

our control, and we ought not to be concerned about what we are not responsible for.

The activity of God is called a "game" precisely because it is assumed that *he* has no ends of his own to serve; it is in the same sense that our life can be "played," and that insofar as the best part of us is in it, but not of it, our life becomes a game. At this point we no longer distinguish play from work.



Measures of Fire

The Fire is the principle of every life.

Jacob Boehme, *Signatura rerum* XIV.29

In a recent thesis,¹ Dr. William C. Kirk has fulfilled his immediate purpose, which was to discover, as far as that is possible, what was actually said by Heraclitus on Fire. We do not propose to review this brochure, which is fully documented and well constructed. It is rather the restricted purpose of historical scholarship itself that we wish to criticize. We must, indeed, know what has been said: but of what use will such knowledge be to us, unless we consider the meaning of what was said and can apply this meaning to our own experience? Here Dr. Kirk has little more to say than is contained in the significant words, "Heraclitus is one of the Greek philosophers who sought to explain the whole universe in terms of some one basic entity. . . . After his time, to be sure, fire decreased in importance, and men ceased to look for one principle² that would explain all phenomena." This is a confession that men have fallen to the level of that empiricism of which Plato was so contemptuous, and to that of those Greeks whom Plutarch ridiculed because they could no longer distinguish Apollo from Helios, the reality (τὸ ὄν) from the phenomenon, "so much has their sense perception (αἰσθήσις) perverted their power of discrimination (διάνοια)."³ It is, however, only partially true that "the importance of fire has decreased," and only some men have abandoned the search for "one principle."

Dr. Kirk sees that Heraclitus must have had forerunners, but scarcely

[This essay was first published in *O Instituto*, C (1942), Coimbra, Portugal.—ED.]

¹ *Fire in the Cosmological Speculations of Heraclitus* (Minneapolis, 1940).

² "One principle" . . . "that One by which, when it is known, all things are known" (BU II.45).

³ Plutarch, *Moralia* 393b, 400cd. Cf. Plato, *Laws* 898b, "The body of Helios is seen by all, his soul by none," and AV x.8.14, "Him (the Sun) all men see, not all know with the mind." "Apollo" is Philo's ὁ νοητὸς ἥλιος. [Note Victor Magnien, *Les Mystères d'Éleusis* (Paris, 1929), p. 143.]

realizes that he may not have been a philosopher in the modern sense, but rather one in the highest ancient sense, according to which the veritable teacher is one who understands and transmits a doctrine of immemorial antiquity and anonymous divine origin.⁴ He does say that Heraclitus speaks as one who propounds an obvious and generally accepted truth, not as one who argues for a personal opinion. What remains of Heraclitus is, indeed, unquestionably "orthodox," i.e., in accordance with the *Philosophia Perennis* (et *Universalis*), of which the teachings are always and everywhere the same.

The conception of a transcendent and universal Fire, of which our fires are only pale reflections, survives in the words "empyrean" and "ether"; the latter word derives from *αἶθω*, to "kindle" (Skr. *indh*) and it is, incidentally, not without interest that Blake's "tiger burning bright" echoes the *αἶθωνες θήρες* of the Greeks, who thus referred to the horse, the lion, and the eagle; the *Rg Veda* (II.34.5) speaks of "blazing (*indhavan* = *αἶθων*) kine." For Aeschylus, *Ζεὺς ἔστω αἰθήρ* (*Fr.* 65A; cf. Virgil, *Georgics* II.325); in the Old Testament (Deut. 4:24) and for St. Paul (Heb. 12:29), *Noster Deus ignis* (*πῦρ*) *consumens est*; and the epiphany of the Spirit is as "tongues of fire" (Acts 2:3, 4).⁵ Agni (*ignis*, Fire) is one of the principal, and perhaps the chief of the names of God in the *Rg Veda*. Indra is "metaphysically Indha" (*αἰθων*), a "Kindler," for he "kindles" (*inddha*) the Breaths or Spirations (*prānāḥ*, ŚB VI.1.1.2).⁶ The solar Gander (*hamsa*), "on seeing whom one sees the All," is a "blazing Fire" (*tejas-endham*, MU VI.35), and spoken of as "flaming" (*lelāyati*, BU IV.3.7), like Agni's tongues (*lalāyamānāḥ* in Muṇḍ. Up. I.2.4). The Buddha, who can be regarded as a humanized type of Agni or Indrāg-

⁴ The Buddha, for example, proclaims that he "has followed the ancient path" (S II.106), and says that "Whoever pretends that I preach a doctrine wrought by my own reasoning and argumentation shall be cast out" (M I.77); ["the Source of a hundred streams (*bhūtānām garbham*)," RV III.26.9].

⁵ The connection of the tongues of fire and the speaking with tongues is not fortuitous, but depends on the doctrine that Fire (Agni) is the principle of Speech (*Vāc*); to which she is reduced when freed from her natural mortality (BU I.3.8, etc.; for the mortality of all the functional powers, cf. JUB IV.19); Agni, like Plato's *δαίμων*, "cares for nothing but the Truth," being *satyavācaka* (RV III.26.9, VI.2.3). Cf. ŚB X.3.3.1, "What becomes of one who knows that Fire? He becomes eloquent, speech does not fail him." See René Guénon, "Le Don des langues," *Études traditionnelles*, XLIV (1939). [The *Rṣis* (Sages) are described as sacrificers and singers "born hither again for the keeping of the Vedas" (JUB I.45.2).]

⁶ [For Indra-Agni as twins see RV VI.59.2, X.8.7. For the fullest account of the *Rṣis* as "Breaths," the *maruts* as "Storms," see ŚB VI.1.1.6 and JUB I.45.1-6; IV.12.6.]

nī,⁷ is "a master of the element of fire" (*tejo-dhātum-ḥusalo*, Vin I.25) which he can assume at will, and he is represented iconographically not only as a Tree but also as a Pillar of Fire.⁸ Meister Eckhart can still speak of "the motionless heaven, called fire or the empyrean" and say that the nectar (*die züezekeit* = ambrosia, *amṛta*, "honey," "water of life") is withheld from all who do not reach "that fiery heavenly intelligence."⁹

Let us now consider the Indian doctrine of "Measures of Fire." I use capitals here and in the many contexts where it is the God, and not the natural phenomenon in which He manifests Himself, that is referred to.¹⁰ We must first explain that while Skr. *agni* is literally *ignis*, "fire," the word *tejas*, which we shall have to cite repeatedly, is strictly speaking not so much the fire itself as an, or the most, essential quality of "fire," whether as deity or natural phenomenon. *Tejas* (\sqrt{tij} , to be sharp, cf. *στίζω*, *στίγμα*, *di-stinguo*, *in-stig-o*, stick, stake, stitch), is, as nearly as possible, what Jacob Boehme calls the "sharpness of the fire-flash" (*Three Principles* XIV.69). In RV VI.3.5, Agni is said to whet his *tejas* like a point of iron. The corresponding adjective *tigma* commonly qualifies *śocis*, "flame," and Agni himself is *tigma-śocis*, "of sharp flame." The word *tejas* is usually and rightly, however, translated by "fire"¹¹ or "fiery energy," the essential quality standing for the essence, the characteristic act for the agent; just as the Blast (*vāyu*) of the Spirit (*ātman*) is nothing but the Spirit itself in terms of its characteristic activity. At the same

⁷ Indrāgni, like Mitrāvarunau, is the *mixta persona* of the Sacerdotum (Agni being the *brahma*) and the Regnum (Indra, the *ḥsatra*) in *divinis*. Thus "Indra is Agni as Supreme Overlord," Śāyana on RV V.3.2, cf. V.3.1; also AB III.4, IV.22, and BD I.68. Names are given according to the aspect under which God is considered (RV V.44.6); [*brahma sat ḥsatrām ucyate*, "even as he seemeth so he is called," AV X.2.23].

⁸ Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, 1935, Pl. II; also Exod. 13:21.

⁹ Meister Eckhart, Pfeiffer ed., pp. 214 ff.

¹⁰ The customary designation of the early Greek and Indian philosophies as "naturalistic" is a betrayal of the truth ["physical" in Greek had not this meaning.] A philosophical "development" from naturalism to abstraction, coincident with an aesthetic development from abstraction to naturalism, would have been strange indeed. It is we, for whom "such knowledge as is not empirical is meaningless," who fail to distinguish the adequate natural symbol from its reference, we who see the pointing finger rather than the moon itself.

¹¹ Cf. J. Ph. Vogel, "Het Sanskrit Woord Tejas (= Gloed, Vuur) in de Beteekenis van Magische Kracht," *Med. d.ḥ.ā.ḥ.v. Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde*, Deel 70, Serie B, No. 4 (1930).

time it must be understood that neither *agni* nor *tejas* imply a heat as distinguished from a light; *tejas*, for example, is not merely a "sharpness" but also a "brilliance" as of lightning, hence the correlation "Fire and what can be illuminated" (*tejas ca vidyotayitavyam ca*, *Praśna Up.* iv.8¹²). In *Fr.* 77 Heraclitus himself substitutes φάος for the πῦρ of *Fr.* 20, the verbs remaining unchanged. Since we have made him our starting point, and since it would be awkward to repeat Boehme's "sharpness of the fire-flash," we shall adhere to the customary rendering of *tejas* by "fire" or "Fire."

Now, "Of the Fire (*tejas*) that is hidden within the Sky,¹³ it is but a little measure (*aṃśa-mātram*) that (glows) in the midst of the Sun, in the eye and in fire. That (Fire) is Brahma, Immortal.¹⁴ . . . It is but a little measure (*aṃśa-mātram*) of that Fire that is the ambrosia (*amṛtam*) in the midst of the Sun, whose growing shoots (*āpayanḥkurāḥ*) are Soma and the Breaths" (*prānāḥ*, *MU* vi.35).¹⁵ And so, indeed, just as sparks

¹² "It is as the Breath (*prānā*) that Agni shines" (*dīpyate*, *JUB* iv.12.6); "I am the flash in what is luminous (*tejas . . . vibhāva vasau*) . . . the splendor of the splendid" (*tejas tejasvinām*, *BG* vii.9, 10). [Agni is the *tejas* wherewith they slew *Vrtra* (*ŚB* ii.5.4.3, 8), Agni is the *tejas* of the Sacrifice (*ŚB* v.3.5.7-8) and the immortal in the mortal (*AV* xii.2.33).]

¹³ I.e., is ἠμερουπάριος (cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c); beyond the Sky (*uttaram divah*, *AV* x.7.3; *pareṇa divam*, *Ait. Up.* 1.2; *pare-ardhe*, *RV* i.164.10); in the empyrean as distinguished from the celestial or Olympian paradise.

¹⁴ The immortal, fiery (*tejomayam*) Brahma, the Spirit (*ātman*) of *BU* ii.5.1 ff.; [see Coomaraswamy, "The Sun-kiss," 1940, especially n. 15.]

¹⁵ The functional powers are called Spirations, Lives, or Breaths after the central Spiration, Life, or Breath of which they are participations and on which they depend (*BU* 1.5.21, *CU* v.1.15); and "Indra's energies" (*indriyāni*) with reference to Indra, identified with the central Breath; and by other names, e.g. "Elemental Beings" (*bhūtāni*) with reference to the "Great Being" (*mahābhūtaḥ*) from which their being stems. The passible Ego or "Elemental Self" (*bhūtātman*, *MU* iii.2) is accordingly a "host of beings" (*bhūtagana*, *MU* iii.3) and, in fact, the "Marut host" (*maruḍgana*), for "the Maruts are the Breaths" (*AB* iii.16), as they are also "Fires" (*agnayah*, *RV* iii.26.4). The true relation of these Breaths or Storms (our "stormy passions") to their Head is that of subjects to a king, loyal unto death; but if they are allowed to run wild in pursuit of their natural objects, serving themselves and not their king, "we" are distracted by this body of fallen Angels within us. Self-integration is a matter of orientation. That is, in brief, "Indian psychology."

The assimilation of the Breaths to (Soma-) shoots, implied in our text, is of very great significance for the exegesis of the Soma-sacrifice, but needs more space than can be devoted to it here.

The Commentators read *āpayanḥkurāḥ* and emend to *āpyanḥkurāḥ*, i.e., *api anḥkurāḥ*. In order to avoid any emendation we have assumed a reading *āpyayanḥkurāḥ*, i.e., *āpyai-anḥkurāḥ*, which is not impossible and gives an appropriate meaning; cf. *ŚB* vii.3.1.45 [and *ĀA* i.4.1].

disperse in all directions from a blazing fire, so from this Prescient Spirit (*prajñātman*, the ultimate and solar Self) the Breaths and other substances disperse to their stations" (*BU* ii.1.3, *Kauṣ. Up.* iii.3, iv.20, *Muṇḍ. Up.* ii.1.1, *MU* vi.26, 31, with negligible variants), and it is from this point of view that Brahma is compared to a "sparkling fiery wheel" (*MU* vi.24). Now "these functional powers (*indriyāni* = *prānāḥ*) are of the Spirit (*ātmaḥāni*), it is the Spirit (*ātman*) that proceeds (in them) and that controls them" (*MU* vi.31);¹⁶ they are the solar rays or reins¹⁷ (*raśmayah*) by which the Only Seer and Thinker sees, hears, thinks and eats within us (*MU* ii.6, vi.31, *BU* iii.7.23, *JUB* 1.29, 30, etc.), being accordingly the "Only Saṃsārin" (*BrSBh* i.1.5). Thus these active powers of speech, vision, thought, etc. "are only the names of His acts," of the forces that he puts forth and again absorbs (*BU* 1.4.7, 1.5.21, 1.6.3, etc.). In their operation in ourselves all these Breaths or Lives act together, so that we are able to refer to, see, hear, and think of one and the same object simultaneously (*Kauṣ. Up.* iii.2; cf. *1 Cor.* 12:14 ff.).

Now He, the Spirit (*ātman*), Brahma, Prajāpati, the Immortal, who in us assumes the appearances (*rūpāni*) of speech, vision, mind, etc. (these being, as we have seen, the names of His acts, not "ours"), is himself "of the substance of fire" (*tejo-mayam*, *BU* ii.5.1-15); he "divides himself" (*ātmanam vibhajya*) to quicken his children (*MU* ii.6), himself remaining "undivided amongst the divisions" (*BG* xviii.20).¹⁸ Again, the act of "creation," or rather "expression" (*vyṣṭiḥ*), is typically thought of as a "determination" or "measuring out" (*nirmānam*),¹⁹ the Measurer who is himself the measure of all things remaining "unmeasured amongst the measured" (*AV* x.7.39). It follows from this that His divisions, the

¹⁶ ["In me I take first Agni" (*TS* v.7.9); "let the fires of the sacred hearths (*ātmā*) again officiate just here in their respective stations (*yathāsthāma*)" (*AV* vii.67). *Indriyāgnayah* are the senses sacrificed into the fire of restraint, i.e., *tesu paroḥsam juhōti*, the individual's Internal Agnihotra (*BG* iv.26, 27); "when the Comprehensor controls the mind and the Breath has put the objects of the senses in their place" (*MU* vi.19); also, "the fires (*tejas*) of the senses wear away. . . . Thine alone is the chariot, the dance and the chant" (*KU* 1.26).]

¹⁷ The metaphor of the chariot, common to Plato and our Indian sources, is here involved. In *MU* ii.6, Prajāpati is the driver of the bodily vehicle, controlling the steed (the sensitive powers) by the "rays" or "reins" (*raśmayah*) that extend from his station in the heart to the objects of sense perception; cf. Plato, *Laws* 898c, ψυχῆ μὲν ἐστὶν ἡ περιάγουσα ἡμῶν πάντα, and Hermes, *Lib.* x.22, καὶ τοῦ μὲν θεοῦ καθάπερ ἄκτινες αἱ ἐνέργειαι, and xvi.7, εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ ἡνῖαι (ἐαυτοῦ ἄκτινες).

¹⁸ Cf. Plotinus, *IV.1.1*.

¹⁹ Cf. Coomaraswamy, "Nirmāna-kāya," 1938, citing *RV* iii.29.11, etc., where Agni is "measured out."

aforesaid faculties (or "intelligencies," *jñānāni*, KU VI.10, MU VI.30; *prajñā-mātrāḥ*, Kauṣ. Up. III.8; *buddhindriyāni*, MU II.6)²⁰ must be "Measures (*mātrāḥ*)²¹ of Fire." It is, in fact, as "Fires" (*agnayah*, ŚB x.3.3.1 ff.), as the "Fires of the Breaths" (*prāṇāgnayah*, Praśna Up. IV.3) and as "Measures of Fire" (*tejo-mātrāḥ*, BU IV.4.1, Praśna Up. IV.8) that these active hypostases of the Spirit are actually referred to.

We have shown, then, that the elementals of the active life are "Measures of Fire," and that being mortal in themselves they proceed from and again return to the immortal fiery Breath of the Total Presence within us. It is just this Indian and universal doctrine that Heraclitus (*Fr.* 20) enunciates: "κόσμον τόνδε τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ' ἦν ἀεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται· πῦρ ἀείζων, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα." "That Kosmos, the identity of all things, no one of gods or men hath ever wrought, but it ever was, and is and ever shall be everliving Fire, in measures being kindled and in measures dying out."²²

Very many others of Heraclitus' dicta are in the same way enunciations of doctrines that are both Indian and universal.²³ That "The Thunderbolt (*κεραυνός* = *vajra*) governs all things" (*Fr.* 28), for example, states the doctrine of the Axis Mundi.²⁴ In drawing parallels, it has been very far from my intention to suggest that the philosophies of Hera-

²⁰ The Breaths as "Intelligencies" are the "gods within you" of JUB I.14.1, 2, and the "angels" of Christian theology; their Duke (*netr*), *rex angelorum*, *devānām rājā*, Indra (Vāyu).

²¹ *Mātrā* (like *μέτρον*) is etymologically "matter," not in the sense of "that which is solid," but in the proper sense of "that which is quantitative" and has a position in the world (*loka-locus*). Whatever is thus in the world can be named and perceived (*nāma-rūpa*) and is accessible to a physical and statistical science; the unmeasured being the proper domain of metaphysics.

²² "That Kosmos" evidently being the *νοητὸς κόσμος* = *νοητὸς ἥλιος*, the "un-created Brahma-world" of CU VIII.13.1, the "world-picture" ("painted by the Spirit on the canvas of the Spirit," Śankarācārya. *Ātmanirūpanam* 95); the pattern of the sensible world. "It knows only itself, that 'I am Brahma'; thereby it becomes the All" (BU I.4.10). "Sicut erat in principio, est nunc et semper erit," because for Brahma there is neither past nor future but only the eternal now.

²³ So that, as Heraclitus also says (*Fr.* 77), *ἄνθρωπος ὄκως ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φάος, ἀπτεται ἀποσβέννεται* "Man, like a light in the night, is kindled and extinguished." (*ἀποσβέννμι* is to be despirated; of wind, to die down; of fire, to go out; of passion, to be stilled. These are precisely the senses of Skr. *nirvā*, Pāli *nibbāyati* (also to be finished, be perfected). The *samādhi* of the Breaths is their *nirvāna* and their *τελευτή*.

²⁴ Skr. *śkambha*, *sthūna*, *yūpa*, etc., Christian *stauros*, Islamic *qutb*, etc.

clitus or Plato are derived from Indian or other Oriental sources.²⁵ No culture, people, or age can lay claim to any private property in the Philosophy Perennis. All that I have tried to show is that the axioms of this philosophy, by whomsoever enunciated, can often be explained and clarified or emphasized by a correlation with the parallel texts of other traditions. And finally, I can only say of Heraclitus, with Socrates, that "What I understand of him is excellent, and what I do not [yet] understand is also excellent."

²⁵ For example, it does not seem to be necessary to derive the "negative theology" of Plotinus from Indian sources, as Emile Bréhier wishes to do (*La Philosophie de Plotin*, Paris, 1928, pp. 107-133). It is quite true that a negative theology is fully developed in the Indian sources and that in MU VI.30 both *viae*, *affirmativa* and *negativa*, are commended and are to be followed in their logical sequence. But it would be far simpler to think of Plotinus as dependent on such Platonic sources as *Phaedrus* 247c, "The region above the sky was never worthily sung by any earthly poet, nor will it ever be . . . For the colorless, formless and intangible . . ." and *Epistle* VII, 341D, where Plato says that the subject of his most serious study (i.e., the ultimate nature of deity) "does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies."