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THE MILESIAN MONISTIC DOCTRINE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRESOCRATIC THOUGHT

Aristotle tells us that in their quest for universal causes the early thinkers assumed such causes were material and postulated a single material principle for all things¹. Now the motivation Aristotle suggests for the early thinkers does not account for their consistent monism. Postulating a single cause for everything is not the only possible solution of the problem that supposedly preoccupied the first Presocratics and we still need an explanation why until the middle of the 5th century *all* the solutions advanced were phrased in monistic terms.

Recently this early monism has commonly come to be regarded as an example of the simplificatory reduction characteristic of the scientific outlook. This approach may seem a better explanation of the rise of philosophical thought than an assumption of a sudden awakening of interest in the quest for something that persists through change, but it does not make us understand the reasons for the consistent monism of early speculation. On this interpretation, the first thinkers are credited with attempting to develop a scientific alternative to the traditional mytho-poetic outlook, but there is no explanation why this alternative had to be formulated as a monistic doctrine: the 'scientific hypothesis' could just as well have been dualistic or pluralistic².

Could it have been mere chance that the first Greek thinkers all adopted the monistic position? This however seems highly improbable: it is hard to find a conception that contradicts common sense so sharply as material monism does, and to maintain that the early Presocratics held such a position for no specific reason is to portray them as rather eccentric. The psychological explanation that 'it was natural that the first philosophical simplification

¹ Met. 983b6.

² In commenting on Thales' monism, J. BARNES (*The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed., London 1982, 11) remarks: 'Unity is simpler than plurality ... Science always strives for economy and simplicity in explanation; and in adopting ... [a single stuff for everything] Thales was only proving himself an embryonic scientist ...'. Since BARNES surely does not intend to imply that only monistic doctrines are scientific (cf. *op. cit.*, 305), the relevant point here is that the scientific orientation is reductivistic. Hence Thales, while exhibiting such a reductivist bent, could just as well have arrived at, say, a dualistic doctrine. If his monism is thus not completely explained by his supposed scientific approach, his solution becomes a matter of personal taste. This may well account for Thales' preference for monism, but does not explain the unanimous preference for monism lasting about a century.

should also be the most extreme'³ is not very helpful, for we are dealing with a period extending over a century. Moreover, if one argues that it was their enthusiasm for the new approach that prompted the early thinkers, in contempt of common sense, to promote rigorous monistic reductivism, one must be prepared to explain why this hard-wearing enthusiasm vanished so suddenly and abruptly in the middle of the 5th century and why defending the commonsense world view against Parmenides' attack so concerned the post-Parmenidean thinkers.

Here we encounter another problem concerning early Greek monism: why was it abandoned in favour of pluralism in the middle of the 5th century? The usual explanation is that the 5th-century pluralistic systems were a reaction to Parmenides' argument. This is undoubtedly true, but it is also true that their pluralism *qua* pluralism is not logically accounted for by countering Parmenides' argument as such. Historically, the doctrine of Diogenes of Apollonia shows that monism was still possible after Parmenides and, in fact, was 'an answer to Parmenides as good as, or rather no worse than' the systems of the immediate successors of Parmenides⁴. However, Parmenides' immediate successors all rejected the monistic option and deliberately chose to formulate their answers in pluralistic terms. In view of the century-long monistic tradition, it is surprising that monism was so suddenly and totally abandoned and that a system like Diogenes' of Apollonia was the last, rather than the first, answer to Parmenides.

To sum up, neither the philosophic motivation supposed by Aristotle and his modern followers, nor the scientific purpose suggested by other recent writers, can account for the persistent monism of early Presocratic thought, and reaction to Parmenides' doctrine does not provide an adequate reason for its abandonment⁵.

The Milesian teaching, as reported by Aristotle and Theophrastus, stresses two basic doctrines: the world's coming into being out of a single material source and the world's consisting of this material principle alone⁶. Another

³ W. K. C. GUTHRIE, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (hereafter H.G.Ph.), i, Cambridge 1962, 57.

⁴ M. C. STOKES, *One and Many in Presocratic Philosophy*, Harvard Univ. Press 1971, 36.

⁵ To explain the emergence of monism in 6th-century thought GUTHRIE (H.G.Ph., i, 56 f., 70; cf. J. MANSFELD, *Aristotle and Others on Thales, Mnemosyne* 38, 1985, 109 ff.) argues that the idea of a single source of all things is not too different from the idea of their unity. However there is a great difference between claiming that water is the source of all that now exists and asserting, without regard for common sense, that, say, fire is the same thing as water. Consequently the possibility that early monism originated from a Milesian *façon de parler*, as G. VLASTOS tentatively suggested (in STOKES, *op. cit.*, 40), must also be sceptically regarded.

⁶ Arist. *Met.* 983 b6 (D.K. 11 A 12); *Phys.* 187 a 12, etc.; *Simpl. Phys.* 23, 13; [*Plut.*] *Strom.* 2; *Hippol. Ref.* i 6, 1-2 (D.K. 12 A 16, 9, 10, 11); *Simpl. Phys.* 24, 26; [*Plut.*] *Strom.* 3; *Hippol. Ref.* i 7, 3 (D.K. 13 A 5, 6, 7).

well-established Milesian doctrine is that this principle is divine⁷. The divinity of the Milesian principle may be understood as a primary or as a derived property. The latter approach is generally advanced, namely, that it is because it was regarded as an eternal source of everything that exists and a primary bearer of motion and life in the world that this principle was regarded as divine⁸. However the possibility still exists that the divinity of the Milesian principle was its primary property. On this understanding, the intended context of Milesian monistic reductivism appears to be pantheistic⁹. This approach is of great explicative efficacy, for a pantheistic motivation may well account for the monistic cast of early Greek thought.

Now we have authentic evidence for the existence of a pantheistic outlook in the 6th century, which lends historical plausibility to the assumption of a pantheistic motivation for Milesian thought. I refer to the conception of Zeus in the Orphic verses of the Derveni papyrus¹⁰ (cols. xii-xv):

So Zeus swallowed the body of the god, of the Firstborn king, the reverend one. And with him all / the immortals became one, the blessed gods and goddesses / and rivers and lovely springs and everything else / that then existed: he became the only one. / Zeus was born first, Zeus last, god of the bright lightning, / Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle, from Zeus all things are made¹¹, / Zeus is the king, Zeus is the ruler of all, god of the bright lightning.

After the swallowing Zeus creates the world out of himself (cols. xvii-xix)¹².

A pantheistic purpose of Milesians' teaching being admitted, two specific features of their pantheism may be noted. First, they envisaged the divine as

⁷ Arist. Phys. 203b7 (D.K. 12 A 15); Cic. De nat. d. i 10, 26 (D.K. 13 A 10); cf. Hippol. Ref. i 7, 1; Augustin. C.D. viii; Aët. i 3, 4 (D.K. 13 A 7, 10, B 2).

⁸ See, e.g., W. JAEGER, *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers*, Oxford 1947, 32; G. VLASTOS, *Presocratic Theology and Philosophy*, *Philosophical Quarterly* 2, 1952, 97 ff.

⁹ Cf. F. M. CORNFORD, *From Religion to Philosophy*, repr. 1957, N.Y., 114, 216.

¹⁰ See R. MERKELBACH, *Der Orphische Papyrus von Derveni*, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 1, 1967, 22; P. BOYANCÉ, *Remarques sur le papyrus de Derveni*, *R.E.G.* 87, 1970, 95. Cf. Aeschyl. fr. 105 METTE (70 NAUCK² = 70 RADT).

¹¹ Cf. Plato, *Legg.* iv 715E (D.K. 1 B 6).

¹² M. L. WEST's reconstruction and translation (*The Orphic Poems*, Oxford 1983, 88 ff., 114 f.; in WEST, the column-numbering is higher by one than in other publications); cf. W. BURKERT, *Orpheus und die Vorsokratiker*, *Antike und Abendland* 14, 1968, 101 f. According to the reconstruction proposed by MERKELBACH (*Z.P.E.* 47, 1982, appendix after p. 300) and adopted in G. S. KIRK, J. E. RAVEN and M. SCHOFIELD, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed., Cambridge 1983 (hereafter K.R.S.), 31 f., Zeus swallows not the Firstborn's body but Uranus' phallus; this difference is of no great import for the present discussion. For the date of the Orphic poem of the Derveni papyrus see MERKELBACH, art. cit., 21 f., WEST, op. cit., 108.

a particular substance, a conception hardly surprising in this epoch, and secondly, they combined the pantheistic view with the cosmogonical one, precisely as the pantheistic identification of the world with Zeus was combined with mythological cosmogony in Orphic verses of the Derveni papyrus¹³. The teaching that the world's emergence is a result of the cosmic god's transition from homogeneity (uniformity of ἄρχή) to heterogeneity (multiformity of ἀρχή) may be called cosmogonical pantheism¹⁴.

It is not hard to see that the concept described above is fundamentally inconsistent: since the cosmic god is envisaged as a particular substance, that is, since the subsumption of the manifold into a higher unity is actually its subsumption under one of its components, the all-inclusive divine nature turns out paradoxically to be one of its own manifestations. Thus water, for example, would be both the whole manifold world and one of its particular components, water proper as distinct from its other components, such as earth, fire, etc. Consequently, both the unity of all things in the divine and the ability of the divine to be all things without losing its single identity (the ability of ἀρχή to turn into all other things without ceasing to be itself), and, in fact, the monistic picture as a whole, is extremely problematic. Clearly, if the Milesian doctrine was indeed pantheistically motivated, its failure to be consistently monistic was its failure to fulfil its very purpose. Such failure, if noticed, must have caused a great deal of concern. In its historical context, the problem must have been posed as the question of how the cosmic god, being a particular substance, can be all other substances without ceasing to be single. The problem has no real solution: the only way to arrive at a consistent monistic doctrine is to consider a higher unity of the universe as its intelligible and not material quality. Hence, if my starting-point is correct, the evolution of the early Presocratic systems must be prompted by the search for an adequate formulation of the pantheistic vision and should therefore present a gradual advance towards an abstract notion of a higher unity, a suggestion to which I now turn. What follows is a sketch, necessarily short and phrased in rather general concepts, in which I shall try out my hypothesis on the early

¹³ It was O. GRUPPE (*Die griechischen Culte und Mythen in ihren Beziehungen zu den orientalischen Religionen*, i, Leipzig 1887, 643 ff.) who pointed out that both the Orphics and the Presocratics were preoccupied with a common problem, which he defined as that of the relationship between the One and the Many. See also GUTHRIE, *The Presocratic World-Picture*, Harvard Theological Review 45, 1952, 187 ff., id., *The Greeks and Their Gods*, London 1950, 316 ff., id., *H.G.Ph.*, i, 132.

¹⁴ Viewing both the Milesian teaching and the Orphic lore as cosmogonical par excellence precludes the correct understanding of their relationship, see, e.g., the treatment of the Derveni papyrus in K.R.S., 30 ff. I discuss the relationship between the Orphics and the Milesians in my paper *On the Unity of Orphic and Milesian Thought*, Harvard Theological Review 79, 1986, 321–35.

Presocratic doctrines by tentatively putting them within the suggested pantheistic perspective; in the state of our evidence concerning the first Presocratics, little can be proved beyond doubt regarding individual thinkers, but a consistent picture of the whole of the development may lend plausibility to the hypothesis.

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The premise that Thales simply asserted that the cosmic god is the water out of which the world came into being and with which this world is identical¹⁵ implies that he was unaware of the contradiction involved in his teaching. On this assumption, Anaximander should be considered as the first to grasp the problem¹⁶.

On producing the manifold world, a portion of Anaximander's cosmogonical ἀρχή, the ἄπειρον, turns into the world's various components¹⁷, while the rest of the ἀρχή, which retained its original nature, constitutes a distinct part of the physical universe, a part which is divine proper, as implied by Aristotle's words that the ἄπειρον 'encompasses all things and directs all things'¹⁸. The ἄπειρον, whatever its physical nature, thus appears to be a changeable substance¹⁹ which, on producing the world, loses its unity: having undergone a certain differentiation, the ἄπειρον turns into the

¹⁵ Cf. Arist. *De anima* 411a7 (D.K. 11 A 22) and accounts in JAEGER, *op. cit.*, 21f.; G. E. R. LLOYD, *Polarity and Analogy*, Cambridge 1966, 239; K.R.S., 95ff., and W. J. VERDENIUS in *Fondation Hardt, Entretiens* i, 1952, 164.

¹⁶ In his recent article (*art. cit.*, 109ff.) MANSFELD suggests that Thales was not a monist in the strict sense of the term, arguing that Aristotle seems to be unable to adduce sufficient factual material to support his classification of Thales with the monists. But this inability would be decisive only if Aristotle had had direct access to Thales' doctrine, and the only conclusion that follows is that Aristotle's construal of Thales' conception of ἀρχή as implying material monism must depend largely upon his knowledge and understanding of Milesian thought in general. The correctness of Aristotle's inference is another, different question, one to which no definite answer can be given, because, as MANSFELD himself points out (*art. cit.*, 110), 'one cannot go beyond the text of *Met.*, and one's final conclusion is very much a matter of choice'.

¹⁷ [Plut.] *Strom.* 2 (D.K. 12 A 10).

¹⁸ *Phys.* 203b6 (D.K. 12 A 15). It is almost certain that here Aristotle paraphrases Anaximander, see JAEGER, *op. cit.*, 29; C. KAHN, *Anaximander and the Arguments Concerning the ἄπειρον* at *Phys.* 203b4-15, *Festschrift Ernst Kapp*, Hamburg 1958, 19ff.; F. SOLMSEN, *Anaximander's Infinite: Traces and Influences*, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 44, 1962, 111ff.; cf. GUTHRIE, *H.G.Ph.*, i, 88. On the divinity of the ἄπειρον see, among others, JAEGER, *op. cit.*, 31, 203ff.; F. M. CORNFORD, *Principium Sapientiae*, Cambridge 1952, 168; C. KAHN, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*, *Columbia Univ. Press* 1960, 237; GUTHRIE, *H.G.Ph.*, i, 87ff.

¹⁹ *Hippol. Ref.* i 6, 2 (D.K. 12 A 11); cf. *Simpl. Phys.* 24, 13 (D.K. 12 A 9).

manifold of which it itself (namely, its unchanged portion) is a distinct part, opposed to both the articulated world as a whole and to its various components²⁰.

But the *ἄπειρον* is not only what encompasses and directs the rest of things but also these things themselves, that is, the principle under which the manifold world is subsumed, as reflected in the Peripatetic treatment of the *ἄπειρον* as material substrate²¹ and as can be inferred from the confused reports that Anaximander held the infinite worlds to be gods²². Here, in addition to an uncertainty as to which worlds are meant, single or coexistent, there is another confusion: the infinite worlds are not gods but the god is infinite worlds into which it successively turns²³.

Now according to Diogenes, 'Anaximander said that *ἀρχή* and element is the *ἄπειρον* not determining it as air or water or something other. And the parts change but the whole is unchangeable'²⁴. The report implies that changes that take place in the universe do not affect the *ἄπειρον* which is coextensive with it (for 'the whole' here can hardly mean something other than the *ἄπειρον*). What is the *ἄπειρον* so described? It cannot be a material principle

²⁰ Cf. C. J. CLASSEN, *Anaximander and Anaximenes: The Earliest Greek Theories of Change?*, *Phronesis* 22, 1977, 97. The world's emergence from the *ἄπειρον* is said to be by *ἀπόκρισις*, separation-out ([Plut.] *Strom.* 2; D.K. 12 A 19), a word which, as ΚΑΗΝ (Anaximander, 160 and note 3) points out, 'implies the emergence of unlike, contrary forms'. See also U. HÖLSCHER, *Anaximander und die Anfänge der Philosophie*, *Hermes* 81, 1953, 258 ff. and K.R.S., 129 f.

²¹ E. g., Arist. *Phys.* 187 a 12, 204 b 22, *De gen. et corr.* 332 a 19 and *Simpl. ad loc.*, *Phys.* 24, 24; *Theophr. ap. Simpl. Phys.* 24, 13 (D.K. 12 A 16, 15, 9). Cf. E. ASMIS, *What is Anaximander's Apeiron?*, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19, 1981, 286.

²² *Aët.* i 7, 12; *Cic. De nat. d. i* 10, 25 (D.K. 12 A 17); cf. *Simpl. Phys.* 24, 13 (D.K. 12 A 9 and B 1); *Hippol. Ref. i* 6, 1 (D.K. 12 A 11), [Plut.] *Strom.* 2 (D.K. 12 A 10). See ASMIS' discussion of this Theophrastean tradition in art. cit., esp., 280 ff.

²³ My interpretation comes close to that of ASMIS, art. cit., 280 ff., 293, 297. H. B. GOTTSCHALK (*Anaximander's Apeiron*, *Phronesis* 10, 1965, 37 ff.) comments that as the beginning of all things the *ἄπειρον* 'took over from the first principles of the mythological cosmogonies', but also 'usurped the function which the mythographers gave to the later gods who seized power after the creation of the world was complete', a function which implies 'a continuing relationship between the world and its own source much more intimate than anything envisaged by Hesiod or writers like him' (art. cit., 50). However, GOTTSCHALK's contention that this unification of the two functions 'was an important feature of the philosophical as against the mythological world-picture' (*ibid.*) cannot be accepted without reservations after the discovery of the Derveni papyrus: it is correct only regarding 'Hesiod and writers like him', but is paralleled in contemporary Orphic lore. In the Derveni papyrus Zeus is the creator of the world with which he somehow remains identical and which he governs. The parallel between the Apeiron's being called 'beginning' and 'end' in *Phys.* 203 b 6 (D.K. 12 A 5) and the Orphic verse 'Zeus is the head, Zeus is the middle, from Zeus all things are made' ([Arist.] *De mundo* 7, now also col. xiii of the Derveni papyrus) was emphasized by JAEGER, *op. cit.* 28 f.

²⁴ *Diog.* ii 1 (D.K. 12 A 1).

like that of Thales or Anaximenes. First of all, had this been the case, it would have been named and not referred to as τὸ ἄπειρον. Secondly, as a material principle – either definite or indefinite – it would not be unchangeable, for changeability is what enables such a principle to become the manifold world²⁵. Nor can it be the mere totality of things: it is said to be unchangeable as opposed to its changeable ‘parts’. The conclusion that here the ἄπειρον is not conceived as physical seems unavoidable. The ἄπειρον as described in Diogenes is the cosmic god which is all things (they are thought of as its ‘parts’), but which itself is neither one of them nor their aggregate.

Thus Anaximander arrived at the idea of the divinity as an intelligible essence coextensive with the universe. Evidently, the precise nature of this essence was not clear to him, as is indicated by the name τὸ ἄπειρον, the Immense²⁶, which seems to be simply a reified attribute of the cosmic god²⁷. But if indeed Anaximander was aware of the contradictory implications of a physical definition of the divine, and as a result touched upon a new notion untroubled by the contradiction, why did he nevertheless combine it with the vision of the divine as a changeable physical body? The answer is that the subsumption of the world under one of its components is not an accidental feature of cosmogonical pantheism, but rather its very essence: the divine is both the unifying principle of all things and the particular substance out of which the world has arisen, for the ἀρχή and the manifold world are but two states of the cosmic god, namely, those of homogeneity and heterogeneity. For this reason, when Anaximander was thinking of the divine in the cosmogonical context, he inevitably construed it as a changeable physical essence. If anything could reconcile these incompatible conceptions, it could only be Anaximander’s personal vision. Anaximander’s immediate successors had to decide whether the divine is something which is not one of the components of the physical world and hence different from the ἀρχή, or whether it is an ἀρχή and hence a component of the physical world. The former decision allows for continuity with and completion of the way begun by Anaximander, a way of creating an abstract notion of the divine (and thus, of the idea of the intelligible as such). The latter decision, the inconsistency of the physical definition having been acknowledged, is an attempt to eliminate the contradiction

²⁵ Cf. Anaximenes’ stress on the changeability of air: Theophr. ap. Simpl. Phys. 24, 26; [Plut.] Strom. 3; Hippol. Ref. i 7 (D.K. 13 A 5, 6, 7); cf. also Heraclitus’ fr. 30. 31. 67. 90.

²⁶ That in Anaximander’s time ἄπειρος did not mean ‘infinite’ in the strict sense of the term, nor did the idea of infinity even exist, is today beyond doubt, see KAHN, op. cit., 331; GUTHRIE, H.G.Ph., i, 85f.

²⁷ This is not to say that in selecting this name for the cosmic god Anaximander was not influenced by specific considerations. One such reason can be found in use of the term in its literal meaning ‘in-finite’ in the presumably Anaximandrian argument at Phys. 203 b 4. On this argument see JAEGER, op. cit., 25; KAHN, art. cit.; SOLMSEN, art. cit., 111; ASMIS, art. cit., 287ff.

without abandoning cosmogonical pantheism. Xenophanes chose the former path, Anaximenes the latter.

Anaximenes identifies the divine with air; as a result, air appears as both the entire universe whose components are no more than air in various degrees of density²⁸, and a distinct component of the universe, air proper, as in the paraphrase preserved in Aëtius, in which air's relation to the rest of the world is compared with the soul's relation to the body²⁹. As the problem had been noticed by Anaximander, we can expect that Anaximenes was also aware of it and attempted to eliminate the inconsistency. Indeed, Anaximenes' explanation of how air can become all other things through rarefaction and condensation, that is, without ceasing to be air, was just such an attempt³⁰. This capacity of air to retain its identity throughout all changes makes it in a certain sense unchangeable, and, taken in this sense, air may properly be called 'ἄπειρος'³¹ or even 'τὸ ἄπειρον'³², for 'ἄπειρος' is the name associated with the Anaximandrian concept of the divine as an unchangeable essence coextensive with the universe. Therefore Anaximenes' application of the term to air is virtually an additional definition of the cosmic god, and the question of whether Anaximenes indeed used the expression 'Air and the Immense' or only 'the immense Air' is philological rather than conceptual. But why did Anaximenes need an additional definition of the divinity?

Anaximenes' attempt to present air's transformations as changes in density may furnish a good explanation as to how air can become all things, but it does not explain how air *is* all things. Indeed, as H. CHERNISS put it »... the definition of it as 'air' [does not] imply here an identity which includes homogeneity, for the other characteristics of the air as of all bodies depend upon the mechanical distribution [I would prefer to say, upon the degree of 'thickness'] of its parts... Such a notion involves the logical difficulty of identifying the

²⁸ Hippol. Ref. i 7, 3 (D.K. 13 A 7). To avoid the association with quantitative distribution of a substance in the void, anachronistic for Anaximenes (see esp. STOKES, op. cit., 43 ff.), 'thickness' and 'thinness' would perhaps be more appropriate.

²⁹ Aët. i 3, 4 (D.K. 13 B 2). Cf. O. GIGON, Die Theologie der Vorsokratiker, Fondation HARDT, Entretiens i, 1952, 139. K. ALT (Zum Satz des Anaximenes über die Seele, Hermes 101, 1973, 129 ff.) challenges the attribution of the text paraphrased by Aëtius to Anaximenes, but see K.R.S., 161, note 1.

³⁰ As KIRK (K.R.S., 145 f.) puts it, Anaximenes 'thought of a way in which it [air] could become other components of the world, like sea or earth, without losing its own nature'. Cf. GUTHRIE, H.G.Ph., i, 116, 119 ff.; CLASSEN, art. cit., 100 ff.; BARNES, op. cit., 45, and some others. For the opposite view, see esp., STOKES, op. cit., 43; J. KŁOWSKI, Ist der Aer des Anaximenes als eine Substanz konzipiert?, Hermes 100, 1972, 131 ff.; cf. C. KAHN, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus, Cambridge 1979 (hereafter Heraclitus), 19 ff.

³¹ Simpl. Phys. 24, 26; [Plut.] Strom. 3; Hippol. Ref. i 7, 1 (D.K. 13 A 5, 6, 7).

³² Diog. ii 3 (D.K. 13 A 1): 'he said that the ἀρχή is air and the ἄπειρον'.

'parts' . . . «³³. Thus changes in the air's density are in fact changes in its basic nature so that air appears to be a primal form of matter rather than the sole constituent of all things. If Anaximenes had any doubts about whether his explanation satisfactorily established air as all that exists he would have emphasized this point, and it is therefore not surprising that in addition to defining the divinity as air, he adopts the Anaximandrian definition of it as τὸ ἄπειρον, the unchangeable essence coextensive with the universe, a definition within the limits of which the deity's capacity to be all things without losing its identity is more firmly established.

This technique of using supplementary definitions to clarify aspects of the vision of the divinity not adequately expressed in the main definition was continued and developed by Heraclitus. Since Heraclitus identifies the cosmic god with fire³⁴, his doctrine displays the familiar contradiction: fire is both the entire manifold world (fr. 30. 31. 65) and a distinct part of it, fire proper, which assumes the function of the divine principle in the world (fr. 64. 90. 66)³⁵. This contradiction, irresolvable within the limits of the physical definition, compelled Heraclitus, as it did Anaximenes before him, to resort to additional definitions of the deity.

One such additional definition can be found in fr. 67 where the totality of things represented by a list of opposites is subsumed under the higher unity of God which is described as what remains the same throughout manifold appearances, an essence which cannot be consistently predicated of fire. Another additional definition of the divinity is One, as becomes clear from the juxtaposition of fr. 32 with fr. 50: since 'one' in fr. 32 stands for the divine (the only possessor of the true wisdom and claimant to the name of Zeus), 'all is one' in fr. 50 is not so much an assertion of the unity of all things as their subsumption under the essence One. The divine being defined as One, the problem

³³ H. CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*, Baltimore 1935, 380. CHERNISS, however, is of the opinion that 'the Ionians paid no attention to this problem' (*ibid.*).

³⁴ On the divinity of Heraclitus' fire see, among others, O. GIGON, *Der Ursprung der griechischen Philosophie*, Basel 1945, esp. 218, 237 ff.; GUTHRIE, *H.G.Ph.*, i, esp. 432, 459; KAHN, *Heraclitus*, esp. 275 ff., cf. 11. Cf. also G. S. KIRK, *Heraclitus. The Cosmic Fragments*, Cambridge 1954, 363, 387 and *passim*.

³⁵ In fr. 64, the thunderbolt is the symbol of fire; in this KIRK (*op. cit.*, 356) is correct as against GIGON (*Untersuchungen zu Heraklit*, Leipzig 1935, 145) who argues that as the world is fire, it cannot be governed by fire. The contradiction, however, lies not in the interpretation but in the doctrine itself. KAHN (*Heraclitus*, 23) sees this as the Heraclitean paradox of 'a world-order identified with one of its constituent parts'. But as we have already seen the paradox is not peculiar to Heraclitus but is the inescapable effect of a physical definition of the higher unity. KIRK's attempt (*op. cit.*, 316), following ZELLER (*ZELLER-NESTLE*, 817 ff.), to resolve the difficulty by imposing upon Heraclitus the distinction between 'celestial' and 'everyday' fire (cf. M. MARCOVICH, *Heraclitus. Editio Major*, Merida 1967, 259 f., 284 f., 287 and esp. 350) was rightly criticized by G. VLASTOS, *On Heraclitus*, *A.J.Ph.* 76, 1955, 337 ff.

acquires a new, more speculative aspect: how the apparently many is actually One. To claim that the many is unity is possible either by denying the substantial nature of the plurality or by postulating that the One has a peculiar nature that enables it to be the Many at the same time. Heraclitus uses both strategies. On the one hand, he tries to show that the differentia of things depend on the observer's attitude to them (fr. 9. 37. 61. 111; cf. fr. 4. 13)³⁶ and not on their own nature, for things have no definite identity (fr. 12. 91. 126; cf. fr. 48), so that even things that appear to be opposites are the same (fr. 48³⁷. 59. 60. 103; fr. 88 synthesises both theses); consequently, reality, correctly understood, is a complete unity (cf. fr. 50. 57), and this is how God grasps it (fr. 102). On the other hand, Heraclitus claims that 'one' and 'all' are complementary (fr. 10) and that One both diverges and converges with itself (fr. 51)³⁸ so that plurality is perfectly arranged and connected in a higher unity (fr. 8. 10. 51; cf. fr. 54. 123).

Yet as long as the definition of the divine remains physical, supplementing it with additional definitions and descriptions, even if not contradictory in themselves, cannot resolve the basic inconsistency³⁹; the doctrine becomes more complex, and more, not less, contradictory.

Another attempt to resolve the problem bequeathed by Anaximander, the problem of whether the divine is the ἀρχή and hence a component of the physical world, or something different from any component of the world and hence different from the ἀρχή, was made by Xenophanes, who differentiated the cosmic god from the cosmogonical ἀρχή. This step, which amounts to turning cosmogonical pantheism into a non-cosmogonical pantheistic doctrine, made the subsumption of the manifold under one of its components unnecessary and consequently allowed for an abstract concept of the divine. The doctrine of Xenophanes is thus the turning-point in the development of early Presocratic thought, and CHERNISS' contention that Xenophanes »became a figure in the history of Greek philosophy by mistake«⁴⁰ makes him great injustice.

³⁶ Fr. 4, 9 and 13 are not invective (so, e. g., ZELLER, *op. cit.*, 794, 911; GIGON, *Untersuchungen* 121; H. FRÄNKEL, *A Thought-pattern in Heraclitus*, *A.J.Ph.* 59, 1938, 322); rather, together with fr. 61, they describe the dependence of any definition on the definer's perspective. Cf. KIRK, *op. cit.*, 80, 83 f.

³⁷ Fr. 48 is correctly understood by KIRK (*op. cit.*, 112) as another example of 'the concurrence of the two states normally counted as radically opposed to each other'.

³⁸ Following ZELLER, reading ξυμφέρεται instead of ὁμολογέειν in the mss. retained in D.K.

³⁹ The supplementary character of the opposite-doctrine manifests itself in what KIRK (*op. cit.*, 344) considers 'one of the strangest features' of Heraclitus' system, namely, in 'the lack of explicit interrelation between his special analysis of the cosmological change . . . and his general analysis of change as between opposites'. As KIRK points out (*ibid.*, 348), 'Heraclitus perhaps did not fully integrate his opposite-doctrine with his doctrine of fire'.

⁴⁰ H. CHERNISS, *Characteristics and Effects of Presocratic Philosophy*, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, 1951, 335.

But what is this cosmic god which is not one of the components of the manifold? Obviously, it is intended to be a certain essence. Paradoxically, this is precisely what the divine defined as 'θεός', cannot be. Indeed, since the Greek 'θεός' is by nature a predicate, as WILAMOWITZ pointed out⁴¹, the subsumption of the manifold under this term results in the concept of the divine as a mere aggregate of the world's components⁴²: the divinity defined as 'θεός' is 'all' but it is not 'something'. To prevent the cosmic god from merely being 'all', Xenophanes, following Anaximander, in whose doctrine unchangeability was predicated of the divine *qua* principle under which the manifold is subsumed, attributed to it unchangeability⁴³. But when supplemented with it the cosmic god turns into an unspecified abstract essence⁴⁴, whose precise nature remains unknown and whose only attainable definition is the name 'God'⁴⁵.

The question of the precise nature of Xenophanes' God, which is coextensive with the universe but different from the sum of its components (*viz.* is an essence and not a predicate like 'θεός') and from any one of them (*viz.* is not a particular body) was answered by Parmenides who defined it as Being⁴⁶ and demonstrated Being's possession of the requisite characteristics – notably, the only ones he established – coextensiveness with the universe, divinity and substantiveness. Being's coextensiveness with the universe is demonstrated by showing that it is the only thing that exists (the other than Being, not-Being, cannot be real); its divinity by showing that it possesses at-

⁴¹ U. VON WILAMOWITZ-MOELLENDORF, *Der Glaube der Hellenen*, Berlin 1931, i, 17ff., cf. 26.

⁴² A similar semantic effect is produced by Heraclitus' definitions 'god' and 'one'. Cf. KAHN (Heraclitus, 279) on fr. 67: 'The god . . . is neither a physical substance nor an underlying element nor any concrete body like elemental fire . . . God is . . . strictly identical . . . with the total pattern of oppositions'. Since, however, these are supplementary descriptions of the divine alongside its definition as fire, the problem hardly arises.

⁴³ Fr. 26; Hippol. Ref. i 14, 2; Tim. fr. 59, etc. (D.K. 21 A 33; 35).

⁴⁴ Theophrastus (ap. Simpl. Phys. 22, 22; D.K. 21 A 31) correctly notes the non-physical character of Xenophanes' God.

⁴⁵ Aristotle's statement about Xenophanes at Met. 986b21 (D.K. 21 A 30) clearly implies that his God is somehow identical with the world (cf. Theophr. ap. Simpl. Phys. 22, 26; D.K. 21 A 31). Yet some scholars dismiss Aristotle's evidence on the plea that the motionless god cannot be identical with the changeable world, – see, e.g., K.R.S., 172. But the God's changelessness is not germane to its physical nature, being a result of the invariability of its definition as god, see my *Studies in Xenophanes* (forthcoming in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*).

⁴⁶ On the divinity of Being see, among others, CORNFORD, *From Religion to Philosophy*, 137; JAEGER, *op. cit.*, 197; GUTHRIE, *H.G.Ph.*, ii (Cambridge 1965), 114; H. FRÄNKEL, *The Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, English trans., Oxford 1975, 365f. Cf. also WEST's perspicacious comment (*op. cit.*, 109) that 'Parmenides' sense that Being is all one and continuous has something in common with the [Orphic] theological myth in which the entire universe is united in the body of Zeus, and when he calls Being 'whole, unique' (B 1.4 οὐλον μουνογενές τε), this recalls the Orphic poet's phrase that Zeus 'became the only one' (μοῦνος ἐγενετο).

tributes characteristic only of the divine – eternity (it is ungenerated and imperishable) and perfection (fr. 8, 6–21, 29–33)⁴⁷, and its substantiveness by showing that it is homogeneous and unchangeable (fr. 8, 22–29), so that though coextensive with the universe, it is not a mere changeable aggregate of its components.

Thus in Parmenides' doctrine early Presocratic thought attains its goal: a formally and materially adequate definition of the cosmic god as a higher unity of all things⁴⁸. This was achieved by abandoning cosmogonical pantheism for a non-cosmogonical pantheistic conception which raised the problem of the relation of the traditional cosmogonical view of the world and the newly established view of it as a self-identical intelligible essence. The transformation of the cosmic god from variable substance, undergoing changes that account for the rise of the world and for all that happens in it, to an unchangeable intelligible, cuts off cosmology from 'theology' and moreover, turns the former into one pluralistic doctrine among many, all equally unacceptable from the monistic standpoint. Nevertheless both Xenophanes and Parmenides retained cosmology in their doctrines, which suggests that the original pattern of cosmogonical pantheism was still alive in their minds⁴⁹. But because of the rise of the requirement of self-consistency in the Parmenidean system itself, we can expect that the next step in the development of Presocratic thought would consist in abandoning cosmology, that is, transforming the Parmenidean doctrine into a truly logical monism. In Melissus we witness just such a transformation: following Parmenides, he defines reality as Being, but, unlike Parmenides, does not combine the doctrine of Being with any physical conception of reality.

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If my interpretation is correct, the early Presocratic systems were theologically motivated and their monistic cast was predetermined by an

⁴⁷ JAEGER (op. cit., 107) points out that though Parmenides' Being is 'the very thing that would impress the Greek mind as something of at least divine rank' (cf. the previous note), he definitely fails to identify Being with God'. I however believe that he purposely avoided the definition which was responsible for the failure of Xenophanes' doctrine.

⁴⁸ The interpretation of Parmenides' doctrine I am suggesting conforms with the ancient authorities' view of Being as a unity of all existents, see Plato 128 A 8, 180E, 240D; Arist. 184 a 10, b 25–185 a 22, 986 b 1–18, etc; Theophr. ap. [Plut.] Strom. 5 (D.K. 28 A 22), Hippol. Ref. i 11 (D.K. 28 A 23), etc.

⁴⁹ On the elements of material monism in Parmenides' doctrine see my article Parmenides: Between Material and Logical Monism (Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 70, 1988 1 ff.).

underlying pantheistic vision⁵⁰. Depending on the character of the concept of the cosmic god — first, as a physical body and later, as an intelligible essence, early Presocratic thought took the form of material and then logical monism⁵¹. The monistic doctrine of Melissus is thus the final product of the evolution from the pantheistic-cosmogonical vision to a fully thought-out logical conception, an evolution in the course of which Greek thought ascended to the level of speculative discourse and discovered the sphere of the intelligible. The factor that generated this development and predetermined its path was immanent: the early thinkers were anxious to eliminate the fundamental contradiction inherent in their pantheistic vision and achieve its consistent and satisfactory formulation. In this search for the rational clarification and reconciliation of the notions involved, as in the way in which the fundamental intuitions of the age were interpreted and developed, the rationalistic spirit of Ionia was manifested. However, coming at a time when the pantheistic outlook was already declining, this achievement came too late, and the immediate effect of the emancipation of speculative thought from pantheistic ends and from the consequent need for monism was the ‘pluralistic revolution’ of the mid-5th century. Not bound by any predetermined vision or transcendent purpose, speculative thought became philosophical in the strict sense of the term — purely rational constructing for its own sake.

The pantheistic motivation, accounting for both the monistic cast of the first Presocratic doctrines and the drastic turn to pluralism in the middle of the 5th century, makes it possible to present early Greek thought as an intrinsically unified and continuous development rooted in the spirit of the age. On this approach, Greek philosophy did not come into existence ‘suddenly and without visible cause’⁵², but was a result of a gradual and historically-conditioned evolution. Intellectual achievements of the first thinkers, when viewed in this perspective, appear, not ‘naïve’, ‘embryonic’ or ‘anticipating’, but rather quite compatible with their purposes, while these purposes, instead of being unparalleledly advanced and sophisticated, fit in well with the intellectual horizons of the epoch. But if the intended context of the first Presocratic

⁵⁰ Not only, as CORNFORD points out (*Principium Sapientiae*, 201), is ‘the pattern of Ionian cosmogony, for all its appearance of complete rationalism, ... not a free construction of the intellect reasoning from direct observation of the existing world’, but also — and to the same degree — Ionian monism is not a purely rational construct.

⁵¹ Consequently, the famous Milesian interest in the natural explanation of meteorological phenomena, usually regarded as the clearest expression of the purely scientific motivation of their doctrines, seems to have an entirely different purpose: to provide an alternative explanation for phenomena traditionally regarded as the result of the activity of anthropomorphic gods (cf. KAHN, *Anaximander*, 108f.), an explanation that would allow for a pantheistic picture of the world.

⁵² FRÄNKEL, *op. cit.*, 225.

systems was indeed theological, why does Aristotle count the early monists among his philosophical predecessors?

The early theologians searched for an adequate definition of the divine presence they sensed underlying the whole of the universe. However by giving two answers, that the divine is a physical substance which turns into all things without losing its own identity (eventually, a material substrate), or, that it is an intelligible essence beyond the sensible (eventually, a logical form), they pointed to the area with which Greek philosophy was thereafter concerned, that of material and formal causes. Aristotle was thus correct in regarding Thales as the first thinker whose conception is historically relevant to his own thought and in viewing his own doctrine as the ultimate result of the continuous development begun by the early Presocratics. But classification of the early theologians with the later philosophers without regard for the difference in the intended context of their doctrines meant that the problems the early theologians were concerned with and the solutions they arrived at were framed in terms of later philosophical doctrines⁵³. As a result of this generalization, on the basis of alien motivation, early Presocratic thought was cut off from its historical background, making its rise appear as the sudden emergence of philosophical thought, its gradual development as two unconnected trends, the Ionic and the Eleatic, and its monistic character over a period of about a hundred years an unexplicable intellectual eccentricity.

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⁵³ Thus though formally correct, it is substantially wrong to say that the Milesians postulated a single stuff for everything; what the Milesians actually postulated was an all-embracing cosmic divinity envisaged as a stuff of everything.