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Heraclitus and Iran

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*Jacques Duchesne-  
Guillemin*

HERACLITUS  
AND IRAN

Since the rediscovery of the Avesta has made the sources of Iranian religion accessible to us, so that we can really say "Thus spake Zarathustra," we have been able to return, with fresh interest, to an ancient idea: that of the Oriental, and especially Iranian, origins of Greek philosophy. It is an idea which Antiquity had endowed with a legendary aura, either by declaring that Pythagoras had been Zoroaster's pupil in Babylon (a city to which, probably, neither had ever been) or by writing, as did Clement of Alexandria, that Heraclitus had drawn on "the barbarian philosophy," an expression by which, in view of Ephesus' proximity to the Persian Empire, he must have meant primarily the Iranian doctrines.

The problem, studied seriously by moderns, has often been negatively solved by great historians of Greek philosophy: but it seems, nevertheless, repeatedly to rise anew like the phoenix from its ashes, as though the temptation to compare the two traditions and discover a bond of interdependence between them periodically became irresistible.

The problem has recently been revived in a very personal approach by Clémence Ramnoux. This philosophical scholar, authoress of a voluminous work whose title itself anticipates its originality—*Héraclite ou l'homme entre les choses et les mots* (1959)—confesses in this book that she has suppressed a chapter, originally planned, on the relation

between Heraclitus and Iran, because it raised too many difficulties. Later she herself was able, with fewer scruples, to publish the chapter as an article in a periodical. The article, which appeared in 1959 in *Revue de la Méditerranée* (published in Algiers), is "Un Épisode de la rencontre est-ouest, Zoroastre et Héraclite."

We must admit at the very outset that to draw a parallel between Heraclitus and Zoroaster would perhaps require a more thorough knowledge of both of them; on the other hand, to try to explain the personality of one in terms of that of the other is perhaps to claim to explain *obscurum per obscurius*.

Obviously it would be presumptuous here to pretend to draw genuine and well-defined portraits of the obscure philosopher of Ephesus and of the prophet of Iran, and to demonstrate the influence exerted by Zoroaster on Heraclitus. Nevertheless, it has seemed to me, in view of the results achieved in recent years in the study of Heraclitus and in that of Iranian religion, that there might be a specific interest in confronting these two lines of research.

In dealing with Heraclitus, it is necessary to ask a preliminary question—whether one may rely on the preserved fragments of his work, or rather on the testimonies and paraphrases that the ancients have left us. At first glance one would believe that it was absolutely necessary to give preference to the fragments, since the testimonies might be suspected of reflecting the personal views of their authors, to the detriment of the truth. But the question is not that simple; for the fragments also were preserved by authors who often had their own ideas, their own system, and it is not always easy to distinguish, in what they cite, between literal, authentic citation and more or less interpretative paraphrase. It is necessary, in order to appraise the validity of the fragments, to know the opinions which prevailed later concerning the diverse questions that Heraclitus treated. This will appear clearly, I believe, in the case of the Logos. It will be good to ask ourselves what the Stoics, then the Christians, have understood by Logos, if we wish to avoid attributing unduly to Heraclitus some conceptions which appeared only later. It is also necessary, of course, to take similar precaution when dealing with Fire, as we shall now proceed to do.

There are at least four fragments which expound Heraclitus' reflections on fire. The first is transmitted by Clement of Alexandria and by Plutarch: "This cosmic order, which is the same for all, was not made by any of the gods or of mankind, but was ever and is and shall be ever-living fire, kindled in measure and quenched in measure." The second fragment is from the same source: "The transformations of

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fire: first, sea; and of sea, half is earth, and half fiery water-spout.”

The third fragment is transmitted by Plutarch: “all things are counterparts of fire, and fire of all things, as goods of gold and gold of goods.”

Similarly, Maximus of Tyre reports that, according to Heraclitus, “Fire lives the death of the earth, and air lives the death of fire, water lives the death of air, and earth that of water.” A fragment of Hippolytus, without expressly naming fire, names lightning, which is probably the same thing: “The thunder-bolt steers all things.”

Another passage by the same author, in which it is said that fire will judge all things at the end of the world, was suspected by K. Reinhardt<sup>1</sup> of merely being a Stoic and Christian interpretation of the Heraclitean doctrine of fire; but its authenticity has recently been vindicated.<sup>2</sup>

Turning now to Iran, we will first of all examine the Gathas of Zoroaster. The role of fire in them is fundamental. Twice Zoroaster calls upon “the fire of Ahura Mazda,” either to make offerings to it (Y. 43. 9) or to acknowledge its protection (Y. 46. 7). More frequently (in all other passages, to be precise) fire is characterized as an instrument of ordeal. Ordeal is not found in the Gathas as an actual practice, except for one single mention of it (Y. 32. 7), but several times there is reference to a future ordeal which is to be made by means of fire to separate the good from the wicked, and which Zoroaster invokes. Here fire is the instrument of truth or justice (*aša*), from which it derives its power (hence the epithet *aša-aojah*). This connection of fire with *aša* is constant; it appears again in a passage I have mentioned (Y. 43.9) which may be translated: “I wish to think, insofar as I am able, of making unto thy fire (O Ahura Mazda!) the offering of veneration for *aša*.” In other words, to venerate *aša*, offerings are made to the fire of the Lord. In the same way, when each of the elements or each of the categories of beings of the universe are placed under the protection of one of the Entities which surround Ahura Mazda, *aša* is the patron of Fire.

Now the question arises: Could this doctrine of the Gathas have been known to Heraclitus? Neither the date nor the place of Zoroaster's reform are known with certainty, but it is probable that it occurred at the beginning of the sixth century B.C., in northeastern Iran. We do not know what of it may have reached the western part of the Persian Empire at the time of the early Greek philosophers,

<sup>1</sup> *Hermes*, 1942, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> See Zeller-Mondolfo, *La Filosofia dei Greci*, Vol. I.IV (1962).

when the cities of Ionia bordered on this empire and then were incorporated into it.

What we do know is that Darius worshipped Ahura Mazda, standing before the altar of fire.

On the other hand, in a fifth-century relief found at Dascylium (capital of a satrapy of Asia Minor on the sea of Marmara), we see two Magi with their mouths covered by a veil, as is the custom to this day among Parsee priests during the sacrifice, and holding the ritual twigs. Below them are the heads of a bull and a ram, ostensibly intended for the sacrifice. In front of them there is a column surmounted by a sort of abacus or table, possibly a fire altar. Here is the idea which Heraclitus may have had of the Magi who, besides, are mentioned in one of his fragments that have remained, but placed promiscuously along with the "noctambules, Bacchants, Maenads, initiates" whom he accuses of impiety.

But what could he have known of the doctrines of the Magi, and especially of their fire doctrine? To answer this question we must extend our Iranian inquiry, searching elsewhere than in the Gathas of the prophet, which at that time were perhaps still unknown in Asia Minor.

In medieval Iran, and already partly in the Avesta—and we shall see that these ideas are probably even more ancient—various species of fire are distinguished, and there are three ways of classifying fires.

First of all, in contrast to the normal fires, *Adarān*, there was the fire *Varhrān*. The fire *Varhrān*, preserved in the temples of the first magnitude and importance, is treated like a king; a crown is suspended above it. Many Pahlavi texts call him "the king of fires." The ceremony of his installation is called enthronement.

There is a second classification: in a certain sense, it completes the first, because it concerns three fires, called *Farnbāg*, *Gušnasp* and *Burzēn-Mihr*, patrons, respectively, of the three social classes—priests, warriors, farmers—so that, by adding the fire *Varhrān* to them, we have the entire society.

The two classifications considered so far concern only the ritual fires. There is also a third classification, which seems more general, in which a physical theory is reflected, and which consequently allows us to set it in relation to the early philosophers of Ionia, of whom Heraclitus was one.

This classification (found in the Avesta, Y. 17. 11, and in the Bundahišn, chap. xviii) distinguishes five fires with their respective definitions:

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1. *Bərəzisavah*, which shines before the Lord;
2. *Vohufryāna*, which is found in the body of men and of animals;
3. *Urvāzišta*, which is found in plants;
4. *Vazišta*, which fights against Spənjagrya among the clouds;
5. *Spəništa*, which is used for work.

This classification presupposes a physical doctrine of the universal presence of fire. But for the moment we must pass over the first and the last: we may observe that the other three form a system; for (reading from the bottom up) the fire of lightning (that which fights with Spənjagrya, demon of the storm, among the clouds) brings on the rain which nourishes plants, from which we can get this fire by rubbing together two pieces of wood, and the plants nourish the animals and men in whom fire becomes vital heat.

It would seem that a confusion arose between the first and the fifth fire, since *spəništa* (the name of the fifth fire) means, despite the definition given it, "the most sacred," which, rather, corresponds to the definition of the first fire: "which shines before the Lord."

In any case, the doctrine of vital and cosmic fire is very ancient, although it has been modified in the course of time. So it is, in fact, not by chance that India, especially in the Chāndogya-Upaniṣad, is acquainted, just like Iran, with a classification of fires into three types, and one into five types, and that the three fires of the former classification are, as in Iran, ritual or sacrificial fires, and—what is even more important—that these correspond identically to the three Iranian fires and social classes:

*Ahāvanīya*—Priests—fire of the oblation to the gods

*Anvāhārya*—Warriors—fire which wards off demons

*Garhapatya*—Farmers—domestic fire

The comparison was made by Dumézil<sup>3</sup> and illustrates yet again the tripartite ideology of the Indo-Europeans which this scholar has so often pointed out.

The other Indian classification, that distinguishing and defining five fires, is the one which concerns us most here: we readily observe in it a doctrine of vital and cosmic fire similar to that of Iran; these are the names and characteristics of these fires:

*asau lokah*, the heavenly world, whence Soma is born

*parjanya*, the storm, the tempest, whence rain is born

*prthivī*, the earth, whence nourishment

*puruṣa*, man, from whom sperm

*yoṣā*, woman, from whom the embryo

It is clear that at the base of such a classification lies a primitive theory of the fiery nature of the vital fluid or sap which runs through

<sup>3</sup> *Homages Herrman* (1960), p. 321.

the entire scale of beings. And here is undoubtedly still another reflection, which is very ancient, of the same theory: Apām Napāt, a deity certainly Indo-Iranian in date, and whose name literally means "grandson of the waters," is called in the Avesta (Yt. 19. 52) "the god who created men (males), who fashioned men." Why specifically males, if not as the repositories of the fluid which transmits life and which originates in lightning?

The Iranian fire rituals permit us, in the same way, to make two other interesting deductions. The fire *Varhrān* is made up of a number of different fires, brought together and ritually purified. Now one of these fires comes from lightning.

On the other hand, it is forbidden to let the rays of the sun fall on the sacred fire: for the fire of the altar itself symbolizes the sun; or rather, it *is* in a certain way the sun, before which the other sun must disappear.

And now it is time to conclude on this first point. In the Indo-Iranian religion, and afterward in the most ancient religion of Iran, it seems that there existed a rudimentary fire-cosmology. Heraclitus may have heard of it. Certainly his acquaintance with the Milesians and Hippasus would have been sufficient for him to have some information on such a system of physics. But it is not unlikely that it was due to the suggestiveness of the doctrines of the Magi that he chose, among the various kinds of physics which were widespread from Thales on, one which assigned the basic function to fire.

In the Indo-Iranian doctrine, then, fire was a life-giving, seminal substance—Heraclitus'  $\pi\upsilon\rho\ \acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota\ \zeta\omega\omicron\nu$ . At the end of all things, it would judge the world. In a more general way it was associated with the truth, to which we shall now turn, examining first the Logos in Heraclitus, then the Indo-Iranian notion of *Rta-Aša*.

The answers to both problems seem to oscillate between two extremes; and on both sides it has been bedeviled by very peculiar circumstances. I think, though, that with a certain amount of good sense the right answer, in both cases, is in sight.

On Heraclitus we have a volume in Zeller's *Philosophie der Griechen*, which has recently undergone a thorough revision at the hands of the Italian scholar Mondolfo. It has doubled in bulk.

The book, although it is generally up to date, unfortunately does not mention a thesis which is of capital importance, a thesis published at Nijmegen in the Netherlands, by Surig, "De betekenis van Logos in Heraclitus" (1951).

Surig attacks with a novel argument, drawn from Plato, the extreme view (inherited as we shall see from the Stoic and Christian tradition) that the Logos is a Cosmic principle that rules the world—

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in other words, a kind of God. Did Heraclitus understand and teach that the Logos is a unique substance, the supreme, active principle which directs the universe?

Such was the way that the Stoics conceived of the Logos. For them the Logos was identical with the Fire that rules the world. Coming after Plato and Aristotle, they claimed to abolish the distinction between spirit and matter which Plato had taught. They were, however, in line with the Timaeus, conceiving the universe as a living being, but they owed a great deal also in this respect to medicine (and perhaps because of this, to the East—but that is another question). The universe was, then, a living being whose soul, igneous breath diffused through all things, held the parts together. On account of this conception, seeing that it annulled Plato in part, the Stoics claimed to follow Heraclitus whose view they perhaps deformed, as we shall try to see.

The same thing happened later among the Christians. In the Christian Logos the Stoic logos survives until our time, blended with the Semitic conception of the word of God. God's creative word, the *Fiat Lux* of Genesis, came to be hypostatized, personified in the manner in which it was represented in Egypt, Sumer, and Babylonia, as a distinct being. Egypt used to figure it concretely as a little man issuing forth from the mouth of the god whose will he expressed, whose orders he carried. The Second Isaiah (55:11) saw this word quite concretely: "So shall my word (*dabhar*) be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please." Similarly Psalm 147:15: "He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly."

In order now to translate this "word," the Septuagint used the best word available in Greek, namely "logos," although it had had a rather different past and possessed a different set of meanings. It was then used in the Greek Book of Wisdom (18:14-16), in which the word of God is personified as a warrior. This concretization was probably helped along by that of Wisdom herself (Hoxma-Sophia), a process which had in turn already been stimulated by Hellenistic Stoicism.

This logos notion was further elaborated by Philo. As for the image of the warlike logos it was to be taken up and developed in St. John's Book of Revelation (19:13 ff.). But the most important text—overshadowing the Christian and Jewish Apocalypses, Jubilees (12:5), IV Ezra (9:5), the Syriac Baruch (14:17)—is certainly the Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, thanks to which the Logos notion became the very center of the Christian theology.

It is therefore not astonishing that Clement of Alexandria saw in Heraclitus a precursor of the Christian revelation. And it would not be



more astonishing that he should have attributed to this ancestor some Stoic or Jewish idea of which the Ionian philosopher was innocent.

We have on this subject a fragment (72) which begins as follows: ὁμιλοῦσι λόγῳ τῷ τὰ ὅλα διοικούντι. But the last four words are suspected of being a mere gloss introduced by the author of the citation, Marcus Aurelius, who besides his well-known Stoicism, had yet a particular reason to declare that the logos is the ruler of the world: he could then see in it a kind of model for himself, the Roman emperor, and therefore master of the world.

The same doctrine is reflected from the Christian side in the commentary which Clement of Alexandria makes on another fragment (31) that fire ὑπὸ τοῦ διοικούντος λόγου καὶ θεοῦ, κτλ.

Finally, these two testimonies appear to be corroborated by other fragments, but on the condition of seeing synonyms of logos in τὸ σόφον, in γνώμη (τὸ σόφον . . . ἐπίστασθαι γνώμην ὅτι ἐκυβέρνησε πάντα [41] and in κεραυνός (64): The thunderbolt steers all things, τὰ δὲ πάντα οἰακίζει κεραυνός.

In short, it would seem that Heraclitus was conscious of the synonymy of all these terms, and thus conceived of the logos as a distinct substance, the active principle and ruler of the world. Thus, the Christians—still today—would with good reason recognize in the thinker of Ephesus a prophet of their God.<sup>4</sup>

But as Surig has shown, there is a difficulty in this: If Heraclitus had already had this conception, if he had already put the Logos there where Plato was to put the Good, Aristotle the Immovable Mover, and the Christians God, how is it that Plato said nothing of it, nor did Aristotle, although they knew the work of Heraclitus very well (and not only the fragments of it which remain for us) and although Plato mentioned a similar attempt, that of Anaxagoras, who put the Νοῦς at the head of all things?

But no, they do not report anything like that of Heraclitus. However, the term “logos” is among those which they employ, either with respect to Heraclitus or otherwise, but never in the sense of an active principle and director of the world. For them (as Surig has shown), the logos of Heraclitus is his doctrine, and this doctrine exhausts itself in three points: the general flow of things, the equivalence of the one and the all, and the harmony of opposites.

It is not, let us repeat, because of lack of interest in the notion of the logos: much to the contrary, this notion was adopted by Plato and Aristotle, and if they developed it, it was in senses altogether different from those which the Stoics gave it and attributed to Heraclitus.

<sup>4</sup> Such is, e.g., the attitude of Mazzantini, *Heraclito* (1945).

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Moreover, Plato (or Socrates) even endeavored to defend the positions of Heraclitus concerning the logos against the deformations made by the philosophers—Sophists and Heracliteans—who claimed to follow him. Against the Sophists he maintained that the logos is not only a means of combat, but that there is a logos in reality: against the Heracliteans, who saw (or looked for) the truth in words, he maintained that truth is only in the logos, that is to say, in the sentence or judgment. But finally (in his *Letters*) he went beyond the Logos, in posing, as the supreme degree to which knowledge can reach, above words, the ideas.

As for Aristotle—who knew the text of Heraclitus to the point of being able to discuss the place of a comma in it (before or after *ἀεί*, First Fragment)—he maintained, in line with his predecessors, Heraclitus and Plato, that only in judgment is there truth. And he went beyond the logos as judgment in discovering the purely formal mechanism of the syllogism.

It is then evident that, for Plato, the logos belongs to the sphere of epistemology, and for Aristotle, to the sphere of logic. Neither of them made a metaphysical, ontological being of it. Shall we therefore conclude that they failed to see that this value of the logos already existed in the thought of the obscure Ephesian?

Or shall we, with Surig, go to the other extreme and say that to Heraclitus, the Logos was simply his teaching: When he said that things happen according to the logos he meant “according to the doctrine he had been teaching, namely that of incessant flux, equivalence of one and all, union of opposites”?

More than a quarter-century ago, E. Hoffmann put in relief the fact, until then unrecognized, that the logos is an act of speech, a discourse.<sup>5</sup> But this logos does not simply exist in Heraclitus' mind. It has, according to his own statements, an objective reality. On the basis of Hoffmann's study, but also of some reservations formulated with respect to it by Calogero (another Italian scholar), Pagliaro (an Iranist, by the way) was able to specify<sup>6</sup> that the Logos, as it appears in the First Fragment, has two aspects, the one verbal, the *ἔπος*, the other real, the *ἐργα*, and that there is no opposition between these two aspects, as Hoffmann maintained but, on the contrary, it is precisely their union, their reciprocal correspondence, which constitutes the logos. In other words, the logos, the true discourse, exists not only in language but in things as well: It is the agreement of the sentence with

<sup>5</sup> *Die Sprache und die archaische Logik* (1925).

<sup>6</sup> “Eraclito e il Logos,” *Saggi di Critica semantica* (1953), p. 131.

what it represents. Now, can this truth, which is in the sentence, be already in the word? Yes, on the condition that this word, like reality, combines opposites: thus *βίος* signifies life or, the opposite of life: the bow which kills.

But if the word is univocal, thus *ἀνोधος*, it is necessary to associate with it its opposite, *κάθοδος*, in order to express the reality.

The logos is, then, the form according to which all things take place: It is the norm of each thing; for example, the soul, the *ψυχή*, has a logos.

But did Heraclitus go further? One might perhaps adduce on the logos as a substance the testimony of Sextus Empiricus who said:

It is then by drawing in by inspiration this divine logos that, according to Heraclitus, we become intelligent, and while forgetful during sleep, become sensible again on waking. For during sleep, as the passages of the senses are closed, the mind within us is cut off from its natural union with the enveloping substance—only the connection by way of respiration, like that of a root, being preserved—and being thus parted it loses the power of memory which it previously possessed, etc.

It is, of course, only too easy to dismiss this testimony as a late, rather coarse interpretation of Heraclitus' doctrine. We might cite a fragment in support of it, but on condition that we take *τὸ σόφον* as a synonym of logos—which is by no means certain: Of all those whose discourse I have heard, none arrives at the realization that that which is wise is set apart from all things (Frag. 108).

Be that as it may, we must admit that the logos was not for Heraclitus an active, directing principle; otherwise, Plato and Aristotle would have said so.

On the other hand, Heraclitus' logos was not purely epistemological or logical, for such a distinction had not yet been recognized by the old Ephesian sage. I mean that the notion of a purely abstract principle was yet to be born. We may safely conclude, then, that the logos was at once mental and substantial but not active. It was the *objective truth, according to which all things happen*.

Let us now turn to India and Iran. In the Veda, *R̥ta* plays a conspicuous part. What did it mean exactly?

Ever since the Petersburg *Dictionary* appeared, whose opinion was taken over notably by Bergaigne and Oldenberg, it has been customary to see in the *r̥ta* not only truth (*rtám vad* means "to tell the truth") but the order of things, be it in nature, in the liturgy, or in the moral conduct. It could be inferred that the Indo-Iranians had conceived of a sort of great cosmic law, controlling both the course of the heavenly bodies and the behavior of men.

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Against this interpretation Lüders protested in 1910. He maintained that the Vedic authors did not have the notion of a universal order. *Ṛta* is merely the truth, the non-lie.

Unfortunately Lüders died before publishing the full demonstration for which he had been amassing material for thirty years. And this is one of the unfortunate circumstances to which I alluded: his manuscript, retrieved in a rather bad shape from a shelter in Germany, was published only in 1951–60 (2 volumes), and the book was therefore largely obsolete when it appeared. It is a pity that Lüders was unable not only to take the recent literature into account, but also to take part in the discussion which the publication of his book seems to have revived.

Lüders obstinately maintains that the only possible translation of *ṛta* is truth, *Wahrheit*—a translation which can only be upheld by stretching the meaning of the German or English term so as to include notions which are not usually part of it—such as “cosmic power.”

Why then stick to *Wahrheit*? Why this obstinacy? The reason is, I think, because Lüders thought (perhaps rightly) that he had discovered in *Wahrheit* the *original* meaning of the word.

If the *ṛta*, he said in substance, is supposed to influence the course of the stars and human conduct, ritual or otherwise, it is by virtue of the magical power of the true utterance, of the exact formula uttered in the cult. The ceremony which brings this power into play is well known, although its name is not attested in Sanskrit: it is the *sac-cakiriya* of the Pali texts. In order to obtain the favor of a god, one pronounces a truth (not necessarily a reminder of a former favor of this god), and this secures success.

Lüders shows that this ceremony is already Vedic and even more ancient. It enables us to understand the mythical role which *ṛta* plays in many passages of the Veda: by *ṛta* (or by *brahman*, or by *vāc* “voice,” etc.) has been opened the *Vala*, the cavern from which come the waters and the light; it is by *ṛta*, by pronouncing the *ṛta*, that the eclipse of the sun has been conquered: and *ṛta* is the instrument of the *Ṛbhus* in their thousand miraculous exploits.

Lüders’ analyses have had at least one positive result, by showing the magic origin of the cosmic value given the *ṛta*. But Lüders thought he had discovered in the Veda this process by which a mere utterance from the mouth of men becomes a force in the universe. It is more difficult to follow him here, for we do not witness the process developing in the Veda; we see only the result of it.

As Gonda has shown in his review of Lüders’ book published in

*Oriens*, and in the second issue of *History of Religions* (p. 256), we cannot distinguish in the Veda a first stage in which *Ṛta* was conceived of as a mere *Begriff*, and a second stage in which this *Begriff* assumed a sensible form. From the earliest texts on, we find the conception of the *ṛta* as an objective, cosmic power. And this conception is not only Vedic, but is found also, as we shall see presently, in Iran.

Meanwhile a certain parallelism may already have become noticeable between the *Ṛta-Aśa* problem and that posed by the logos in Heraclitus. And on both sides we find in the last analysis a notion which is neither purely objective nor purely abstract, but both at once.

But there is more to come. As Lüders again has shown, in a large number of passages *ṛta* is synonymous with *brahman*, that is to say, with "hymn," with "Kultlied." One can deduce from this, as well as from passages in which *ṛta* means "truth," the meaning, at once general and precise, of *ṛta* as "any true statement about God, his powers and his exploits" (*jede wahre Aussage über den Gott, seine Kräfte und Taten*). What is more important is to ascertain—which Lüders has not done, but which will be useful for us—that this cosmic power which is *ṛta* is rarely the *subject* of a sentence: almost always, it is in a case other than the nominative, and most often it is in the instrumental. The world has been created "by means of *ṛta*," it is regulated "by means of *ṛta*" (*ṛtena*).

Returning to Lüders, we make, with him this time, another interesting statement. *Ṛta*, cosmic power, is localized and materialized. Often, under the name of "great *ṛta*," it is placed in the supreme heaven, with Agni (fire) in the celestial waters from which arise the sun and the dawn each morning, and where soma, the sacred liquor, also resides. This supreme heaven is also the world of *sūkṛta*, that is, the Paradise where men enjoy the recompense of their good actions.

It is from the supreme heaven that the inspiration of the sacred poet comes, and that is why (as Paul Thieme, a disciple of Lüders, has shown in ZDMG 102, p. 112) one reads: *prá bráhmaitu sádanād ṛtásya*: "may prayer (*brahman*) rise from the abode of *ṛta*" (RV VII. 36). In other passages it is *ṛta* itself which "inspires" the priest and this is expressed concretely, either by the root *śvas* "to breathe" (*ṛtām āśusāndh* "those who breathe *ṛta*," etc.), or by the root *vat* (*āpy avīvatann ṛtām*, "they have insufflated the gift of the word, the *ṛta*"), and we must remark, with Thieme and Renou, that "the idea is always that of insufflating a spiritual force into the soul of the poet" and that "it cannot be chance if an old name for the inspired poet, lat. *vates*, covers exactly this ṛg-vedic root."

## *Heraclitus and Iran*

The practice of *satyakriyā* is even more ancient than the Veda: this seems proved by the fact that one finds its analogue in the Avesta.

In consequence, the movement from the sense of "true prayer" to that of "cosmic power" can itself be of Indo-Iranian date and will then give account of the cosmic sense of *Aša* in Iran as it explains that of *ṛta* in India. But before turning to Iran it is necessary to note in the Indian thought two remarkable parallels to the semantic process which Lüders' theory postulates. As Van Buitenen has recently demonstrated<sup>7</sup> the term *akṣara*, already in the Rig Veda, claimed the position of a supreme principle, without however for a moment ceasing to mean "syllable." And the parallel with *ṛta* goes further in that, as Agni was said to abide in the womb of the *ṛta*, so was it addressed as "most excellent Fire, sparkling in the syllable which is thy mother's womb . . . ; seated in the womb of the *ṛta*" (RV 6. 16. 35-36).

On the other hand—and this was noticed by Lüders himself—after the time of the Rig Veda, in the Atharva Veda and in the Brāhmaṇas, *ṛta* fell into disuse as a cosmic principle. But it was replaced, successively, by two other terms, *tapas*, "asceticism," and *brahman*, "prayer." It is especially the latter which interests us, for if it is true that *brahman* was a synonym of *ṛta*, one sees that in the one case as in the other, the same semantic process shows itself: because prayer had a constraining force on the gods, it was raised to the rank of cosmic principle, and the elevation of *brahman* only repeats, at the time of the Brāhmaṇas and in a sense before our eyes, the evolution of meaning which *ṛta* had undergone during the Indo-Iranian period.

If now we turn toward Iran, we see there the effects of this prehistoric semantic evolution. That *Arta* was already conceived there as a "Power" shows in the usage made of it in proper names such as Artaxšaθra (name of Artaxerxes, meaning literally: "who holds his power from *Arta*") or Artafarnah ("who has his glory from *Arta*"). And this role of *Arta* is more ancient than our most ancient Iranian documents, for one finds it also in many names of Aryan chiefs attested in the cuneiform sources between 1600 and 1250: *Artamanya*, *Artasumara*, etc.

The Avestan form of *arta*, *Aša*, shows clearly the same meanings as the Vedic term. Just as *ṛta* was opposed to *druh* "lie," so *aša* opposes itself to *druj*; and this opposition has, in the Zoroastrian system, a truly cardinal importance, for it orders in a way the entire Iranian dualism: on one side the *ašavan*, the good ones, on the other the *dragvant*, the evil ones. However, since it could be objected that this is a

<sup>7</sup> JAOS, 1959, pp. 176 ff.

purely Iranian development, or even a purely Zoroastrian one, it is best left out of account; we can then consider only the Old Persian term, *artāvan*. This connotes a quality of the deceased ("and may I, dead, be *artāvā*", says Xerxes, Persepolis h. 48), which corresponds perfectly—as shown recently by Kuiper<sup>8</sup>—to Vedic *ṛtāvan*, an epithet of gods, of the deceased fathers, and of death, the essential point being that *ṛta* is lined up with the domain of death: "it is regularly hidden where the sun's horses are unharnessed" (RV 5. 62, 1). It is also apparent that *aša* is connected with afterlife, for a passage of the Gathas (Y. 30. 1), in Kuiper's novel interpretation,<sup>9</sup> speaks of "the bliss of *Aša*."

Furthermore in the same way that *ṛta* signified "truth," *Aša* is Ἀλήθεια in the translation that Plutarch gave of it (undoubtedly following Theopompus). Again, in the Gathas of Zarathustra *Aša* is very seldom the subject of a sentence. One says more often that a thing takes place *ašāi haca*, "according to *Aša*," just as in Vedic one has the instrumental far more often than the nominative of *ṛta*.

*Aša*, according to Zoroastrian cosmology, is the patron of fire; fire is the auxiliary of the truth (and not only, as in the ordeal, of justice and of truth at the same time). Let us listen to the prophet (31:19): "They have heard (your words and maxims, he says to the Lord) by him who thinks of *Aša*, by the healer of the world, by the man who knows, O Lord, and who uses his tongue at will in order to speak correctly, with the aid of thy brilliant fire, O Wise One."

*Aša*, like *Ṛta*, is, in short, luminous. In another stanza, and in a style which seems to anticipate Bossuet, the prophet cries: "He who first created intelligence through thought, who created *Aša* penetrating the free spaces with light. . . ." Moreover, according to Kuiper's interpretation cited above, the bliss of *Aša* "manifests itself in the lights."

We can conclude, without entering into more detail, that Iran, as India, presents us with a term which has had to signify first of all "true statement"; that this statement, because it was true, had to correspond to an objective, material reality; and that, as the discourse did, this reality must embrace all things; and, finally that one recognized in it a great cosmic principle since all things happen according to it. I am speaking of Iran and India; but does this not apply to Heraclitus, to his true, objective, substantial Logos, according to which all things happen?

<sup>8</sup> *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 1959, p. 215.

<sup>9</sup> *Indo-Iranian Journal*, 1963 (obligingly communicated in manuscript).

## *Heraclitus and Iran*

There is an obvious difference: *ῥta* is prayer, the sacred formula; logos is undoubtedly more profane: it is the philosophical formula. But the difference is not a radical one. The logos—and in general Heraclitus and all the first philosophers—disengage themselves from the sacred, but they are still in the process of doing so; that is, the logos is still tied, so to speak, to its origin.

However that may be, a final table of what we have found in India, in Iran, and in Greece will bring out all the common points between the doctrine of *Aśa-Arta-Ṛta* and that of the Logos, including the connection with fire (Table 1).

Arranging the data according to geography, we shall put India on

TABLE 1

Greece	Iran	India
Logos	Infinite Lights <i>Aśa, artāvan</i> Bliss of <i>Aśa</i>	<i>ṛtāsya yóni</i>  <i>sukṛtāsya lokāḥ</i>
Fire (lightning)	Fire	Agni
Will finally judge the world	Instrument of eschatological ordeal	
κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε Inspiration	<i>ašāi haca</i>	<i>ṛténa</i> Inspiration

the right, then at its left Iran, and finally Ionia; and we shall give to each entity the place which it occupies in the cosmology of which it is part.

At the top right is the “abode of *ῥta*” (*ṛtāsya yóni*)—where, notably, Agni, the fire, resides also and which, besides, is the “world of good actions” (*sukṛtāsya lokāḥ*), the paradise of the just. And from above *ῥta* descends as an inspiration, an insufflation.

In Iran, *Aśa*, the luminous principle situated where other texts place the “infinite lights,” is the abode also of the *artāvan*, that is, of the blessed. This *Aśa* is associated with fire, the instrument of ordeal, especially of the eschatological ordeal.

Finally, in Greece the Logos, which, according to Sextus Empiricus, is beyond all things and which, from up there, *inspires* man; and according to which all things happen (κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε), as in India *ṛténa* and in Iran *ašāi haca*. It is the celestial principle, which mingles more or less with—but is less active than—lightning, or than the fire which will finally judge the world.

Shall we conclude from all this that Heraclitus knew the doctrines



of the Magi concerning fire and truth? It seems to me that nothing is opposed to this conclusion. But it is perhaps necessary to take note of some general analogies between Heraclitus and Zoroaster (which do not prove a historical influence) and some important differences (which prove that if there has been borrowing there has not been servile imitation).

The general analogy which one can ascertain between the thought of Heraclitus and that of Zarathustra results from developments which had already taken place in Greece and Iran when the prophet and the philosopher appeared. Both, in their representation of the world, make use of entities, of abstractions, which are personified. In Greece it is already the case with Hesiod, for whom Heraclitus shows a certain contempt (perhaps because he was one of his masters); in Iran the use of abstraction preceded Zarathustra: *šta-aša*, for example, was already an Indo-Iranian notion.

But there is another analogy: in Heraclitus as in Zarathustra the use of abstractions or entities was established in such a way that they took the place of the ancient gods. However, the rupture with these is more radical in the case of the Iranian prophet than it is in the case of Heraclitus, who nevertheless condemns the bloody sacrifices to the gods.

Finally, however, there is a capital difference: Iran, beginning with Zarathustra and perhaps long before, irreducibly opposed good to bad, life to death. Heraclitus proclaims the *harmony of opposites*, between life and death (and other analogous pairs). There is here certainly an intuition, with that of the equivalence of the one and the all and with the *πάντα ῥεῖ*—in sum, the three principal points of his doctrine, according to Plato—which should be attributed to the genius of Greece. Nevertheless, as propounder and prophet of the Logos and of ever living fire, it would seem to be apparent that Heraclitus owed something to old Iran.