stylistic quirk to which we will return—preserves randomness within the beautiful order of the cosmos and suggests that it is precisely that randomness that accounts for its beauty. In reading the fragments of Heraclitus we come to appreciate the *kosmos* of incoherence as a philosophical as well as a poetic principle and to sense the productive force of asynchrony both for philosophy and for human life.

AEI AND *AIŌN*

The non-synchrony of human time and cosmic time is established in the very first fragment.

> τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος ἀεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν ἐοίκασι, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγεῦμαι κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅκως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὕδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται. (B1/D1)
>
> Of this *logos* that is always (*aei*) mortals are always uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when they have first heard it. Though all things come about in accordance with this *logos* they are like people without experience even when they experience such words and deeds as I expound, distinguishing each thing according to its nature and saying how it is. But other men are not aware of what they do when they are awake, just as they forget what they do when asleep.

This book begins with the word, *logos*. Appearing at the opening as a kind of authorial *sphragis*, "this *logos*" seems to refer to the work we are about to read, the "words and deeds" the philosopher will expound.[18] But in its eternal being this *logos* also signifies the structure of the physical and metaphysical universe of which Heraclitus's own *logos* will be an account. A single word operating on two different planes at once, this equivocal *logos* makes for a perfect Heraclitean opening. But does its ambivalence unite opposites—"all things are one"—or does it bespeak a schism within the fundamental structure of the universe?

This question unfolds as a matter of time. The *logos* occupies a temporality of eternal being: it is always (*eontos aei*). By contrast, humans live in the time of becoming (*ginontai*). This is a temporality of before and after, of transformation (from inexperience to experience and incomprehension to comprehension) and temporal rhythms (sleeping and waking). But the ambiguous placement of *aei*

18. Kahn (1979, 97) notes that an introductory reference to the author's own *logos* is typical of Ionian prose. Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 7.132–133), who quotes the fragment, tells us that it came at the opening of the book; see also Arist. *Rh.* 3.5 1407b15–16 (< A4/R6). The passage was likely preceded by a statement of the author's identity, such as Diels-Kranz suggest ("Heraclitus son of Bloson of Ephesus teaches the following"). Dilcher (1995, 11–13) discusses the parallels.

raises a question, noted already by Aristotle.[19] Is it the existence of the *logos* that is eternal or the ignorance of mortals or both? "Always" is a point of continuity between cosmic realm and human but also a point of divergence. The adverb binds the two grammatically even as it signals their eternal separation at the level of content: mortals will always fail to understand the always-existent *logos*. Maybe we are dealing with two different kinds of "always" here. Maybe we should understand *aei* as "eternally" on the cosmic level but something more like "usually" or "typically" for humans. But this zeugma would merely perpetuate the separation of humans and cosmos, which exist in fundamentally different temporalities. That means that even if there is only one *aei* there are always two (human and cosmic), and even if there are two there is only one (an eternity in which people fail to understand the *logos*). This paradoxical adverb leaves open the question of whether humans can change over time from *axunetoi* to *xunetoi*, or whether their incomprehension truly is eternal, *aei*.

The stakes of this question are high, both for Heraclitus and for his cosmos. *Axunetoi* alludes via negation to *to xunon*, Heraclitus's term for the unity and coherence of the cosmos.[20] In our ignorance, humans are separated from this cosmic whole: "Although the *logos* is in common (*tou logou d'eontos xunou*), most people are living as if they have their own private thought" (B2/D2). Isolated in their private world, unable to commune with the common *logos*, they "do not understand (*ou xuniasin*) that what differs with itself agrees with itself" (B51/D49). As a result mortals are asleep when they think they are awake, they hear with deaf ears, they are absent while present (B34/D4; cf. B17/D3, B19/D5, B71–73/R54, B89/R56). This alienation is humanity's tragedy. But it is also a cosmic tragedy, for how can the *logos* be truly common if it does not include the understanding of mortals? Out of tempo with the common *logos*, human *axunesia* risks negating (*a–*) *to xunon*, creating a break in the circle whose beginning and end are in common (*xunon*, B103/D54).[21]

This possibility puts pressure on Heraclitus's own *logos* to transform ignorance (*axunesia*) into shared wisdom and in this way to secure the *xunos logos*. Heraclitus would thus seem to undertake to put together (*xun-hiēmi*, the root of *xunesis*)

19. Arist. *Rh.* 3.5 1407b11–18 (< A4/R6). I translate the adjective twice in an attempt to capture the ambiguity. I will return to this *apo koinou* construction at the end of the chapter. On the syntactical structure of B1/D1, see Gigon 1935, 1–11.

20. Lesher (1983, 163–67) stresses the novelty of Heraclitus's use of *xunesis* as genuine understanding, not mere perceptual contact. But we will see in the next section that the haptic sense ("putting together") remains active in the word. On Heraclitus's epistemological theory, see Hussey 1982; Lesher 1983; Curd 1991; Wilcox 1991, 631–33; and Graham 2009.

21. That the *xunos logos* requires human *xunesis* is hinted in the grammar of the opening clauses of B1/D1: the eternal being of the *logos* that on first glance might seem to be a genitive absolute is revealed, as one reads on, as the object of mortals' (lack of) understanding. The *logos* is at once independent and dependent, not just grammatically but ontologically, on human understanding. The same grammatical ambiguity structures B2/D2, where *tou logou d'eontos xunou* could be absolute or the object of human *phronēsis.* On the grammar, see Tarán 1986, 7–8.

our private thinking (*idia phronēsis*) with the *xunos logos* (B2/D2), on the assumption that "to think (*phroneein*) is common (*xunon*) to all" (B113/D29).[22] This *xun-* can be imagined in spatial terms—a fitting together of different parts—but it can also be taken temporally, as the first fragment's temporal idiom suggests. Heraclitus's challenge, then, as he establishes it at the opening of his book, is to bring human understanding into synchrony with cosmic eternity, to make the two temporalities simultaneous.

Let's consider these two temporalities more closely, beginning with the cosmic *aei*. Scholars differentiate between two senses of eternity: timeless eternity and an eternity of everlasting duration.[23] Does Heraclitus's *aei* fill all time or fall outside of time altogether? As we might expect from the philosopher of paradox, it seems to do both at once. The ambivalence is evident in fragment B30/D85.

> κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἁπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ' ἦν ἀεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ ἀείζωον, ἁπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα.
>
> This cosmos, the same of all, no god nor man created, but it always (*aei*) was and is and will be fire ever-living (*aeizōon*), kindled in measure and extinguished in measure.

This fragment places cosmic eternity (*aei*) within time, but it is a time without limit, neither beginning nor end. Like human time, it can be conceptualized in terms of past, present, and future, but it also renders that chronology meaningless as it fills all three temporalities with its eternal life (*aeizōon*).[24] Extending its present-tense being into past and future, this is eternity as limitless plenitude and presence, an eternal now. And yet like human time it is also subject to change, as it is kindled and extinguished in an alternation marked out by regular measures (*metra*) in a metronomic beat.

The cosmic *aei* thus seems to be simultaneously within time and beyond it, susceptible to its measures but not subject to its limits. To understand this paradox, we need to understand the nature of the Heraclitean cosmos. The universe Heraclitus imagines is dynamic and cyclical, ever-changing but always staying the same. Like the circle whose beginning and end are in common (B103/D54),

22. Cf. B114/D105, where Heraclitus seems to pun on "common" (*xunōi*) and "with mind" (*xun noōi).* Benjamin (2010, 29–53, 57–63) examines Heraclitus's *xunos* as a primordial "being-in-common."

23. Sorabji 1983, 98–130; and Wilberding 2016, 14–15. Ramelli and Konstan (2007, 5–35) survey the vocabulary for eternity in classical Greek literature.

24. Parmenides describes the eternity of Being similarly (*oude pot' ēn oud' estai, epei nun estin,* Parm. B8.5/D8.10), but there is debate over whether by this he envisions Being as interminable (Schofield 1970; O'Brien 1980; and Wilberding 2016, 16–21) or timeless (Owen 1974; and Sorabji 1983, 99–108). See further the references in chapter 1, n. 38 and the similar formulations of Melissus B1/D2; Emp. B16/D63, B21.9/D77a.9; Anax. B12/D27. The tripartite formula goes back to Homer (*Il.* 1.70) and Hesiod (*Th.* 38): see Šćepanović 2022. Benjamin (1988) offers a stimulating reading of the *aei* in B30/D85 as signaling a "temporal realm which is neither transcendental nor empirical" (121). Cf. Snell 1926, 374; and Heidegger and Fink 1993, 49–70.

it cycles forever, and its sequential transformations are circumscribed within a timeless repetition of sameness.[25] This cycle is reiterated at every level of the cosmic order. At the highest level, it describes the cycles (*tropai*) of elemental transformation: fire becomes sea, sea becomes earth (B31/D86, cf. B36/D100, B90/D87, B76/R54); the eternal fire is kindled and extinguished in endless alternation (B30/D85). At the human level, the same cycle describes the seasons of the year (B100/D90), the cycle of birth and death over human generations (B20/D118, A19/D69), and the alternation of day and night (B6/D91a, B94/D89c). At every level the rhythm of this cyclical transformation is regular and isometric: change is marked by *metra* (B30/D85, B31/D86, B94/D89c, A8/≠LM), the constant beats or measures that allow us to perceive change (and thus time) by themselves remaining unvarying.[26] This rhythmic revolution constitutes Heraclitus's *kosmos* in both senses of the word. It describes the structure of physical and metaphysical reality but also provides a paradigm of aesthetic order, one reflected in the artful symmetry and balance of Heraclitus's aphorisms, including B30/D85 with its isometric antithesis (*oute tis theōn oute anthrōpōn*), tricolon polyptoton (*all' ēn aei kai estin kai estai*), and balanced repetitions (*haptomenon metra kai aposbennumenon metra*). The fragment formally enacts the *kosmos* it describes.

Inasmuch as it undergoes—or in fact simply is—transformation, the Heraclitean cosmos is fully temporal, even if it has no beginning or end. Its transformations are not simultaneous but sequential, and they move at a steady tempo and on a fixed circuit.[27] This is clear, for instance, in fragment B31/D86, which describes the "turnings" (*tropai*) of the elements.

> πυρὸς τροπαὶ πρῶτον θάλασσα, θαλάσσης δὲ τὸ μὲν ἥμισυ γῆ, τὸ δὲ ἥμισυ πρηστήρ. . . . ⟨γῆ⟩ θάλασσα διαχέεται, καὶ μετρέεται εἰς τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον, ὁκοῖος πρόσθεν ἦν ἢ γενέσθαι γῆ.
>
> Turnings of fire: first sea, but of sea half is earth, half lightning storm. As earth sea is poured out, and it measures up (*metreetai*) to the same amount (*ton auton logon*) as it was before becoming earth.

The cosmic *tropai* have a temporal sequence (*prōton, prosthen*) that can be counted off in *metra* (*metreetai*). As in B30/D85, the metronomic repetition of the *metra*

25. *Aei* would be the appropriate adverb for this cyclical eternity if, as Chantraine (1968, 42) posits, the word often had the nuance of "each time" or "again and again." Fragments like B103/D54 suggest that the process is a closed circle, not an open rectangle, as proposed by Kirk (1954, 102–3), followed by Vieira (2013). As we shall see, however, it does not close completely. On the circle in Heraclitus and in Greek thought, see Ballew 1979.

26. Cf. B94/D89c: "Helios will not overstep his *metra.* If he does, the Erinyes, guardians of Dikē, will find him out." The plural (*metra*) may suggest multiple tempos; the point is regularity not singularity. See Kirk 1974; Long 2013; and on the semantic range of *metron,* Van Berkel 2013.

27. This is disputed. Kahn (1979, 139, 147–53) argues for periodic, sequential transformation; contra, Bollack and Wismann 1972, 134–36; and Porter 2024. Cf. Gigon (1935, 20–31) on the tension between a succession and unity of opposites.

measures change in a cosmos that is itself unchanging. In B30/D85 that cosmos is "the same of all" (*ton auton hapantōn*); it is the same order for all (people or things) and it remains the same through all time.[28] Likewise, the sequential "turnings" of the elements in B31/D86 revolve within a cycle that is itself timeless inasmuch as its transformations always preserve the same amount, *ton auton logon*.

Logos is this principle of sameness amid change, like the *logos* in B1/D1, which governs phenomenal becoming—"all things come about (*ginomenōn*) in accordance with this *logos*"—but itself is fixed in its unchanging being, "the *logos* that is (*eontos*) always." Flickering fire is one vivid example of this sameness-in-difference, like the cosmic fire that in B30/D85 is "ever-living" (*aeizōon*) even when extinguished.[29] But perhaps the best-known example is the river: "Upon those stepping into the same rivers different and different waters flow" (*potamoisi toisin autoisin embainousin hetera kai hetera hudata epirrhei*, B12/D65b, cf. B49a/D65a, B91a/≠LM). Different water is always flowing, but the river is always the same.[30] Like the cosmic *tropai*, the river exists both in time, as the *hetera kai hetera hudata* mimetically reproduce the rhythm of water flowing sequentially downstream, and out of time in the rivers' eternal self-sameness.

Plato characterized Heraclitus as a philosopher of flux, a constant and multidirectional transformation that destabilizes any fixed meaning or truth. He is followed in this by Nietzsche, who claims that Heraclitus knows only becoming, not being.[31] But that becoming flows regularly within fixed banks, and its flux operates within a logic of sameness regulated by a singular and constant—if ever-changing—element, whether we call it *logos* or *kosmos* or fire. This element functions as a cosmic universal equivalent, lending the coherent order to the

28. In B30/D85 Kahn and Laks-Most translate "the same for all." The genitive is odd, though, and may be a Stoic interpolation (Reinhardt 1959, 170n1; and Kirk 1954, 307–10; contra, Vlastos 1955, 344–47; and Marcovich 1967, 269–70).

29. On the choice of fire, see A5/R45; Wiggins 1982, 13–18; Furley 1987, 34–36; and Goldin 1991. Cf. B67/D48: "God: day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger. He alters like fire when it is mixed with incense, and is named according to the flavor of each one." Other images of sameness amid change include Helios (B6/D91a, B16/D83, B94/D89c, B100/≠LM), Zeus (B32/D45), and war (B53/D64, B80/D63). Perhaps Nehamas (2002) is right (following Arist. *Metaph.* 1.3 984a7–10) that this makes Heraclitus an odd sort of monist.

30. Or perhaps those who step into it: *toisin autoisin* could go with "rivers" or "steppers," an ambiguity to which we will return at the end of the chapter. On the authenticity and interpretation of the river fragments, see Kirk 1954, 366–84; Tarán 1999; Dilcher 2005; Graham 2006, 129–37; and Mouraviev 2008.

31. Pl. *Cra.* 402a, 411b–c, 439c–440d; cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 4.5 1010a7–15, 13.4 1078b12–17; and Nietzsche 1962, 51 (on which Deleuze 2006, 23–25). On Plato's (mis)reading of Heraclitus, see Kirk 1954, 366–80; Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 1983, 194–97; and Colvin 2007. For Kahn (1979, 167–68) and Kirk (1974, 189–91), following Reinhardt (1959, 206–7), the river exemplifies the preservation of structure or regularity amid change; for Guthrie (1974) and Barnes (1982, 65–69), universal flux. Graham (2006, 113–47) offers a useful synopsis of the scholarly schism between "Heraclitus the Constancy Theorist" and "Heraclitus the Flux Theorist" and an intelligent attempt to bridge it; cf. 2008b, 172–76, 2013. See also Porter (2024), arguing for multidirectional flux.

transformations of becoming that allows us to speak of a cosmos at all. So Heraclitus suggests in B90/D87: "All things are exchange for fire and fire for all things, just as goods for gold and gold for goods" (*puros te antamoibē ta panta kai pur hapantōn hokōsper khrusou khrēmata kai khrēmatōn khrusos*). Far from a directionless flux that nullifies meaning, the universal signifier secures meaning. Its constant value enables substitution and hence exchanges of all sorts: commerce, communication, law.[32] As the equivalent of everything it also underpins the equation that describes Heraclitus's philosophy of paradox—all things are one.[33] Day is night, mortal immortal, sleeping waking: grounded on the universal *logos*, paradox is not the antithesis of this logic but its most general form. This singular entity, preserved in some way throughout the "turnings" of the elements, enables change, and therefore time,within the cosmos but is itself timeless, and it is because of this that the cosmic *aei* can be simultaneously timeless and time without end.

Against that cosmic *aei* Heraclitus sets the human *aiōn*: a life span, a period of vitality that ends in death. Although the two terms are related and later become synonymous, in early Greek *aiōn* was connected to the life force, the *zōē* or *psukhē*. As the animacy lost at the moment of death, *aiōn* denotes the duration of a life seen from the perspective of its end.[34] It is presumably to this terminal human temporality that Heraclitus alludes in B52/D76 when he says "*Aiōn* is a child playing, playing checkers. Sovereignty belongs to the child," although we will return to this fragment and to this presumption below.[35] *Aiōn* serves as a shorthand for a long tradition of Greek thought on mortal temporality. Long before Solon warned Croesus to "look to the end" (Hdt. 1.32.9), human existence was defined for the Greeks by its finitude: we are *thnētoi*, creatures whose lives will end in death. Heraclitus evokes this conception when he comments that mortals don't even know the

32. This singular economy grounds law (B33/D108, B114/D105); justice (B16/D83, B66/D84, B102/D73); ethics (B29/D13, B43/D112, B85/D116, B102/D73); social hierarchy (B39/D11, B49/D12); politics (B121/D14); war (B53/D64, B80/D63). See Kurke (1999, 50–52) for gold as sameness over time (and 58n36 on gold in Heraclitus). Seaford (2004, 231–42) connects Heraclitus's *logos* to the rise of money as both universal equivalent and transcendental abstraction.

33. Papamichael-Paspalides (2005) stresses the role of the One in Heraclitus's thought, but at the risk of reifying what is always for him a dynamic process.

34. Arist. *Cael.* 1.9 279a24–26: its *aiōn* "is the end (*telos*) encompassing the time of the life (*zōēs khronon*) of each creature, which nothing can exceed in accordance with nature." Hesychius A2216 defines *aiōn* as "the life (*bios*) of mortals, the time of living (*zōēs*)." The word could also denote the spinal marrow, perhaps as a vital fluid (*Hom. Hymn Hermes* 42, 119; Hipp. *Epid.* 7.122). The evolution of *aiōn*'s meaning from "life span" to "eternity" is traced by Lackeit 1916; Benveniste 1937; Festugière 1949; Chantraine 1968, 42; Couloubaritsis 1989; and Keizer 2000. Deleuze's conception of Aion as the empty nonpresent of the event, influenced by Stoicism, is hard to square with Heraclitus's usage: see Deleuze 1990, 62–65, 162–68 (with a veiled allusion to Heraclitus at 64).

35. Wohlfart (1991, 33–55) discusses in detail the meaning of the word in this fragment. See also Couloubaritsis (1989), stressing the link to both time and vitality.

things they encounter every day (*kat' hēmeran*, B72/R54, cf. B17/D3), an allusion to the Homeric designation of mortals as *ephēmerioi*, creatures of a day.[36]

This traditional conception of mortal existence afforded two traditional forms of immortality: biological reproduction through children and symbolic reproduction through *kleos*. Heraclitus alludes to these familiar ideas but adapts them to his cosmological scheme. He slights the former, as Clement notes in his introduction to B20/D118:

> Ἡ. γοῦν κακίζων φαίνεται τὴν γένεσιν, ἐπειδὰν φῇι· γενόμενοι ζώειν ἐθέλουσι μόρους τ' ἔχειν, μᾶλλον δὲ ἀναπαύεσθαι, καὶ παῖδας καταλείπουσι μόρους γενέσθαι.
>
> Heraclitus apparently reproaches generation when he says 'once born, they want to live and to have their destiny (*morous*), [or rather, to pause] and they leave behind them children to be their doom' (*morous*).

The fragment's play on the double meaning of *moros* figures reproduction as a cycle of morbidity, as the "destiny" promised by generation (*morous genesthai*) obliterates not just the hope for immortality but the modest desire to live out one's allotted life span (*morous t'ekhein*). In the fragment's punning and ring composition, birth (*genomenoi*) generates death (*morous genesthai*); life (*zōein*) becomes a mere "pause," as Clement says, between *moros* and *moros*.[37] In the idiom of B52/D76, *aiōn* is a game quickly over, and the "sovereignty" of the child is nothing but mortal finitude.

To hope for immortality through one's children is thus a fool's game. But "greater deaths (*moroi*) are allotted greater destinies (*moiras*)" (B25/D122b), and the best men seek immortality by other means:

> αἱρεῦνται γὰρ ἓν ἀντὶ ἁπάντων οἱ ἄριστοι, κλέος ἀέναον θνητῶν· οἱ δὲ πολλοὶ κεκόρηνται ὅκωσπερ κτήνεα. (B29/D13)
>
> The best men choose one thing in exchange for everything: glory ever-flowing (*kleos aenaon*) among men. But the many are sated like cattle.

Again, the idea is familiar: Kahn reads the fragment as an allusion to Achilles's choice in the *Iliad* between undying *kleos* and a long but finite life.[38] Heraclitus integrates the theme into his cosmology. The adjective *aenaon* ("ever-flowing")

36. Fränkel (1946) argues that *ephēmerioi* refers not to the brevity of human existence ("creature of a day") but to its instability (changing from one day to another); Dickie (1976) defends the former definition. The close connection between the two qualities in archaic thought (cf. Parmenides's Doxa) makes it hard to decide between them in any given context. See further Nooter 2023, 17–24.

37. *Mallon de anapauesthai* is presumably Clement's interjection, but note the suggestive parallel at B84a/D58: *metaballon anapauetai.* Plutarch reports that Heraclitus called a period of thirty years a generation (A19/D69), a mere drop in the bucket compared to the 10,800 years it takes for a full cycle of the cosmic rotation (A13/R64).

38. Kahn 1979, 233–34. Nussbaum (1972b) connects immortality through *kleos* to the Heraclitean *psukhē*'s novel (in her view) affinity for *logos*.

connects *kleos* to the "ever-living" (*aeizōon*) fire of B30/D85 and the *logos* that exists *aei* of B1/D1, as well as the ever-changing, ever-the-same river of B12/D65b, while the choice of "one thing in exchange for everything" recalls the *antamoibē* of all things for fire in B90/D87. Through these echoes, *kleos aenaon* connects the mortal *aiōn*—a brief life ending in death—to the cycle of material transformation that constitutes the cosmic *aei*.[39]

In the *Phaedo*, in a passage full of Heraclitean echoes, Plato argues for the immortality of the *psukhē*.[40] For him it is because the *psukhē* is immaterial, unlike the perishable body, that it is immortal. For Heraclitus, by contrast, the *psukhē*'s immortality derives from its materiality, a materiality that binds the animating breath of the individual to the physical elements that make up the cosmos. The human *psukhē* is one of those elements, though whether we should imagine it as fire or air or some combination of the two is much debated.[41] A physical substance, it is degraded by contact with liquid (B77/D101, B117/D104): "A dry *psukhē* is wisest and best" (B118/D103). As part of the physical stuff of the cosmos it participates in the *tropai* of elements. "Breathed out" at death in the form of an airy exhalation (*anathumiasis*), it becomes water. It is drawn into the endless flow of the cosmic river, both metaphorically and literally: the river metaphor of B12/D65b may in fact describe the *psukhē* and refer to this very process.[42] Fragment B36/D100 tells us where it goes from there: "For *psukhai* it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth; from earth water is born, from water *psukhē*."[43] *Psukhai* die and are reborn in an unending cycle of material transformation and in this way become immortal. The fragment both describes and enacts this eternal cycle in its almost perfectly circular form (we will return to that "almost").

Heraclitus's "psychophysics" radically reconfigures the traditional nature of the *psukhē*. Etymologically linked to the breath, the *psukhē* in Homer figures the animating force of the living individual.[44] It appears at death as a ghostly double of the

39. The phrase *kleos aenaon* also appears in Simonides's epitaph for the Spartan dead at Thermopylae (531.8–9 *PMG*), to which Heraclitus may be alluding (Sider 2013, 326–27). See also Pind. *Ol.* 14.12: *aienaon timan*.

40. *Phd*. 70d–72d. On the *Phaedo*'s "reminders" of Heraclitus, see Rowett 2017. For Plato, the immortality of the *psukhē* means the survival of the individual, an idea alien to Heraclitus's eschatology.

41. The best recent discussion is by Betegh (2013), who splits the difference by associating *psukhē* with air in a variety of states, from moist to fiery.

42. So, at least, we are told by Arius Didymus, citing Cleanthes citing Zeno (with support from Arist. *De an.* 1.2 405a27: *reon aei*): see Mouraviev 2008. It is doubtful that Heraclitus himself mentioned *anathumiasis* (Kirk 1954, 367–72) and the entire exhalation theory may be a Stoic superimposition: see the discussion by Dilcher (1995, 62–65), who defends it as original to Heraclitus; likewise, Buchheim 2005.

43. Marcovich (1967, 362–64) takes this fragment to describe a process within the human organism not the destiny of the *psukhē* after death. Contra, Schofield (1991, 15–21), for whom it epitomizes the principle that the *psukhē* is subject to the same processes as the cosmos. See further Betegh 2006.

44. Rohde 1925, 3–54; Snell 1953, 8–17; and Chantraine 1968, 1294–95. Claus (1981) argues that it never fully lost that Homeric meaning. The term "psychophysics" is Hölscher's (1968, 156); cf. Kahn 1979, 238.

dying hero; breathed out with his final breath, it flutters away to the underworld. We might think of it as a posthumous quasi-personification of the *aiōn*, which evaporates when life ends.[45] Pindar calls this evanescent remainder "the still-living image of a lifetime" (*aiōnos eidōlon*, 131b S-M). But for Heraclitus the *psukhē* does not evanesce at death. Instead, it becomes a gleam (*augē*, B118/R101) of the ever-living fire. In this way, through its mutable materiality and not (as for Plato) through its immateriality, the *psukhē* becomes eternal.[46] Snell may be correct, then, to credit Heraclitus with "a new concept of the soul"—not, however, as a spiritual substance within the individual but as a material substance that exceeds her. If the limit of the *psukhē* is unreachable, as B45/D98 proclaims, it is not because "the soul, as contrasted with things physical, reaches into infinity," as Snell says, but because it participates *as a physical thing* in a physical process that is infinite.[47]

Through the material afterlife of the *psukhē*, we enter the eternity of the cosmic *aei*. Trading "all things for fire," we gain immortality in the fire ever-living (*aeizōon*). But in doing so we must relinquish the *aiōn*, our ephemeral life and all it contains. In the Achillean choice of B29/D13, "the best men" choose one thing in exchange for all, "glory ever-flowing among men." In the *Iliad* that choice affirms the value of a human life: *kleos aphthiton* is the only thing worth the sacrifice of one's *aiōn* (9.415) or the loss of one's *psukhē*, which can never be regained once "it has passed the barrier of the teeth" (9.408–9). Heraclitus asks us to make a more radical choice: he offers us immortality at the price not just of an individual life but of human life as a whole, which is reduced to a base animal existence, the satiety of the herd ("But the many are sated like cattle"). Joining in the eternal cycle of fire, water, and earth, we become immortal but only, as Kahn writes, by "the overcoming of everything personal, partial, and particular, in the recognition and full acceptance of what is common to all."[48] *Aiōn* and *aei* are thus mutually exclusive not just in the trivial sense that death is the prerequisite for immortality, but in the more absolute sense suggested by the exchange of everything for one thing. We may gain the blaze of eternity, but we lose our lives in the fire.

45. Thus the death of Sarpedon is described as the departure of the *psukhē te kai aiōn* (Hom. *Il.* 16.453). The Sarpedon episode is the setting for the earliest visual depictions of the *psukhē:* see Wohl 2020, 128–31. We will return to one image of the scene (without *psukhē*) below.

46. Thus if for Homer the *psukhē* is material and therefore perishable and for Plato the *psukhē* is immaterial and therefore imperishable, Heraclitus's *psukhē* is imperishable because material. Finkelberg (2009) offers a Platonic reading of the Heraclitean *psukhē* as divine until embodied.

47. Snell 1953, 17. For Snell, Heraclitus occupies a key moment in a historical trajectory of spiritual transcendence, as the soul liberates itself from the corporeal and moves toward ever greater abstraction, rationality, and self-consciousness. The Hegelian orientation of this trajectory is signaled by the word *Geist* in Snell's title. Compare Hegel's parenthetical discussion of Heraclitus at Hegel 1975b, 132–33.

48. Kahn 1979, 253; cf. 1979, 222–27, 238–40, 245–54. Kahn is sanguine about this exchange of the private self for "something better" (253), but as we shall see in the next section, Heraclitus invites us to doubt (as Achilles himself did) whether immortality at this cost is such a good deal.

This brings us back to the ambiguous "always" of fragment B1/D1. That fragment opens a vista onto eternity. But as soon as we contemplate that *aei* we begin to lose sight of our mortal *aiōn*.[49] "Of this *logos* that is always (*aei*) mortals are always uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when they have first heard it." The *logos* is the marker of time for mortals, but the chronology it produces is confused: not quite before and after. Human temporality is blurred and with it the change (*ginontai, ginomenōn*) that defines our existence. Experience is no different from inexperience: "They are like people without experience even when they experience such words and deeds as I expound." Memory slides into *lēthē*, the oblivion of a sleepwalker: "Other men are not aware (*lanthanei*) of what they do when they are awake, just as they forget (*epilanthanontai*) what they do when asleep." Fragment B1/D1 offers us a vantage on cosmic eternity, the *logos* that exists always. But from that eternal perspective time, change, experience, memory, the rhythms of the day—all the things that make up an individual *aiōn*—dim and fade from view.

The *aei* of B1/D1 thus marks an irreducible asynchrony between cosmic temporality and human. Human life cannot be brought into rhythm with the cosmic cycle without the loss of its defining *metra*, its unique tempos and temporality. We may come to understand that day and night are one (B57/D25a, B106/D25b), but that understanding renders our existence as *ephēmerioi*, creatures of a day, meaningless. This would seem to indicate the limits of Heraclitus's synthetic project—his hope of transforming *axunetoi anthrōpoi* into *xunetoi*—and of his synthetic vision of a *xunos logos*, for a *logos* that excludes human life is not truly *xunos*. The eternal circle of Heraclitus's cosmology would seem to be a bad infinity, returning always to the "common (*xunon*) beginning and end" (B103/D54) of noncoincidence between the cosmic and the human. Out of tempo with the cosmic cycle, human life is an eternal hole in the cosmic whole.

APHORISM LULLABY

And yet Heraclitus does manage to bring together *aei* and *aiōn*. He effects this synthesis or *xunesis* (literally, "putting together") through the form of his aphorisms.[50] Aphorism has its own particular formal temporality. On the one hand, its brevity makes aphorism the most ephemeral of forms.[51] Delimited by definition

49. Long (1992, 272) speaks of "Heraclitus's view from nowhere." *Aei* and *aiōn* form a parallax, two closely related perspectives that can nonetheless never be synthesized: see Žižek 2006 and chapter 5 below.

50. This section title is a nod to Derrida's essay "Aphorism Countertime" (1992a). Derrida proposes that the aphoristic form precludes synchronicity or simultaneity (both of which are implied by his term *contretemps*). While the same can be said of Heraclitus's aphorisms (as we shall see in the next section), this section shows that his aphorisms can also eliminate asynchrony by eliminating time altogether.

51. For Grant (2016, 45), aphorism's apparent instantaneity "produces an immediate and striking effect, like a flash of lightning." The lightning strike recurs in discussions of aphorism including