almost totally ignorant on the subject of mysteries. If, notwithstanding this ignorance of mine, I accepted Apostolos' rather late invitation, it was because it came precisely at a moment when I felt that I badly need some deeper insight into that subject, and gave me a rare opportunity to learn more about it from some of the best specialists in the field. I have already learned a lot from the speakers who preceded me.

You may ask whence this sudden urge. The answer is simple. Having completed 90 % of my planned work on the *texts* of the Heraclitean corpus, fragments and doxography included (I shall be sending soon to the publisher the volume containing Heraclitus' *placita*),¹ I am now beginning to focus my attention on reconstructing the philosopher's *doctrine*. This requires acquaintance with what preceded it (early theogonies and cosmogonies, including the Orphics and the Milesians) and what accompanied it. This accompaniment mainly consists of Heraclitus' relation to politics and religion, and the latter includes his possible Eleusinian priesthood, his identification of life and death, his probable adherence to Orphic psychology and eschatology, his condemnation of popular religious practices, his pantheon and his understanding of the place and rôle played by the gods he names or alludes to. On each of these subjects I shall expound the Heraclitean evidence we have and ask you whether there is some external evidence, connected with the mysteries, which could throw some light on it. My paper therefore will consist not of certainties, but of interrogations. I shall cursorily enumerate the facts and features to be found in our sources suggesting the existence of some connection between Heraclitus and the mysteries and then formulate the questions to which I have so far no ready answers to propose.

I

I shall begin with the **biographical and anecdotic testimonies**.

First of all, we are told Heraclitus was entitled to the honorary charge of *basileus*, but gave it up in favour of an unnamed brother of his (**M 8^a**)². This probably means that he was a member of the Androclids or Basilids, the royal dynasty descending from the legendary founder of Ephesus, Androclos, son of Codrus, a dynasty that was deprived of its rights to kingship in the first half of the 6th century

¹ Vol. III.2 *Placita* [now published] of my *Heraclitea : Édition critique complète des témoignages sur la vie et l'œuvre d'Héraclite d'Éphèse* (St. Augustin, 1999- [in progress]). Have already appeared: vols. II.A.1-4 *Traditio* (1999-2003), III.1 *Memoria* (2003), III.3.A *Fragmenta : Le Langage de l'Obscur* (2002), III.3.B/i-iii *Fragmenta : Textes et Notes* (2006). — Numbers beginning with the letter **T** refer to the texts of *Traditio*, with an **M**, to those of *Memoria*, with a **D**, to those of the *Placita*, with an **F** to the fragments (same numeration as in Diels—Kranz B-fragments, but with additions).

² Antisth (Rhod. ?) *FGrH* 508 F 10 ap. Diog. Laert. IX, 6 [T 36 = T 254 = T 705,58] σημείον δ' αὐτοῦ τῆς μεγαλοφροσύνης Ἀντισθένης φησὶν ἐν Διαδοχαῖς· ἐκχωρῆσαι γὰρ τὰδελφῶι τῆς βασιλείας.

by a tyrant named Pythagoras³. In fact, this dynasty appears to have survived another half millenium, at least until the 1st century BC, since Strabo tells us it still existed in his time (or possibly — but this is less likely in view of the plural *phasi* — in the time of his source, Pherecydes of Athens) and performed some honorary functions like presiding at the *agônes* and at the sacred rites of Dêmêtêr Eleusinia (M 8^{bc}).⁴ Thus Heraclitus could have been priest of the Ephesian outgrowth of the Eleusinian mysteries... Unfortunately we do not know whether this outgrowth and the privileges related to it already existed in his time, but if they did,⁵ and even if his abdication prevented him from performing his priestly obligations, he must have received some kind of appropriate education and have been initiated into the mysteries.

My first questions will be then about the **non-Athenian early outgrowths of the Eleusinian *teletai***. *Are there other early instances of such outgrowths? What evidence do we possess about them?* (I found none so far.)

Secondly, there is the story about his depositing his treaty in the Artemisium (M 48^{ab})⁶ and the legend about his living like a hermit (M 22^a *anachorêsas*) near the temple.⁷ The cult of Artemis was of course the main Ephesian cult, but there seems to be evidence that this goddess was not without connections with the Eleusinian mysteries, more precisely with Dêmêtêr⁸, whose daughter she was said to be, and Korê with whom she shared a number of features or was even identified. And there were temples of Artemis both in Eleusis and in Agra.

The obvious questions (without obvious answers) are: *How real is the mystical association between Artemis and Dêmêtêr and / or Korê? If it is real, from when can it be dated? Could there be any link between the Dêmêtêr mystical cult and the official Artemis cult? As a possible Eleusinian priest, would Heraclitus have been perceived as a colleague or as a rival by the Artemisian priests?*

Thirdly, one fragment of Heraclitus and four versions of one and the same anecdote have reached us featuring the *kukeôn*, the barley posset which Dêmêtêr prepared for herself after refusing the wine which Metaneira had offered her (*HDem.* 210) and which was drunk by the worshippers during the third night of the Big Eleusinian mysteries. The fragment says: *Even the mixture (kukeôn) desintegrates when stirred (or mixed)*.⁹ The anecdotes tell us how by silently preparing and drinking this posset

³ *Suda*, s. Πυθαγόρας Ἐφέσιος.

⁴ Strab. XIV, 1, 24 [632] = Pherecyd. Athen. *FGrH* 3 F 155 ἄρξαι δέ φησιν Ἄνδροκλον τῆς τῶν Ἴώνων ἀποικίας, ὕστερον τῆς Αἰολικῆς, υἱὸν γνήσιον Κόδρου τοῦ Ἀθηνῶν βασιλέως, γενέσθαι δὲ τοῦτον Ἐφέσου κτίστην. διόπερ τὸ βασίλειον τῶν Ἴώνων ἐκεῖ συστήναι φασι. καὶ ἔτι νῦν οἱ ἐκ τοῦ γένους ὀνομάζονται βασιλεῖς ἔχοντές τινας τιμάς, προεδρίαν τε ἐν ἀγῶσι καὶ ποφύραν ἐπίσημον τοῦ βασιλικοῦ γένους, σκίπωνα ἀντὶ σκήπτρου, καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ τῆς Ἐλευσινίας Δήμητρος.

⁵ In which case a possible date of introduction could be the short *aisymnêtia* in Ephesus of the Athenian Aristarchus around the middle of the 6th century (*Suda*, s. Ἀριστάρχος).

⁶ Aristo ap. Diog. Laert. IX, 6 [T 219,36 = T 705,48] τὸ δὲ ... αὐτοῦ βιβλίον ... (6) ἀνέθηκεν ... εἰς τὸ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ἱερόν. Aristo ap. Tatian. Or. ad Gr. 3 [T 220,12 = T 604,2] οὐδ' ἂν ἐπαινέσαιμι κατακρύψαντα τὴν ποιήσιν ἐν τῷ τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος ναῶι μυστηριοδῶς ὅπως ὕστερον ἢ ταύτης ἔκδοσις γίνηται.

⁷ Aristo ap. Diog. Laert. IX 2-3 [T 219,14 = T 705,15-16; 20-24] ἀναχωρήσας δ' εἰς τὸ ἱερόν τῆς Ἀρτέμιδος μετὰ τῶν παιδῶν ἠστραγάλιζε· περιστάντων δ' αὐτὸν τῶν Ἐφεσίων, «τί, ὦ κάκιστοι, θαυμάζετε;» εἶπεν «ἢ οὐ κρεῖττον τοῦτο ποιεῖν ἢ μεθ' ὑμῶν πολιτεύεσθαι;»

⁸ W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (1950) 101.

⁹ F 125 Καὶ ὁ κυκεῶν δίσταται κινούμενος (κυκούμενος ?).

in public Heraclitus convinced the Ephesians to give up their immoderate eating habits while the Persians were besieging Ephesus and food was running out (main version),¹⁰ or merely to cease their intestine feuds and/or establish autarcy (secondary versions nr. 1 and 2) or peace and homonoia (secondary version nr. 3).¹¹ There also exists half a dozen allusions to and reminiscences of the Heraclitean *kykeōn* from Plato's *Cratylus* (T 115 [439 C 5]), Epicurus (T 279) and the Stoics (Chrysippus [*SVF* II 937]) and to the time Marcus Antoninus IV, 27; VI,10; IX, 39; XII, 14,1) and Lucianus (T 568)¹².

While this fact may indirectly confirm the reality of Heraclitus' priesthood of Dēmêtêr Eleusinia, neither the fragment, nor the anecdotes, nor the reminiscences and allusions seem to point to any religious connotation in the way the philosopher uses this word. (This view is challenged by Battagazzore but without decisive argumentation.) The image of the *kykeōn* looks here rather like a (counterfactual) example of desintegration through movement which may or may not have had a cosmological or cosmogonical context. My questions here would be: *Is the kykeōn an exclusively Eleusinian, or more widely, an exclusively sacred beverage? And as such, does it have any symbolic meaning other than staging the story about Dēmêtêr?*

So much for the biographical and anecdotal aspects.

II

Then there is the **literary form** of Heraclitus' *prose* fragments, a form almost unanimously recognized as being *hieratic*¹³. While scholars like Hermann Diels,

¹⁰ M 9^a = M 24^b Them. *De uirtute* p. 40-41 [T 755] (traduction latine moderne de l'original syriaque) *nam quidam silentio persuadebant et id, quod pulchrum est, in conspectum eorum afferebant. fortasse miramini, quia audiistis hominem silentio tamquam reprehensione usum adiuuare posse. uobis igitur quod Ephesi euenit narrabimus: Ephesii luxuriis deliciisque erant assueti. cum autem bellum contra eos ortum esset, urbe a turma Persarum obsessa, illi etiam tunc more suo luxuriose uiuebant. coeperunt autem alimenta in urbe deminui. cum fame laboraretur, ciues omnes conuenerunt ut deliberarent, quid sibi faciendum esset, ne commeatus deminuerentur. nemo autem, ut eos luxuriam minuere oporteret, suadere ausus est. omnibus idcirco congregatis uir quidam Heraclitus nomine ptisanam prolatam aquae immiscuit et considens in medio eorum edit. et hoc omni populo praeceptum erat tacitum. nam, ut narratur, Ephesiis, hac reprehensione statim animaduersa, nihil amplius reprehensione opus fuit, ita ut discederent certiores facti delicias sibi paulum minuendas, ne cibus deminueretur. cum autem hostes audiuisent eos modeste uiuere didicisse et, sicut Heraclitus suasisset, prandere, ab urbe discesserunt; licet armis uincerent, tamen ptisanae Heracliti oppositi locum dereliquerunt.*

¹¹ M 24^c Plut. *De garr.* 17, 511 B [T 471] Ὅς Ἡράκλειτος, ἀξιούντων αὐτὸν τῶν πολιτῶν γνώμην τιν' εἰπεῖν περὶ ὁμονοίας, ἀναβὰς ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα καὶ λαβὼν ψυχροῦ κύλικα καὶ τὸν ἀλφίτων ἐπιπάσας καὶ τῷ γλήχωνι κακῆσας ἐκπλῶν ἀπῆλθεν, ἐνδειξάμενος αὐτοῖς ὅτι τὸ τοῖς τυχοῦσιν ἀρκεῖσθαι καὶ μὴ δεῖσθαι τῶν πολυτελῶν ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ ὁμονοίαι διατηρεῖ τὰς πόλεις. M 24^d *Schol. bT in Il.* X, 149 [T 1173] ἑστασίαζόν ποτε Ἐφέσιοι περὶ χρημάτων παρελθὼν δὲ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν Ἡράκλειτος, ἐπιπάσας κύλικι ἄλφιστα ἐξέπιε τὸν κυκεῶ, ἐμφαίνων ὅτι δεῖ ζηλοῦν αὐτάρκειαν.

¹² The subject of the cyceon has been exhaustively treated by Delatte in a book which I have been unable to find neither in Geneva nor in Moscow. Another related book is by Battagazzore, *Oracolarità e gestualità in Eraclito*, where the author, admitting that the word means no more than 'cocktail', does identify H.'s *kykeōn* (in Plutarch's version of the anecdote) with the one of the *HDem* 209 on account of the *glēkhōn* (branch of mint) used to mix it. And makes of Heraclitus a silent orator using the gestures and symbols of the mysteries to bring home his ideas.

¹³ Cf. J.-P. Vernant (1957): « L'exemple d'Héraclite est plus suggestif encore. L'aspect heurté et antithétique d'un style où s'entrechoquent des expressions opposées, l'usage de calembours, une forme volontairement énigmatique, tout rappelle dans la langue d'Héraclite les formules liturgiques

Eduard Norden or George Thomson simply stated this opinion; while others, like Charles Kahn, insisted on its artistic dimension; I published in 2002 400 pages devoted to the description of Heraclitus' language, its style and extraordinary poetics. Last year, at the Symposium Heracliteum Secundum in Mexico-City, Alberto Bernabé read an interesting paper on the selfsame subject. And yet I am still unable to say more than Diels, Norden, Thomson or Kahn as to their hieratic origin. I can only agree, on the one hand, with Kevin Robb's ideas of a typological kinship with the “orational” style of Egypt and elsewhere (while rejecting his theory of a Semitic origin) and with his concept of a “third style” standing somewhere in-between poetry and prose; I agree, on the other hand, with the parallels Thomson, following Norden, finds with Early Christian and Byzantine liturgical texts¹⁴. But, save *perhaps* Anaximander's sole fragment and the four longest fragments of Pherecydes (neither of them to our knowledge was a priest), I find no direct prose analogies to Heraclitus' language closer to his time which could be labelled as hieratic — and I would be grateful for any suggestions. (Gorgias' innovations have much in common with Heraclitus' language, but they completely lack his acumen.)

Having heard Dirk Obbink's paper and the following discussion, I now know that what is called Eleusinian hymns are in fact the Homeric exoteric hymn to Demeter which partly coincides with an Orphic hymn parts of which have been preserved by the PDerv and the PBerl. Unfortunately, they all of them are *metric*, not prosaic. There are also some short dicta, but unfortunately they are too short to allow any conclusive genre identification. And the only pagan *Prosa*hymnen Norden (*AKP* 844 ff.) speaks of are 1) Plato's (the two speeches in the *Phaedrus*, which have little in common with Heraclitus' style), after mentioning which he jumps to 2) Aristides, 3) the emperor Julian and 4) Libanius. But he also speaks of *hymnenartigen Predigten*, both Christian and pagan, characterized by their rhythm, and quotes from Hermes Trismegistos' *Poimandr.* 5 and from a Magical papyrus (Leemans, 1885) V col. 7a 7ff) and these indeed have much in common with Heraclitus.

Hence the question: *Are there any early surviving prosa texts of mystical liturgy long enough to be compared with Heraclitus' fragments?* Because, if he did undergo any preparatory education for his forthcoming priesthood, such texts would be the obvious and most appropriate means of testing whether his language is hieratic indeed.

III

As far as **content** is concerned, four kinds of information deserve examination. There are the fragments and testimonies saying and/or implying that life is death, living is dying. There are the fragments naming gods more or less connected with the mysteries. And there are Heraclitus' attacks against certain religious, mainly

utilisées dans les mystères, en particulier à Éleusis. Or, Héraclite descend du fondateur d'Éphèse, Androclos, qui dirigea l'émigration ionienne et dont le père était Codros, roi d'Athènes. Héraclite lui-même eût été roi, s'il n'avait renoncé en faveur de son frère. Il appartient à cette famille royale d'Éphèse qui avait gardé, avec le droit à la robe pourpre et au sceptre, le privilège du sacerdoce de Déméter Eleusinia. Mais le *logos* dont Héraclite apporte dans ses écrits l'obscur révélation, s'il prolonge les *legomena* d'Eleusis et les *hieroi logoi* orphiques, ne comporte plus d'exclusive à l'égard de personne... » (*La Grèce ancienne* [Seuil, 1990], I, p. 216).

¹⁴ H. Diels, *Herakleitos* (1901, 1909) III-V = V-VII, Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa* I (1890), G. Thompson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society*, II, *The First Philosophers* (London, 1955); Ch. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979); K. Robb, “Pre-literate Age and the Linguistic Art of Heraclitus” : *Language and Thought in Early Greek Philosophy* (La Salle, 1983) 153-206; S. Mouraviev, *Heraclitea*, vol. III.3.A (St. Augustin, 2002).

mysterical, practices. Finally there is the whole bulk of Heraclitus' psychology and eschatology as reflected both by the doxography and a number of fragments, and which by all standards looks very much akin to the kind of Orphic doctrines one finds in Plato and other contemporary and later sources.

Let me turn first to the **divine names**. In Greek alphabetical order they are (adding their numbers according to Diels-Kranz as supplemented by me in my edition: Aides (Hades, **F 15**, **F 98**), Apollo (**F 93** implied, **F 92** and **F 16A** possibly implied), Aphrodites and Arès (perhaps implied in **F 9A**), Harmonia (**F 9A**, **F 51**, ex coni.), Dikê (**F 3-94**, **F 23**, **F 28**, **F 80**), Dionysos (**F 15**), Eirênê (**F 67**, **F 123B**), the Erinyes (**F 3-94**), Eris (**F 3-94**, **F 80**, **F 123B**), Zeus (**F 13B**, **F 32**, **F 120**, cf. **F 53**, **F 123B**), Mnêmê (**F 126A**), Nyx (**F 13A**); to which one should add the purely Heraclitean Polemos (**F 13B**, **F 53**, **F 67**, **F 80**, **F 123B**), who could stand for Zeus or Ares, and last but not least an anonymous god in the singular, usually with the definite “article”, mentioned 5 times and once or twice merely implied (**F 16A**, **F 50**, **F 67**, **F 92?**, **F 102**, cf. **F 16**, **F 11**). Both Dêmêtêr and Artemis are absent from the fragments and doxography. (I omitted such “gods” as Hêlios or Selênê, since Heraclitus nowhere presents them as gods although he possibly called the former an *annama noeron*; and I omit all the cases where gods are mentioned anonymously in the plural).

If we attempt a classification of these deities, we shall find out that the Twelve Olympians are represented by Zeus, Apollo and possibly Ares-Polemos (and perhaps Aphrodite), and since Dêmêtêr and Artemis also belonged to this group, one could say that Heraclitus could have been somehow related to six or seven of them (“seven” counting Dionysos who was later added to the 12 at the expense of Hestia, — provided this had happened before Heraclitus' time). Hades can also be considered as Olympian, but is chthonian as well since he dwells in the underworld. The Chthonioi are also represented by the Erinyes and Nyx. The latter, Nyx, can also be included in the group of “conceptual” divinities with speaking names where we find Mnêmê, Eris, Dikê, Harmonia, Eirênê and Polemos.

If we look now at the Heraclitean contexts, we shall discover that Zeus is either only a semi-adequate name for *hen to sophon* (**F 32**),¹⁵ — i. e. Heraclitus' anonymous philosophical god — or is to be equated with Polemos (= Ares? **F 13B**,¹⁶ cf. **F 53**²⁴), or is another name for the shining sky (**F 120**)¹⁷; that Apollo is not named at all but only cryptically described as the “lord whose is the oracle in Delphi” (**F 93**)¹⁸ and perhaps understood as the god of the Sibyl (**F 92**, **F 16A**)¹⁹; that, as said, Artemis and

¹⁵ **F 32** Ἐν τὸ σοφὸν μόνον
λέγεσθαι οὐκ ἐθέλει
καὶ ἐθέλει Ζητὸς οὐνομα.

¹⁶ **F 13B** Πόλεμος καὶ Ζεὺς ὁ αὐτός ἐστι.

¹⁷ **F 120** ἡοῦς καὶ ἐσπέρης
τέρματα ἢ Ἄρκτος
καὶ ἀντίον τῆς Ἄρκτου
κόρος αἰθρίου Διός.

¹⁸ **F 93** Ὁ ἄναξ,
οὗ τὸ μαντεῖόν ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς,
οὔτε λέγει οὔτε κρύπτει,
ἀλλὰ σημαίνει.

¹⁹ **F 92** Σίβυλλα δέ,
μαινομένῳ στόματι

Dēmêtêr are absent ; and that Dionysus is despicably identified with Hades (F 15)²⁰. That, therefore, there remains practically nothing of the Olympians. On the contrary, all the conceptual divinities — in which category we are finally forced to include Polemos-Ares —, strike a positive note. Nyx is *prōtistê* (F 13A)²¹, Mnêmê is *athanatos* (F 126A)²², Eris is the condition of any birth (F 80)²³, Polemos is responsible for the division of the living into gods and men, freemen and slaves (F 53)²⁴ ; Polemos moreover is in love with Dikê (F 80)²³, who (with the Erinyes) is the guardian of natural and human justice, law and truth (F 28 cf. F 23)²⁵, and may even be the demiourgos of the cosmos (F 13B)¹⁶; Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite, is the bond which holds together all that diverges, i. e. the unifying principle of the organized world (F 51)²⁶, while Eirênê is the final, most homogeneous and all-pervading, stage of the cosmic cycle: the *pyros koros*²⁷, the prelude to a new *diakosmêsis*. So despite their connection with the traditional divinities bearing the same names, these gods have new rôles to play and resemble more physical forces and powers than mythological deities.

ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα
καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη,
χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται [τῆ] φωνῆι
διὰ τὸν θεόν.

F 16A Οὐκ ἀνθρωπείως,
ἀλλὰ σὺν θεῶι,
μᾶλλον Σιβύλλης
εἰμί πεφασμένος.

²⁰ F 15 Εἰ μὴ<ν> [γὰρ] Διούσωι πομπὴν ἐποιοῦντο
καὶ ὕμνεον ᾄσμα<τ> αἰδοίοισιν,
ἀναιδέστατα εἴργασται.
ωὗτος δὲ Αἴδης καὶ Διόνυσος
ὅτεωι μαίνονται καὶ ληναΐζουσιν.

²¹ F 13A Νύξ θεὰ πρωτίστη

²² F 126A ...κατὰ τοὺς Ἄρκτου ἐπτὰ,
ἀθάνατα Μνήμης σημεῖα.

²³ .F 80 ...χρὴ τὸν Πόλεμον, ἐόντα ζυνὸν,
καὶ Δίκην ἐρεῖν,
καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ' Ἔριν

²⁴ F 53 Πόλεμος
πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι
πάντων δὲ βασιλεύς,
καὶ τοὺς μὲν θεοὺς ἔδειξε
τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπους,
τοὺς μὲν δούλους ἐποίησε
τοὺς δ(ἐ) ἐλευθέρους.

²⁵ F 20 ...καὶ μέντοι καὶ Δίκη
καταλήφεται ψευδέων τέκτονας
καὶ μάρτυρας.

²⁶ F 51 Οὐ ζυνιαῖσιν <πολλοὶ>
ὅπως <ἐν> διαφερόμενον
ἐαυτῶι ὁμολογεῖ·
παλίντροπος ἁρμονίη
ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης.

²⁷ Diog. Laert. IX, 8 [F 123B] τῶν δὲ ἐναντίων τὸ μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν γένεσιν ἄγον καλεῖσθαι «πόλεμον» καὶ «ἔριν», τὸ δ' ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκπύρωσιν «ὁμολογίαν» καὶ «εἰρήνην». Cf. F 64-65.

In this connection, I remember having read somewhere that one of the secrets de the Eleusinian mysteries consisted in introducing a new esoteric divine nomenclature as well as some changes in the traditional relationship between the “classical” gods. Thus Demeter was called *Achtheia*, Korê *Athelâ* (which incidentally I cannot help reading together anagrammatically as *Aletheia*), the secrecy of other names having been better preserved. *Couldn't we interpret the way Heraclitus renames some divinities and attributes new functions to them as an effect of his having been initiated to the Eleusinian mysteries?* (Another obvious example of curious renamings is Pherecydes with his Zas, Khthoniê-Gê, Khronos and Ogenos.)

IV

Thus, though rich in divine names, Heraclitus' doctrine is entirely devoid of mythology of any kind and seems to stand even farther away from popular (local) religion than did the Homeric aristocratic mythology. This is confirmed by his outright condemnation of such popular practices as :

- sacrifices and purification from shed blood with new blood (F 5)²⁸ *They vainly purify themselves with blood defiled...; (F 69)²⁹ Pure sacrifices even from one seldom occur) ;*

- praying to statues (F 5) *They pray to these statues as though someone were to talk to their abodes, not knowing gods and heroes themselves who are... ;*

- bacchic orgies and phallophoric processions (F 14)³⁰ *Unto night wanderers — magi, bacchi, lenae, mysts — <I predict destruction by> Fire. For quite impiously do they initiate themselves into the secret rituals...; F 15)³¹ If truly 'twas for Dionysus' sake they introduced procession and chanted hymns to shameful parts, shameless indeed the deed performed. Same Shame are Hades and Dionysus for whom they rave and lenaeize!) even though he may have recognized in them some sort of Freudian remedies (F 68 *akea*) against the stresses of life.*

While the first two instances concern such standard universal religious practices as making sacrifices, purification rites and praying to statues (all of which incidentally were also performed in Eleusis), the third one is clearly directed against dionysiac rites and mysteries. Dionysus is named and equated here with Hades *in malam*, even

²⁸ F 5 Καθαίρονται δ' ἄλλως αἵματι μαινόμενοι
<όκ>οῖον εἴ τις
ἐς πηλὸν ἐμβὰς
πηλῶι ἀπονίζοιτο.

Μαίνεσθαι δ' ἂν δοκοῖη
εἴ τις αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπων
ἐπιφράσαιτο οὕτω ποιοῦντα.

Καὶ τοῖσ<ιν> ἀγάλμασι δὲ
τούτεοισιν εὐχονται
όκοῖον εἴ τις
τοῖσ<ι> δόμοισι λεσχηνεύοιτο
οὐ τι γινώσκων θεοῦς
οὐδ<ἐ> ἥρωας οἵτινες εἴσι.

²⁹ F 69 Ἐφ' ἐνὸς ἄν ποτε γένοιτο σπανίως (sc. θύσια καθαρὰ).

³⁰ F 14 Νυκτιπόλοις μάγοις βάρχοις λήναις μύσταις... πῦρ...
Τὰ γὰρ [νομιζόμενα κατὰ ἀνθρώπους] μυστήρια
ἀνιερωστὶ μυεῦνται.

³¹ See note 20?

in pessimam partem. He is not an excuse for performing impious shameful deeds. The word *mysteria* appears for the first time. The actors are clearly indicated as being night wanderers — *magi, bacchi, laenae* — and mysts. Since the discovery of the Derveni papyrus, the authenticity of this enumeration can no longer be questioned: these magi have nothing to do with Zoroaster and the Mazdeian religion but are the priests of the mystical congregations.

And this raises another question. Were it not for the name of Dionysos, all these accusations (of obscene practices and shameful misbehaviour) would be just as applicable to the Eleusinian *teletai* as they are to the Dionysiac ones. The sacred objects brought to Eleusis, the staging of how Baubô cheered the goddess, the frenzic dances that followed are sufficient proof of that. *Could it be that a priest of Dêmêtêr Eleusinia condemned the rites of his own sect?* The obvious answer — provided we are sufficiently well informed — paradoxically would be: why not? After all Heraclitus had refused the title of *basileus* and had probably had to give up as well the priesthood that went with it. His reluctance to accept the Eleusinian myth could even have been one of the reasons that prompted him to abdicate. But when he did so, he could already have acquired the knowledge he would have needed as a priest.

V

Yet, this anti-Olympian and anti-orgiastic strain of his does not necessarily imply any atheism or outright denial of religion on the part of Heraclitus. First there is his Anonymous philosophical God, of whom I shall not speak here because he does not pertain directly to our subject. Then there *are* the gods and heroes “who really are” of **F 15** and whom the *polloi* do not know. There *are* pure sacrifices (**F 69**). There is also the expression “gods and men” (**F 24, F 30, F 53, F 81A, F 132**) which, while looking sometimes as a mere *façon de parler* meaning ‘everybody’, attests to the existence of some kind of Heraclitean polytheism. Even Dionysus as such is not negated, what is negated is the Dionysus of the phallophoric procession. So there remains enough room for what I should call an ‘abstract theological’ (as opposed to the concrete mythological) approach to religious subjects, including perhaps a non mythological interpretation of the secret doctrines of Eleusis (of which unfortunately so little is known).

VI

One of the possible points of contact between the Eleusinian mysteries and the Heraclitean doctrine is the question of the post-mortem fate of the soul. The mysteries promised to the initiated a blissful life after death and even immortality. You certainly know the texts, so I don't need to quote the end of the Homeric Hymn to Dêmêtêr, Pindar's fragment (*Thren.fr. 137 Schneider*), Sophocles' fragment (*Tript. fr. 753 Nauck*) or the hierophant's Glaucos epitaph. (When I wrote this I did not know Professor Lowell Edmunds' paper, now you may add mentally the new evidence he adduced and come to the conclusion that Orphic and Eleusinian eschatology were wide apart, so the rest of my paper will already be controversial.) In Heraclitus, apart from the identification of the living and the dead as opposites (**F 88**)³² *Same are for the One the living and the dead...*) we find a number of fragments about the soul where life and death are interchanged : (**F 62**)³³ *Immortals mortals mortals immortals*

³² **F 88** Ταῦτό γε ἐνὶ ζῶν καὶ τεθνεὸς...

³³ **F 62** Ἀθάνατοι θνητοὶ
θνητοὶ ἀθάνατοι·
ζῶντες τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον,

(where it is up to you to drop the final ‘-s’ each time you prefer the adjective to the noun and to insert an ‘is’ whenever you feel you need one), *living through the other's death, dead through the other's life*; (F 77^b)³⁴ *We live their death and they live our death*; (F 80C)³⁵ *We live their death, but we die their life*.

The snag is that these fragments, and others, fit much better into the Orphic picture of afterlife than in the Eleusinian one. F 62 is quoted without explanatory context, so we do not know who is meant (though the masculine participles suggest men and gods). But the two others are about souls and use (or imply) the feminine gender. Now, about souls we have another not verbatim but obviously close to verbatim fragment preserved by Sextus Empiricus: (F 107D)³⁶ : *When we live our souls die and are entombed in us, and when we die, they resurrect and live*. [One may compare F 63 which probably says³⁷ : *That which is in the tomb can rise and become vigilant guardian of the living and defunct*.] This is exactly the *sōma sēma* doctrine which Plato and others attribute to the Orphics and which was shared by Philolaos.

Let me insert those fragments into their probable Heraclitean context. Soul for him is an exhalation, a kind of air (D 97—D 99). During our lives we sustain them and live by inhaling the ambient (D 146—D 147). Through our senses we also get in touch with the Logos (*ibid.*). But *eyes and ears*, Heraclitus says, *are bad witnesses if our soul is barbarian* (F 107)³⁸. This means that there exists different kinds of souls. There are the wet souls like those of drunkards (F 117)³⁹ and the dry ones, those of the wise and virtuous (F 118). A barbarian soul is obviously wet. Why is wetness so bad? Because it leads us to the *death of our soul* : “*<it is> death to souls to become water, (and to water death to become earth. From earth water is born, and from water <is born> Soul)*” (F 36)⁴⁰. Here the soul may even die earlier than the body. Becoming water reintegrates her into the cosmic cycle by destroying her individuality. Of course, at the other end of the cycle, Soul is born again from water (F 36), but this

τὸν δ(ὲ) ἐκείνων βίον τεθνεῶτες.

³⁴ F 77^b Ζῶμεν ἡμεῖς τὸν ἀκείνων θάνατον
καὶ ζώουσιν ἐκεῖναι τὸν ἡμέτερον θάνατον.

³⁵ F 80C Ζῶμεν τὸν ἐκείνων θάνατον,
τεθνήκαμεν δὲ τὸν ἐκείνων βίον.

³⁶ F 107D Ὅτε μὲν γὰρ ἡμεῖς ζῶμεν, τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν τεθνάναι καὶ ἐν ἡμῖν τεθάφθαι,
ὅτε δὲ ἡμεῖς ἀποθνήσκομεν, τὰς ψυχὰς ἀναβιοῦν καὶ ζῆν.

³⁷ F 63 Ἐν θά<πωι> δ' ἐόντι
ἐστ'() ἀνίστασθαι
καὶ φύλακα[ς] γίνεσθαι
ἐγερετὶ ζώντων καὶ νεκρῶν.

³⁸ F 107 Κακοὶ μάρτυρες ἀνθρώποισιν ὀφθαλμοὶ
καὶ ὦτα βαρβάρους ψυχὰς
ἐχόντων.

³⁹ F 117 Ἄνηρ ὀκόταν μεθυσθῆι
ἄγεται ὑπὸ παιδὸς
ἀνήβου σφαλλόμενος,
οὐκ ἐπαίων ὄκη βαίνει,
ύγρὴν τὴν ψυχὴν ἔχων.

⁴⁰ F 36 Ψυχῆισι γὰρ θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι,
ὔδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι,
ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται,
ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή.

is already the cosmic soul in the singular, in other words impersonal air. Such is the fate of the wet soul.

What is the fate of the dry soul after the death of the body? The wise souls are exhaled upwards away from moisture (F 12^b)⁴¹ and feed by drawing vapours (F 98)⁴². They keep their own self, some of them may (perhaps) be reincarnated in new bodies while others may become heroes or daemons. This is why, according to Heraclitus, the world is full of souls and of daemons (F 44A)⁴³. Finally, the driest soul, *the wisest and best, is a flash of light* (F 118)⁴⁴, she escapes from the body of the dying like a lightning from a cloud (F 85A)⁴⁵ and probably becomes a star, since, as we are told by Macrobius, Heraclitus believed the soul to be a sparkle of starry nature (F 70A)⁴⁶. Thus dryness allows our souls to survive to their bodies.

This was, so to say, the physical side of the story. But there was also its “metaphysical” side: what is death? what is life? what is immortality? What *we* call death is the death of our body, the departure of our soul. But what happens to our self, when our soul departs? It either dies as soon as the soul becomes water, or it survives but loses its memory and is incarnated into some other body, or it fully survives and may even dwell in the upper aether where the gods abide, provided its soul rises higher and higher and becomes more and more divine. What is the fullest life for the soul? Being incarcerated in a human body or living *en hypsistois* with the gods? Hence the appropriateness of the comparison of our body to a tomb or to a prison where our soul is kept almost dead while the body is alive — or, even worse, the real death of the individual soul through becoming water. So there is no personal immortality of the self unless one does what is necessary to keep one's soul alive and to deserve quasi divine or divine starry status. And there are the heroes and daemons thus born, and the “immortal” gods born with the world. But *qua* cosmic soul, the Soul *is* immortal. It is the *aēr*, or *prêstêr*, or *aether* of the transformation cycles of the cosmic stuffs, when the death of one stuff is the birth of the other (cf. F 76^a, F 76^b, F 76^c, F 36, D 54—D 62). All this is probably summed up in the pregnant formulas of F 88, F 107D, F 80C, F 77^b, F 62 and F 48:

Same are, for the One, the living and the dead, and <same> the awaken and the sleeping, and the young and the old. For these, when upside down, are those, and those, when upside down again, the former. [F 88] For when we live, our souls die and are buried in us, and when we die, they resurrect and live. [F 107D]. We live their (our souls') death, but we die their life. [F 80C]. They live our death <and they die our life>. [F 77^b]. Immortal(s) mortal(s) mortal(s) immortal(s), living <through> the others' death, dead <through> the others' life. [F 62]. Thus the name of the bow is “life” (BIOS) whilst its deed is death. [F 48]

⁴¹ F 12 Καὶ ψυχὰι δὲ <σοφαί>
ἀπὸ τῶν ὑγρῶν
ἀναθυμιῶνται.

⁴² F 98 Αἱ ψυχὰι θυμιῶνται καθ' Αἴδην.

⁴³ F 44A Πάντα ψυχῶν ἐστὶ καὶ δαιμόνων πλήρη.

⁴⁴ F 118 Αὐγὴ ξηρὴ ψυχὴ
σοφωτάτη καὶ ἀρίστη.

⁴⁵ F 85A (Ψυχὴ) ὥσπερ ἀστραπὴ νέφους διαπταμένη τοῦ σώματος.

⁴⁶ F 70A (*Anima*) *scintilla stellaris essentiae*.

VII

Let us compare this with what is considered to be the core of the Orphic doctrine of the soul. I use here the comprehensive outline of Alberto Bernabé.⁴⁷ I skip the theogonic-cosmogonic part, as well as the fundamental problem of the One and Many. My subject today is not how much Heraclitus owes to Orphic doctrines. It is the very fact that he owes much. And his treatment of psychological and eschatological questions is perhaps in this respect the most indicative part of his doctrine.

“The soul is immortal but it carries the burden of a fault which she must redeem, either in this world or in the other world [if by “in the other world” Bernabé means simply “after death”], during not only one, but even many lives, for the soul undergoes a number of reincarnations. When she is in this world, she finds herself closed up in the body as inside a prison, or interred in it as in a sepulchre... The doctrine of the body as a tomb (*sôma sêma*) is definitely orphic, though accepted also by the Pythagoreans... Yet there are means to shorten or alleviate this punishment through certain rituals... Who performs them may hope to be invited to the banquet of the just... Who ignores them will incur terrible punishment... As to the original fault, all concurs in suggesting that it was the murder of Dionysos torn to pieces by the Titans...” (231-234). Bernabé knows of course the Heraclitean fragment paraphrased in Sextus but he takes it to be a mere commentary of the latter on **F 62** and expresses doubts as to its adequacy *qua* Sextus' “interpretation”. Yet this adequacy is confirmed by the sum total of Heraclitus' psychology. To quote just one new example... in his next section Bernabé speaks of the Orphic doctrine of the soul inhaled with air and compares Diogenes of Apollonia and Pythagoras. But he could just as well have referred to Heraclitus A 16 DK = **T 688** = **D 148**, a lengthy doxography on Heraclitus' gnoseology which the same Sextus probably found in Aenesidemus and where this very doctrine is ascribed to the Ephesian... Provided we do not systematically appeal to the presumption of guilt, error or stupidity, there are no grounds to discard this important testimony.

Of course, there are important differences between the Heraclitean psychology and its Orphic counterpart, of which the absence in the former of any mythology, its condemnation of the purification rites, and the monistic or pantheistic integration of souls and deities into this world are not the least conspicuous...

Yet, I should like to wind up my paper with a couple of new naïve questions concerning Eleusis. *Couldn't a soul redemption doctrine akin to the Orphic one be the essence of the secret Eleusinian teaching?* [I'm not sure Professor Edmonds has entirely refuted such a possibility; the fact that there are two Hymns to Demeter, one Orphic and the other Eleusinian seems to refute him at least partly.] Because, after all, the Dêmêtêr—Korê myth poses practically the same religious problem as the Dionysos—Titans one : that of the presence in humans of two contradictory elements, the chthonian and the Olympian, the foul and the pure, the mortal and the immortal, and of the ritual and moral means of redemption helping one to bridge the gap between the two. And both have recourse to the same kinds of “remedies” and rites.

In case of a positive answer, it would be probably easier to account for Heraclitus' indebtedness to both kinds of mysteries and for his differences from both.

And still another question simply aimed at reducing my ignorance in those matters.

⁴⁷ «Orphisme et Présocratiques» : Laks-Longuet (éd.), *Qui sont les Présocratiques ?* (Lille, 2002) 229 ff.

While reading different books and articles on the subject, I was struck by a kind of complementarity between the different mysteries. The Eleusinian ones had one elaborate agricultural aetiological myth and a secret teaching, a long and complicated ritual, some moderate orgiastic elements, a secret probably very evocative final show but apparently no clear discursive doctrine or teaching which caused the initiated to feel happy but has not come down to us. Guthrie spoke of their “lack of positive teaching” (*GTG* 290). The Dionysiac or Bacchic mysteries on the contrary were utterly orgiastic, based on *as many* typologically similar local aetiological myths about the rejection and killing of the god *as there were* places where they were held. Yet again, there was no doctrine behind, but an utterly violent experience of total liberation from the bonds of society and normal social behaviour. As to the Orphic mysteries, I learned a lot about their theogonic-cosmogonic mythology, about Zeus' swallowing of Phanes or penis or the world, and Dionysos' murder by the Titans, and about their psychology with its *metensômatoiseis* and provisional purification courses in Hades or elsewhere; I learned a little about their ascetic and vegetarian way of life meant to help liberating their souls from its earthly titanic element; and I learned almost nothing about their Dionysiac ritual of initiation, their gatherings or their organizations. (Note that Heraclitus is *extremely hostile* to Dionysiac practices and rites but *extremely receptive* to a substantial part of the Orphic doctrine.)

My questions are : *Is this just an impression, and if not how are we to account for these distinctions?* And also : *Were the Orphics really a mystery cult, with a secret doctrine and secret practices, or were they merely a new mystical intellectual religion, something ressembling our modern theosophic and anthroposophic societies?*

Evharisto poly.