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Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks

Friedrich Nietzsche

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Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks

Friedrich Nietzsche

Modern English edition

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PHILOSOPHY IN THE AGE OF TRAGEDY OF THE GREEKS

(1873)

Preface

(Probably written in 1874)

When people are strangers to us and we know what they are aiming for, it is enough for us to approve or reject their aims as a whole. With people who are closer to us, we judge them by the ways they use to reach their aims. We often dislike what they are aiming for, but we love them because of the way they go about it and the style of their will. Now, philosophical systems are completely true only for the people who founded them. To all later philosophers, a system is usually one big mistake. To weaker minds, it is a mix of mistakes and truths. In any case, if you treat a system as the highest goal, it is a mistake, and to that extent it deserves blame. That is why many people reject every philosopher: his aim is not their aim. These are the people I called "strangers to us." But anyone who takes any pleasure at all in great people will also enjoy such systems, however wrong they may be. That is because they all contain one point that cannot be disproved: a personal touch, a personal colour. You can use them to build a picture of the philosopher, just as you can look at a plant growing in a certain place and figure out what the soil there is like. That way of living, or at least that way of looking at human life, existed once, and so it is possible. The "system" is what grew in this soil, or at least a part of it....

I tell the story of these philosophers in a simplified way. In each system, I will highlight only the one point that is a small piece of personality. That point belongs to what cannot be disproved or argued about, and it is what history must keep safe. This is a first attempt to win back and rebuild these personalities by comparing them, and to let the many voices of the Greek character ring out together at least

once more. The task is to bring to light the thing we must always love and honour, the thing no later knowledge can ever take away from us: the great person.

Later Preface

(Written towards the end of 1879)

This attempt to tell the history of the early Greek philosophers is different from similar attempts because it is short. I made it short by mentioning only a few of the teachings of each philosopher. In other words, it is short because it is incomplete. But I chose the teachings in which the philosopher's personality echoes most strongly. A complete list of every statement that has come down to us, the way textbooks usually do it, achieves only one thing: it completely silences the personal side. That is exactly why those records become so boring. In systems that have been proven wrong, the personal side is the only thing that can still interest us, because it alone can never be disproved. You can shape a picture of a person from just three little stories. So I try to bring out three such stories from each system, and I leave out the rest.

1.

There are people who are against philosophy, and it is wise to listen to them. This is especially true when they try to talk the troubled, unhealthy minds of Germans out of metaphysics, those big questions about what lies beyond the physical world. Instead, they tell them to clean themselves up through nature, as Goethe did, or to heal themselves through music, as Wagner did. The doctors of the people condemn philosophy. So anyone who wants to defend it has to show what healthy nations use philosophy for, and what they have used it for in the past. If he can show that, then perhaps even the sick nations will gain something, by learning why philosophy is harmful to them in particular. It is true that there are good examples of health that can exist without any philosophy at all, or with only a small, almost playful use of it. For example, the Romans, at their best time, lived without philosophy. But where can we find an example of a nation that had fallen sick and was brought back to health by philosophy? Whenever philosophy proved helpful, saving, or protective, it was among healthy people. It made sick people even sicker. Whenever a nation was falling apart, with its people only loosely tied to it, philosophy never once bound those people more closely to the whole. Whenever a person was ready to step aside and plant a hedge of self-sufficiency around himself, cutting himself off from others, philosophy was always ready to isolate him even more, and to destroy him through that isolation. Philosophy is dangerous wherever she does not fully have the right to be there. And only the health of a nation gives her that right, and not every nation has that health.

So now let us look for the highest authority on what makes a nation healthy. The Greeks were the truly healthy nation. By doing philosophy, they proved once and for all that philosophy is justified, and they did more of it than any other nation. They could not even stop at

the right moment. Even in their old, dried-up age, they still acted like passionate official champions of philosophy, although by then all they meant by it was the pious tricks of argument and the holy hair-splitting of Christian doctrine. By not knowing when to stop, they greatly reduced the credit they deserved in the eyes of the barbarian peoples who came after them. Those later peoples, in their untaught and hot-headed youth, could not help getting tangled up in those cleverly woven nets and ropes of argument.

On the other hand, the Greeks knew how to begin at the right time. And they teach this lesson, about when one ought to start doing philosophy, more clearly than any other nation. Philosophy should not be started when trouble comes, as some people perhaps think, who believe philosophy grows out of gloom and bad moods. No, it should be started in good times, in full grown-up strength, in the middle of the glowing, cheerful calm of a brave man who has won his victories. The fact that the Greeks did philosophy at such a time tells us something about what philosophy is and what its job is, and also about what the Greeks themselves were like. Suppose the Greeks had been the sort of practical, clever-too-early, worldly smart-alecks that today's learned narrow-minded know-it-all perhaps imagines. Or suppose their life had been nothing but a dreamy state of pleasure, all floating, ringing, breathing and feeling, as the uneducated daydreamer likes to believe. In either case, the spring of philosophy would never have burst out among them. At most, a little stream would have come out, soon trickling away into the sand or drying up into mist. It would never have become that wide river, flowing out with the proud rhythm of its waves, the river we know as Greek philosophy.

It is true that people have been eager to point out how much the Greeks could find and learn abroad, in the East, and how many different things they could easily have brought back from there. Of course, this made a strange sight when certain scholars lined up the supposed

teachers from the East next to their possible Greek students. They put Zarathustra next to Heraclitus, the Hindus next to the philosophers of Elea, the Egyptians next to Empedocles, and even Anaxagoras among the Jews and Pythagoras among the Chinese. Very little has been proven in the details. But we would have no problem at all with the general idea, if only people did not load us with the conclusion that philosophy was therefore just imported into Greece and did not grow naturally from Greek soil. Some even say that philosophy, being something foreign, may have ruined the Greeks rather than improved them. Nothing is more foolish than insisting that the Greeks had a home-grown culture all their own. No, instead they soaked up all the culture that was flourishing among other nations. And they got so far precisely because they knew how to pick up the spear right where another nation had dropped it, and throw it even further. They were wonderful at the art of learning in a way that produces something new. So, like them, we ought to learn from our neighbours, with the aim of living better, not of piling up dry knowledge. We should use everything we learn as a foothold from which to jump high, and even higher than our neighbour. Questions about where philosophy first began hardly matter at all. Because everywhere, at the beginning, things are crude, shapeless, empty and ugly, and in every field only the higher stages are worth considering. Some people would rather study the philosophy of Egypt and Persia than that of Greece, because those may be more "original" and are certainly older. They are acting just as foolishly as those people who cannot rest until they have traced Greek mythology, so grand and deep, back to simple physical things like the sun, lightning, weather and fog, as if those were its first roots. Such people happily imagine, for example, that the narrow worship of the single sky among the other Indo-European peoples was a purer form of religion than the Greeks' worship of many gods. The road back towards the beginning always leads into barbarism. Anyone who studies the Greeks should always remember this: an un-

tamed thirst for knowledge, all by itself, makes people just as barbaric as hatred of knowledge does. And the Greeks tamed their naturally endless thirst for knowledge through their respect for life, through a high, ideal need of life, because they wanted to live out right away whatever they learned. The Greeks also did philosophy as cultured people and with the goals of culture. Because of this, they spared themselves the trouble of reinventing the basics of philosophy and knowledge from scratch out of some proud idea that everything had to be their own. Instead, they eagerly set to work at once to fill out, improve, raise up and purify the basics they had taken over. They did this in such a way that they became inventors only at that later point, in a higher sense and in a purer realm. For what they discovered was the typical genius of the philosopher, and all the inventions of later ages have added nothing essential to it.

Every nation would feel ashamed if you showed it a group of philosophers as wonderfully ideal as the early Greek masters: Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Democritus and Socrates. All these men are whole, complete and self-contained,[1] as if each were carved out of a single block of stone. There is a strict, unbreakable link between the way they think and the kind of people they are. No rules or customs tie them down, because back then there was no profession of philosophers and scholars. They all stand before us in grand loneliness, as the only people of their time who gave their whole lives to knowledge. They all have the strong, upright energy of the ancients. Because of it, they do better than all later philosophers at finding their own shape and at perfecting it as they change and grow, down to the smallest detail and in the big picture as well. For no helpful fashion came along to make things easier for them. So, taken together, they form what Schopenhauer called a brotherhood of great minds, as opposed to a mere community of scholars. One giant calls out to another across the long, empty

stretches of the ages. And beneath them crawls a reckless, noisy crowd of dwarfs, but it does not disturb them, and the noble conversation between these great spirits goes on.

From this noble conversation between great spirits, I have decided to tell those parts that our modern ears, which hear so poorly, might perhaps still hear and understand. That surely means the smallest part of all. It seems to me that those old wise men, from Thales to Socrates, talked in that conversation about everything that, to our eyes, makes up what is truly Greek, even if only in the broadest terms. In their conversation, just as in their personalities, they clearly show the great features of the Greek genius. The whole of Greek history is only a shadowy print of this, a blurry copy, and so it speaks less clearly. If we could understand the whole life of the Greek people correctly, we would always find in it the same picture that shines in brighter colours in its greatest minds. Even the very first appearance of philosophy on Greek soil, the honouring of the Seven Wise Men, is a clear and unforgettable line in the picture of what is Greek. Other nations have their saints; the Greeks have wise men. It has rightly been said that a nation is shown not only by its great men, but even more by the way it recognises and honours them. In other times, the philosopher is a lonely wanderer who happens to turn up by chance in a very hostile world. He either sneaks through it or forces his way through with clenched fists. With the Greeks, though, the philosopher is no accident. In the sixth and fifth centuries before Christ, surrounded by the most terrible dangers and temptations of a world turning to worldly pleasures, he appears. It is as if he steps out of the dark cave of Trophonios, the ancient oracle, right into the middle of plenty: into the joy of discovery, the wealth and the pleasure-seeking of the Greek colonies. Then we can guess that he comes as a noble warner. He comes for the same purpose for which tragedy was born in those centuries, and which the Orphic mysteries hint at in their

strange, symbolic picture-writing. What those philosophers thought about life and existence means so much more than any modern opinion. That is because they had life in front of them in rich, overflowing perfection. And unlike us, the thinker's mind was not confused by a split inside him, between the wish for freedom, beauty and a full life on the one hand, and the love of truth on the other, which only asks: what is the point of life at all? We cannot clearly guess, from our own situation and experience, what job the philosopher has to do within a real culture that has a shared way of life. The simple reason is that we have no such culture. No, only a culture like the Greek one can answer the question of what the philosopher's task is. As I said before, only such a culture can justify philosophy at all. For only such a culture knows, and can show, why and how the philosopher is not a chance wanderer, pushed now this way, now that way. There is a necessity as hard as steel that chains the philosopher to a true culture. But what if this culture does not exist? Then the philosopher is a comet that no one can predict, and so he fills people with fear. But when things go well, he shines as the central star in the solar system of culture. This is why the Greeks justify the philosopher: with them, he is no comet.

[1] Compare what Napoleon said about Goethe: "There is a man!" (Translator's note.)

2

After these thoughts, no one should be offended if I speak of the philosophers before Plato as one united group, and give this essay to them alone. Something completely new begins with Plato. Or one could say, just as fairly, that compared with that brotherhood of great minds from Thales to Socrates, the philosophers after Plato are missing something essential.

Anyone who wants to speak badly of those older masters may call them one-sided, and call their later followers, led by Plato, many-sided. But it would be fairer and less biased to see the later ones as a mixed type of philosopher, and the earlier ones as pure examples. Plato himself is the first magnificent mixed type, and this shows both in his philosophy and in his personality. His system of ideas combines elements from Socrates, from Pythagoras and from Heraclitus, and so it is not a pure example of anything. As a man, too, Plato blends together different features: those of Heraclitus, who lived apart like a king and needed no one; those of Pythagoras, who was sad, full of pity, and a giver of laws; and those of Socrates, the skilled arguer who understood the human soul. All later philosophers are mixed types like this. Whenever something one-sided does stand out in them, as with the Cynics, it is not a pure example but a cartoon. Much more important, though, is the fact that they start sects, and that the sects they start are all organisations directly opposed to Greek culture and to the shared way of life that had held until then. In their own way they look for salvation, but only for single people, or at most for groups of friends and students closely tied to them. The work of the older philosophers aims, even though they did not know it, at healing and cleansing on a large scale. The mighty flow of Greek culture must not be stopped; terrible dangers must be cleared out of the path of its current; the philosopher protects and defends his homeland. But now, from Plato on, he is in exile and plots against his own country.

It is truly bad luck that so very little from those older masters of philosophy has reached us, and that we do not have a single complete work by any of them. Because of that loss, we end up judging them by the wrong standards without meaning to. We let ourselves think less of them simply because of the chance fact that Plato and Aristotle always had people who admired them and copied out their books. Some people believe that books have a special fate watching over

them, a "fate of little books." If so, that fate must be a very spiteful one. It decided to keep from us the works of Heraclitus, the wonderful poem of Empedocles, and the writings of Democritus, whom the ancient Greeks ranked as equal to Plato, and who was even cleverer than Plato. And in their place, it handed us the Stoics, the Epicureans and Cicero. We have probably lost the highest and greatest part of Greek thought and the way it was put into words. This fate will not surprise anyone who remembers the bad luck of the thinkers Scotus Erigena and Pascal. Nor will it surprise anyone who considers that even in our own enlightened century, the first printing of Schopenhauer's book "The World As Will And Idea" ended up as scrap paper. If someone wants to believe in a special power of fate in such matters, they are free to do so, and they can say along with Goethe: "Let no one complain or grumble about things that are low and mean, for they are the real rulers, however much people deny it!" Above all, these low things are stronger than the power of truth. Humankind very rarely produces a good book that boldly and freely sings the battle-song of truth, the song of heroes in philosophy. And yet whether such a book survives another hundred years, or crumbles and rots into dust and ashes, depends on the most wretched accidents. It depends on people's minds suddenly going dark, on fits of superstition and on dislikes, and in the end even on fingers too lazy to copy it out, or on hungry bookworms and rainy weather. But we will not cry about it. Instead, we will take the advice in the scolding but comforting words that Hamann spoke to scholars who grieve over lost works. He said: "Imagine an artist who has learned to throw a lentil through the eye of a needle. Wouldn't a whole sackful of lentils be enough for him to practise his skill? One would like to ask this question of all the scholars who use the works of the ancients no better than that man used his lentils." In our case, we could add this: we did not need a single extra word, story or date beyond what has come down to us. In fact, even much less could have survived, and we would still be able

to prove the main point, which is that the Greeks show philosophy is worth having.

Think of an age that suffers from so-called "general education" but has no real culture and no shared way of life. Such an age hardly knows what to do with philosophy, even if the very spirit of Truth were to announce it out loud in the streets and market-places. In such an age, philosophy stays something else. It stays the learned talking-to-one-self of a lonely wanderer, a prize that one person happens to grab, a secret hidden away in a cupboard, or harmless chatter between old professors gone feeble and young people who are still children. Nobody dares to live out the rules of philosophy in their own life. Nobody lives as a philosopher, with the simple, strong faith that made a person in ancient times act like a Stoic wherever he was and whatever he did, once he had promised himself to the Stoic school. All modern philosophy is held back by politics and kept in line by the police, so that it is only a learned show. Because of governments, churches, universities, customs, fashions and human cowardice, it never gets further than a sigh of "If only!..." or further than knowing that "Once upon a time there was..." Philosophy has no rights. So if modern people had any courage and honesty at all, they ought to condemn philosophy and maybe throw it out, using words like the ones Plato used when he threw the writers of tragic plays out of his ideal State. Of course, philosophy would still have an answer, just as those poets had an answer to give Plato. If someone once forced philosophy to speak up, she might say something like this: "You miserable nation! Is it my fault that among you I have to wander like a homeless beggar, like a fortune-teller roaming the countryside? Is it my fault that I must hide and disguise myself, as if I were a great sinner and you were my judges? Just look at my sister, Art! Things are the same for her as for me. We have both been cast out among barbarians, and we no longer know how to save ourselves. It is true that here we have no

proper rights at all. But the judges who will do us justice are also judging you, and they will tell you: First get yourselves a real culture. Then you will find out what Philosophy can do and will do."

3.

Greek philosophy seems to start with a ridiculous piece of imagination: the claim that water is where everything comes from, the mother and womb of all things. Do we really need to stop at this idea and take it seriously? Yes, we do, and for three reasons. First, because the claim says something about where things come from. Second, because it says it plainly, without images and without myths. Third and last, because hidden inside it, like a butterfly still inside its cocoon, is the idea: Everything is one. The first reason still puts Thales among religious and superstitious people. The second reason, though, takes him out of their company and shows him to us as someone who studies nature. But because of the third reason, Thales becomes the first Greek philosopher. If he had said, "Earth develops out of water," we would only have a scientific guess. It would be a wrong guess, but still a hard one to disprove. But Thales went beyond science. When he presented this idea of oneness by way of his guess about water, he did not rise above the poor level of knowledge about nature in his time. At best, he jumped over it. Thales had made some weak, unorganised observations of how water appears and changes, or more exactly, how the wet appears and changes. Those observations would never have made such a huge, sweeping idea possible, or even hinted at it. What pushed him to this sweeping idea was a belief about the deepest nature of things, a belief that came from a mysterious, inner sense. We find this belief in every philosophy, together with the endless new attempts to put it into better words. It is the claim: Everything is one!

It is worth noticing how bossily a belief like this treats all evidence from experience. Thales in particular shows us how philosophy has

always behaved whenever it wanted to get past the fences of experience and reach the goal that pulls at it like magic. Philosophy jumps ahead, resting its weight on flimsy supports; hope and guesswork give wings to its feet. Careful, calculating reason comes clumsily panting along behind. It looks for sturdier supports as it tries to reach that tempting goal, where its godlike companion has already arrived. Picture two travellers beside a wild forest stream that sweeps loose stones along with it. The first one is light on his feet. He jumps across using the stones, swinging himself from one to the next, further and further, even though they sink straight down into the depths behind him. The second one stands there helpless most of the time. He first has to build a path strong enough to hold his heavy, tired steps. Sometimes that can't be done, and then no god will help him across the stream. So what carries philosophical thinking to its goal so quickly? Is the only difference between it and calculating, measuring thought that it flies faster across wide spaces? No. A strange power that doesn't follow logic gives wings to the feet of philosophical thinking, and this power is imagination. Carried up by imagination, philosophical thinking jumps from one possibility to the next, and for the moment it treats these possibilities as certainties. Now and then, even while it is still in flight, it catches hold of real certainties. A clever hunch points them out to the one who is flying; it senses from far away that provable certainties will be found at that spot. Imagination is especially strong at grabbing hold of likenesses and lighting them up, as fast as lightning. Afterwards, careful thought comes along with its rules and measuring sticks. It tries to replace those likenesses with exact sameness, and to replace things that were only seen side by side with real causes and effects. But even if that could never be done, philosophising that can't be proven still has its value, even in the case of Thales. When logic and strict, evidence-based science try to make their way across to the statement "Everything is water," every support breaks under them. And yet, even after the whole scientific building

has been torn down, something is still left over. And in that very leftover lies a driving force, and you could say the hope that it will bear fruit in the future.

Of course, I do not mean that the idea still holds some kind of "truth" in a weakened or limited form, or as a symbol. For example, I do not mean something like this: picture an artist standing near a waterfall. In the shapes that leap up toward him, he sees the water playing a game, as if it were sketching out human and animal bodies, masks, plants, rocks, nymphs, griffins, and every kind of living form there is. And so, for him, the statement "Everything is water" seems proven. No. The value of Thales' idea lies somewhere else. Even after we see that it cannot be proven, it is valuable precisely because it was not meant as a myth or as a symbol. The Greeks, among whom Thales so suddenly stood out, were the very opposite of realists. Deep down, they believed only in the reality of humans and gods. They looked at the whole of nature as if it were just a disguise, a costume party, a shape-changing show put on by these god-like humans. For them, humanity was the truth and the heart of all things. Everything else was only surface, a misleading game. For that very reason, they found it incredibly hard to think of ideas simply as ideas. In modern times, even the most personal thing tends to turn into an abstract idea. With the Greeks, it was the other way around: even the most abstract ideas turned into persons. Thales, however, said: "Not humans, but water, is what things really are." He began to believe in nature, at least to the point of believing in water. As a mathematician and astronomer, he had lost his warmth for everything mythical and symbolic. He did not manage to fully reach the pure abstract idea, Everything is one, and he stopped at a physical way of putting it. Even so, among the Greeks of his time, he was a surprising rarity. Perhaps the very well-known Orpheans, a religious group, had an even greater ability than he did to think in abstract ideas, without picturing them as shapes. But they

could only express these ideas in the form of symbolic stories. Then there was Pherecydes of Syros, who lived at the same time as Thales and shared many of his ideas about nature. When he expressed those ideas, he floated in that in-between zone where symbol and myth are joined together. So he dared, for example, to compare the earth to a winged oak tree hanging in the air with its wings spread wide. After Zeus defeated Kronos, Zeus dressed this oak in a magnificent robe of honour, and with his own hands he embroidered lands, water and rivers onto it. Compared with this kind of dark, symbolic philosophising, which can hardly be turned into anything we can understand, Thales' work is that of a creative master who began to look into the depths of nature without inventing fantasy stories. It is true that he used science and things that can be proven, but he soon jumped beyond them. That, too, is a typical mark of the philosophical genius. The Greek word for the wise man comes from the same root as the Latin "sapio," which means "I taste," and "sapiens," which means "the one who tastes," and the Greek "sisyphos," the man with the finest taste. So, in the opinion of ordinary people, the special skill of the philosopher is a fine, choosy judgment by taste, by sharp perception, by telling things apart in a meaningful way. If you call someone smart because he knows what is good for his own affairs, that is not the philosopher. Aristotle rightly says: "What Thales and Anaxagoras know, people will call unusual, amazing, difficult, even godlike, but useless, because those two did not care about human possessions." By choosing and singling out the unusual, the amazing, the difficult and the godlike, philosophy draws the line between itself and science. And by stressing what is useless, it draws the line between itself and practical cleverness. Science does not choose like this. It has no such fine taste. It grabs at everything that can be known, with a blind greed to know it all at any cost. Philosophical thinking, on the other hand, is always on the trail of the things worth knowing, on the trail of the great and most important insights. Now, the idea of what is "great"

keeps changing, both in morals and in matters of beauty. So philosophy begins by laying down laws about greatness. It becomes the one who gives things their names. "That is great," it says, and in this way it lifts people above the blind, wild greed of their thirst for knowledge. With the idea of greatness, it calms that thirst. Above all, it does this by treating the greatest insight, the insight into the heart and core of things, as something that can be reached and has been reached. When Thales says "Everything is water," people are jolted awake. They stop crawling around like worms, chewing away at the separate sciences one by one. They sense the final answer to things, and through this sensing they rise above the usual confusion of the lower levels of knowledge. The philosopher tries to let the whole great chord of the universe sound again inside himself, and then to send it outward in the form of ideas. He is thoughtful and observing like the creative artist. He feels deeply with things like a religious person. He looks for goals and causes like the scientist. He feels himself swell up until he is as big as the whole universe. And yet he keeps enough care and calm to look at himself coldly, as a mirror image of the world. He keeps that cool head which the playwright has when he turns himself into other characters, speaks through them, and still knows how to set this transformation outside himself in written verse. What verse is to the poet, logical argument is to the philosopher. He grabs hold of it to keep his enchantment from slipping away, to freeze it into stone. For the playwright, words and verse are only stammerings in a foreign language. He uses them to tell what he lived through and what he saw, things he could really only express directly through gesture and music. In the same way, when a deep philosophical insight is expressed through logical argument and scientific thinking, this is, on the one hand, the only way to share what has been seen. But on the other hand, it is a poor way. At bottom, it is a figurative, completely inexact translation into a different world and a

different language. So Thales saw the oneness of what truly exists, and when he wanted to share this idea, he talked about water.

4

In the picture of Thales, the general type of the philosopher stands out only in a rather hazy way. But the picture of his great successor already speaks to us much more clearly. Anaximander of Miletus was the first writer of philosophy among the ancient Greeks. He writes the way the typical philosopher will always write, as long as strange demands have not driven out his openness and simplicity. He writes in a grand style, like words carved in stone, sentence after sentence. Each sentence is proof of a new inspiration and shows a mind living among lofty thoughts. The thought and its form are like milestones along the road to the highest wisdom. With this carved-in-stone weight, Anaximander once said: "Things must return to where they came from, and perish there, as necessity demands. For they must pay the penalty and be judged for their injustices, according to the order of time." What a puzzling saying from a true pessimist! It is like an oracle's words carved on the boundary stone at the very edge of Greek philosophy. How shall we explain you?

The only serious moral thinker of our century, in his book of side essays, the Parerga (Volume two, chapter twelve, "Additional Remarks on the Teaching about Suffering in the World, with an Appendix of Related Passages"), asks us to think about something similar. He writes: "The right way to judge every human being is this: he is really a being who should not exist at all, but who is paying for his existence through many kinds of suffering and through death. What can you expect from a being like that? Aren't we all sinners sentenced to death? We pay for being born, first by living, and second by dying." Imagine someone who reads this teaching in the face of our shared human fate. He already sees that every human life is bad at its core, because

no life can stand up to a very close and careful look. Our time, which is hooked on a craze for biographies, seems to think differently and more grandly about human dignity. But imagine someone who, like Schopenhauer, has heard, high up "on the heights of the Indian breezes," the holy teaching about the moral worth of existence. Such a person will find it hard to stop himself from making a very human-shaped comparison. He will be tempted to take that gloomy teaching, which at first was only about human life, and stretch it to cover the nature of all existence. That may not be very logical. But it is certainly very human, and it fits well with the kind of philosophical jump described earlier. So, along with Anaximander, he will see all constant change as a guilty breaking-away from eternal true, unchanging existence, as a wrong that must be paid for by destruction. Everything that has once come into existence also dies away, whether we think of human life, or of water, or of heat and cold. Wherever we notice definite qualities, we can predict that those qualities will one day vanish. Experience proves this everywhere. So a being that has definite qualities and is made of them can never be the origin and basic principle of things. The real thing, what truly exists, Anaximander concluded, cannot have any definite qualities. Otherwise, like everything else, it would have had to be born and to die. So that constant change never stops, the first source of everything must be without definite qualities. The first source of everything is deathless and eternal. But this is not because it is endless and can never run out, as people who explain Anaximander usually assume. It is because it lacks the definite qualities that lead to destruction. That is also why it has its name: the Boundless. This first source of everything, so named, stands above all constant change, and for that very reason it guarantees that constant change will go on forever without being blocked. This final unity in the Boundless, the mother's womb from which all things come, can truly only be described by humans in a negative way. It is something

to which we cannot give any quality taken from our world of constant change. It could be seen as an equal to Kant's "thing as it really is."

Of course, some people love to argue on and on with others about what kind of thing that first substance really was. Was it maybe something halfway between air and water, or between air and fire? Anyone who argues like that has not understood our philosopher at all. The same goes for those who seriously wonder whether Anaximander thought of his first substance as a mixture of all existing substances. Instead, we should look at the place where we can learn that Anaximander no longer treated the question of how the world began as just a question about nature. We should look at that first saying, the one carved like words in stone. He saw the many things that have come into being as a pile of wrongs that had to be paid for. In doing so, he became the first Greek to boldly grab hold of the tangled knot of the deepest moral problem. How can anything die that has a right to exist? Where does that restless constant change and giving birth come from? Where does that look of painful twisting on the face of Nature come from? Where does the endless funeral song in every part of existence come from? Anaximander runs away from this world of injustice, this world that has boldly turned its back on the first unity of things. He flees into a castle beyond the physical world. Leaning out of it, he looks far and wide. At last, after a thoughtful silence, he asks all beings this question: "What is your existence worth? And if it is worth nothing, why are you here? I can see that you are living in this world because of your guilt. You will have to pay for it with death. Look how your earth is fading. The seas are shrinking and drying up. The seashell up on the mountain shows you how much they have already dried up. Fire is destroying your world even now, and in the end it will finish in smoke and ashes. But again and again, a world like this, where nothing lasts, will build itself up once more. Who will save you from the curse of constant change?"

A man who asked such questions could not have been happy with just any kind of life. His thinking kept soaring upward, always snapping the ropes of everyday experience, so that it could fly straight to the highest heights, beyond the moon. We are glad to believe the old stories that he walked around in especially dignified clothes and showed a truly tragic pride in his gestures and in the way he lived. He lived the way he wrote. He spoke as solemnly as he dressed. He raised his hand and set down his foot as if life were a tragedy on stage, and as if he had been born to take part in that tragedy by playing the hero. In all of this he was the great model for Empedocles. The people of his city chose him to lead a group of settlers going off to found a new colony. Perhaps they were happy to be able to honour him and get rid of him at the same time. His thinking also moved away and founded colonies. In Ephesus and in Elea they could not get rid of him. And even if they could not bring themselves to stay at the spot where he stood, they still knew that he was the one who had led them there, and from there they now got ready to go on without him.

Thales shows a need to simplify the huge realm of the many things. He wants to reduce it to just a spreading out, or a disguise, of one single quality that exists: water. Anaximander goes two steps further than him. First, he asks himself: if there is an eternal Unity at all, how is it possible for the many things to exist? He finds his answer in the nature of the many things themselves. They contradict each other, eat each other up, and cancel each other out. For him, the existence of the many things becomes a moral matter. It is not justified, and it keeps paying for its guilt by being destroyed, over and over. But then new questions come to him. Why hasn't everything that came into being died out long ago, since a whole eternity of time has already passed? Where does the endless flow of the river of constant change come from? He can only escape these questions by turning to mystical ideas. Constant change, which is eternal, can only come from the

eternal, true, unchanging existence. The conditions that make things break away from that eternal, true, unchanging existence and fall into constant change, which is a kind of injustice, are always the same. The way things are arranged simply cannot be otherwise, and so there is no end in sight to individual things stepping out of the lap of the Boundless. This is where Anaximander stopped. In other words, he stayed inside the deep shadows that lay like giant ghosts over the mountain range of this view of the world. The harder anyone tried to solve the problem, the darker the night became. The problem was this: how could the definite ever break away from the Boundless, how could the temporary come out of the eternal, and how could the unjust come out of the just?

5

Into the middle of this mystical night, which wrapped up Anaximander's problem of constant change, came Heraclitus of Ephesus. He lit it up with a flash of lightning, as if from the gods. "I look at constant change," he cried out, "and nobody has ever watched this eternal surging of waves and rhythm of things as closely as I have. And what do I see? I see order and law, total certainty, and paths of Justice that never change. Behind every breaking of the laws stand the Furies, ready to condemn. The whole world is a show of justice in charge, with natural forces that are everywhere, almost like spirits, and all of them obey justice's rule. I do not see things that have come into being being punished. I see constant change being proven right. When has wickedness, when has a falling away from what is right, ever shown itself in forms that cannot be broken, in laws that are held sacred? Where injustice rules, there you find whims, disorder, irregularity, and contradiction. But where only Law and Zeus's daughter, Justice, rule, as they do in this world, how could that be a place of guilt, of paying for crimes, of judgment? How could it be, so to speak, the execution ground for everyone condemned?"

From this insight, Heraclitus drew two denials that fit together. You can only see them clearly if you compare them with the ideas of the thinker who came before him. First, he denied that there are two completely different worlds, an idea Anaximander had been forced into. Heraclitus no longer separated a physical world from a world beyond the physical, or a realm of definite qualities from a realm of the Boundless, which cannot be defined. Once he had taken this first step, nothing could stop him from making an even bolder denial: he denied true, unchanging existence altogether. For the one world he had left was guarded on every side by eternal, unwritten laws, and it flowed up and down to the hard, bronze-like beat of rhythm. Nowhere in it was there anything that lasted, nothing that could not be destroyed, no wall standing firm in the stream. Heraclitus cried out even louder than Anaximander: "I see nothing but constant change. Don't be fooled! If you think you see solid land anywhere in the ocean of becoming and passing away, it is the fault of your narrow view, not the fault of how things really are. You need names for things, as if they stayed fixed and permanent. But even the river you bathe in a second time is no longer the same river you stepped into before."

Heraclitus owns, like a king owns his treasure, the greatest power of seeing things directly, through intuition. But toward the other way of understanding, the one that works through ideas and chains of logic, that is, toward reason, he is cool, uninterested, even hostile. He seems to enjoy it when he can contradict reason with a truth he has seen directly. He does this in statements like: "Everything always has its opposite inside itself." He says this so fearlessly that Aristotle, acting as if he were in the court of Reason, charges him with the worst crime of all: breaking the rule that a thing cannot be its own opposite. Now, what we grasp directly by intuition includes two things. First, there is the present world, colourful and always changing, which presses in on us in everything we experience. Second,

there are the conditions that make any experience of this world possible at all: time and space. These two can be grasped directly, purely on their own, apart from any experience. In other words, we can perceive them even though they have no particular contents. If Heraclitus thought about time in this way, cut off from all experience, then he had in it the clearest symbol, a kind of signature, of everything we grasp by intuition. Schopenhauer, for example, thought about time in just the same way. He says again and again that in time, each moment exists only because it has destroyed the moment before it, its own father, and that it is then wiped out just as quickly itself. He says that past and future are as unreal as any dream. He says that the present is only the thin, shaky border between the two, with no size of its own. And he says that space is just like time, and that everything that exists in space and time together is just like them too: it has only a borrowed kind of existence. It exists only through something else and for the sake of something else, something of the same kind, which in turn exists only under the same limits. This truth is as obvious as anything can be, and anyone can see it. And for exactly that reason, it is very hard to reach by abstract, logical thinking. But whoever keeps this truth in view must go straight on to the next step in Heraclitus's thinking. He must say that the whole nature of the real world is really activity, and that the real world has no other kind of existence or reality. Schopenhauer explained this too ("The World As Will And Idea," Vol. I, Book 1, section 4): "Matter fills space and time only by acting. Its action on the thing it directly touches decides the perception, and only in that perception does it exist. The effect of one material object on another is known only when the second object acts on the thing it directly touches in a different way than it did before; that is all the effect is. So cause and effect make up the whole nature of matter; its true existence is its action. That is why, in German, everything material together is very fittingly called Wirklichkeit, meaning 'actuality' or 'what works,' a word that says far more than

Realität, 'reality.'[2] What actuality acts upon is always matter. So the whole of its true, unchanging existence and its nature consist only in the orderly change that one part of it causes in another. It is therefore completely relative, based on a relationship that holds only inside the limits of the real world, just as with time and space."

Heraclitus teaches that there is only constant change, forever, and nothing else; that all reality and the real world in action are completely unstable, always working and becoming and never simply being. This is a terrible, frightening idea. Its effect is most like the feeling you get during an earthquake, when you can no longer trust that the solid ground beneath you will hold. It took amazing strength to turn this feeling into its opposite, into something grand and noble, into joyful wonder. Heraclitus did this by watching the real pattern of how all things come into being and pass away. He understood it as a kind of pull between two poles: one force splitting into two opposite actions that are different in kind, and that keep trying to come back together. A quality keeps falling out with itself and splitting into its opposites, and these opposites keep reaching back toward each other. Ordinary people, of course, think they see something fixed, finished and steady. But the truth is that at every moment, light and dark, sour and sweet sit side by side and cling to each other, like two wrestlers, where sometimes one wins and sometimes the other. According to Heraclitus, honey is sweet and bitter at the same time, and the world itself is like a big jar whose contents always need stirring. All constant change comes out of the fight between opposites. The qualities that seem to us clear and lasting only show that one fighter has the upper hand for a moment. But that does not end the fight; the wrestling goes on forever. Everything happens according to this struggle, and this very struggle shows eternal justice. It is a wonderful idea, drawn from the purest spring of Greek thought. It sees the struggle as the never-ending rule of one single, strict justice, bound by eternal laws.

Only a Greek could make this idea the foundation of a defence of the world as just. It is Hesiod's good goddess of healthy rivalry, lifted up to become the law of the whole universe. It is the idea of competition, an idea held by individual Greeks and by their city-states. It was taken out of the gyms and wrestling grounds, out of the artistic contests, out of the battles between political parties and between towns, and turned into the most general law of all, so that the whole machinery of the universe runs by it. Every Greek fought as if he alone were in the right, and as if a completely reliable judge could decide at any moment which way victory was leaning. In just the same way, the qualities wrestle with one another, following unbreakable laws and standards that belong to the struggle itself. The Things themselves, which the limited minds of people and animals believe to be lasting, do not really "exist" at all. They are like the fierce flashing and fiery sparkling of drawn swords, like the stars of Victory rising in shining splendour in the battle between opposite qualities.

Schopenhauer also describes this struggle that belongs to all constant change, this endless swapping of victory back and forth. In "The World As Will And Idea" (Volume I, Book 2, section 27) he writes: "Matter, which lasts, must keep changing its shape. This is because, following the rules of cause and effect, all kinds of things—mechanical, physical, chemical and living—are eager to appear, and they snatch matter away from each other, since each one wants to show its own Idea. You can follow this fight through the whole of nature. In fact, nature only exists because of it." The pages that follow in his book give the most striking examples of this struggle. But the overall mood of his description always stays different from that of Heraclitus. For Schopenhauer, the struggle proves that the Will to Life is at war with itself. To him, it is this gloomy, blind urge eating itself up, and on the whole it is something horrible that does not lead to happiness at all. The battleground and the prize of this struggle is matter. Some forces

of nature keep trying, by turns, to break matter apart and build it up again, at the cost of other forces of nature. The battleground is also space and time, and the joining of space and time through cause and effect *is* exactly this matter.

[2] Translator's note: a Latin quotation from Seneca's Letter 81. It means: "In some things the exact meaning of words is wonderful, and the way people spoke in the old days marks certain things with very powerful signs."

6

At first, Heraclitus used his imagination to take in the restless, ever-moving universe, the real world in action. He looked at it like a happy spectator watching countless pairs of wrestlers fighting cheerfully, with strict referees in charge of them. But then an even higher idea came over him. He could no longer see the wrestling pairs and the referees as separate from each other. The referees themselves seemed to be fighting, and the fighters seemed to be their own judges. Indeed, since deep down he could only think of one single Justice that rules forever, he dared to cry out: "The competition of the many things is itself pure justice. And after all, the one is the many. For what are all those qualities, really? Are they gods who never die? Are they separate beings, working for themselves, with no beginning and no end? And if the world we see knows only coming into being and passing away, and nothing that lasts, then perhaps those qualities make up a different world, a world beyond nature? A true world, yes—not a world of oneness like the one Anaximander looked for behind the fluttering curtain of the many things, but a world of many things that are eternal and essential?" Could it be that, however fiercely Heraclitus had denied such a split into two worlds, he still ended up, by a roundabout path and by accident, in a two-level order of the universe? On one side, there would be an Olympus full of gods and spirits who

never die—that is, *many* realities. On the other side, there would be a human world that sees only the cloud of dust from the battle on Olympus and the flashing of the gods' spears—that is, only constant change. Anaximander had run away from exactly these definite qualities and taken shelter in the lap of the Boundless, beyond nature. Because these qualities *came into being* and passed away, he had denied that they truly and really existed. But now shouldn't it look as if constant change is only a struggle between eternal qualities coming into view? When we talk about constant change, shouldn't we look for its real cause in how weak human understanding is? Perhaps in the true nature of things there is no constant change at all, but only many true realities existing side by side, never created and never destroyed.

These are Heraclitus's escape routes and mazes. Once again he cries out: "The one is the many." The many qualities we can sense are not eternal things that exist forever. Nor are they ghosts or illusions made by our senses. (Later, Anaxagoras thinks of them in the first way, as eternal things, and Parmenides thinks of them in the second way, as illusions.) They are not stiff, all-powerful true, unchanging existence, and they are not a passing mere appearance floating around in human minds either. Heraclitus had only one other possibility left, a third one. Nobody will be able to guess it by clever reasoning, or work it out as if by doing a sum. What he came up with here is rare, even among strange mystical ideas and surprising pictures of the universe. Here it is: the world is Zeus's game. Or, to put it in more physical terms, it is the game that fire plays with itself. Only in this sense is the one also, at the same time, the many.

First, I want to explain why Heraclitus brings in fire as the force that shapes the world. To do that, let me remind you how Anaximander had built further on the idea that water is where all things come from. Anaximander trusted the main part of Thales' theory. He backed up

Thales' observations and added to them. But he could not be convinced that there was no other stage of quality before water, or behind it, so to speak. No, to him it seemed that the wet formed itself out of heat and cold. So heat and cold were supposed to be the earlier stages, the even more basic qualities. Constant change begins when they come out of the first existence, the Boundless. Heraclitus, as a student of nature, ranked himself below Anaximander's importance. He explained Anaximander's "heat" to himself as breathing, the warm breath, the dry vapours, in short as the fiery element. And about this fire he now says the same thing that Thales and Anaximander had said about water. He says it travels along the path of constant change through countless transformations, especially through three main states: as something hot, something wet, and something solid. For when water goes down, it turns into earth, and when it goes up, it turns into fire. Or, as Heraclitus seems to have put it more exactly: from the sea rise only the pure vapours, which feed the divine fire of the stars. From the earth rise only the dark, foggy vapours, and these feed the wet. The pure vapours are the in-between stage as sea turns into fire. The impure vapours are the in-between stage as earth turns into water. So the two paths along which fire transforms keep running side by side, all the time, up and down, back and forth: from fire to water, from water to earth, from earth back to water, and from water to fire. In the most important of these ideas, Heraclitus follows Anaximander. For example, he agrees that the fire is kept going by evaporation, and that water breaks down partly into earth and partly into fire. On the other hand, he goes his own way and opposes Anaximander by leaving "cold" out of the physical process. Anaximander had placed cold side by side with heat, as an equal partner, so that the wet could come from both. Heraclitus of course had to do this. If everything is to be fire, then no matter how many ways it may change, nothing can exist that would be the complete opposite of fire. So he probably explained what we call "cold" as just a lower degree of heat, and he

could defend this explanation without any trouble. Much more important than this difference from Anaximander's teaching is another point where they agree. Like Anaximander, Heraclitus believes that the world comes to an end again and again, in cycles. And he believes that, each time, a new world rises out of the great fire that ends the world, which destroys everything. He describes, very strikingly, the period when the world rushes toward that great fire and melts into pure fire as a kind of demand and hunger. And he describes the state of being completely swallowed by fire as being full, as satisfaction. That leaves us with a question. How did he understand, and what did he call, the new urge that wakes up to create a world, the urge of fire to pour itself out into the forms of the many things? A Greek proverb seems to help us here, with the idea that "being full gives birth to crime" (that is, arrogant crime). And for a moment we might really wonder whether Heraclitus explained that return to the many things as coming from arrogant crime. Let us take this idea seriously for a moment. Seen in its light, Heraclitus's face changes before our eyes. The proud shine in his eyes fades. A wrinkled look of painful surrender and helplessness appears. It seems we now understand why people in later ancient times called him the "weeping philosopher." Is the whole process of the world now an act of punishment for arrogant crime? Are the many things the result of a crime? Is the change from pure to impure the result of injustice? Has the guilt now been moved into the very nature of things? If so, the world of constant change and of individual beings is set free from guilt. But at the same time, are they not condemned forever and ever to suffer the results of that guilt?

7

That dangerous word, arrogant crime, is truly the test for every follower of Heraclitus. Here a follower can show whether he has under-

stood his master or misunderstood him. Is there guilt in this world? Is there injustice, contradiction, suffering?

Yes, cries Heraclitus, but only for the limited human being, who sees things as pulling apart rather than coming together. Not for the god, who sees everything together at once. For that god, everything that is opposed comes together into one harmony. It is true that the ordinary human eye cannot see this harmony. But it can be understood by someone who, like Heraclitus, is like the god who looks on and sees the whole. In front of his fiery eye, not one drop of injustice is left in the world that is poured out around him. Even the biggest problem, how pure fire can come to live in such impure forms, he solves with a grand comparison. In this world, there is only one kind of coming into being and passing away, of building and destroying, that has no moral side to it and stays innocent forever: the play of the artist and of the child. And in the same way that the child and the artist play, the fire that lives forever also plays. It builds up and tears down, in innocence. And this game is played by Time, the eternal child, with himself. He turns himself into water and earth. Like a child by the sea, he piles up heaps of sand, builds them up and knocks them down. Every so often he starts the game over. For a moment he is full and satisfied. Then desire grabs him again, just as desire drives the artist to create. It is not reckless mischief, but the urge to play, which wakes up again and again, that brings other worlds to life. The child throws away his toys, but soon he starts again, with an innocent mind. But as soon as the child builds, he connects, joins and shapes things by rules, following a sense of order he was born with.

Only the person with an artist's eye sees the world this way. Such a person has learned from the artist, and from the way an artist's work comes into being. He has learned how the struggle of the many things can still carry law and justice inside it. He has learned how the artist stands above the work, watching it, and at the same time works in-

side it. And he has learned how necessity and play, conflict and harmony, must join together like a couple to give birth to a work of art.

So who would still ask such a philosophy for a system of morals, with the usual commands of "You shall"? Who would even blame Heraclitus for not having one? Man, down to his last fibre, is necessity. He is completely "unfree," if by freedom you mean the foolish claim that you can change your basic nature whenever you like, as if it were a piece of clothing. Every serious philosophy so far has rejected that claim with the scorn it deserves. Very few people live with awareness of the world's reason, seeing things the way the artist's all-seeing eye sees them. Heraclitus says this happens because their souls are wet. People's eyes and ears, and their minds in general, are bad witnesses when "wet slime fills their souls." Why this is so is not questioned, any more than anyone asks why fire turns into water and earth. Heraclitus does not have to prove, as Leibniz did, that this world is the best of all possible worlds. For him it was enough that the world is the beautiful, innocent play of Time, the eternal child. To him, man on the whole is even an unreasonable creature. And yet this does not clash with the fact that the law of all-ruling reason is carried out in every part of man's being. Man does not hold a specially favoured place in nature. Nature's highest form is not simple-minded man but fire, for example in the form of the stars. To the extent that man, by necessity, has received a share of fire, he is a little more reasonable. To the extent that he is made of earth and water, his reason is in poor shape. He is not forced to understand the world's reason just because he is a human being. Why is there water? Why is there earth? To Heraclitus these are much more serious questions than asking why people are so stupid and bad. In the noblest people and in the most twisted people, the same built-in law and justice show themselves. But if someone asked Heraclitus, "Why is fire not always fire? Why is it sometimes water and sometimes earth?", he would simply answer:

"It is a game. Don't take it so dramatically, and even less as a moral question." Heraclitus only describes the world as it is. He takes the same quiet pleasure in watching it that an artist feels when looking at his work as it grows. Only people who have reason to be unhappy with his account of human nature find him gloomy, sad, tearful, dark, bad-tempered, pessimistic and altogether hateful. But he would treat these unhappy people, along with their dislikes and likes, their hate and their love, as unimportant. Perhaps he would answer them with a saying like: "Dogs bark at anything they don't know," or, "A donkey would rather have straw than gold."

The many complaints about how hard Heraclitus's writing is to understand also come from these unhappy people. In fact, probably no one has ever written more clearly or with more light. Of course he wrote very briefly and sharply, and so, naturally, he seems unclear to readers who rush through. But it is completely impossible to explain why a philosopher would write unclearly on purpose, which is what people usually say about Heraclitus. The only reasons would be that he had something to hide, or that he was enough of a cheat to cover up his lack of real thought with words. As Schopenhauer says, even in practical everyday matters we are forced to speak clearly to avoid misunderstandings. So how could anyone be allowed to speak vaguely, even in riddles, about the hardest, most hidden, barely reachable subject of thought, which is the work of philosophy? As for being brief, though, Jean Paul gives a good rule: "On the whole it is right that everything great, everything that has deep meaning for a rare mind, should be said briefly and therefore darkly. That way the small mind will rather call it nonsense than translate it into the world of its own emptyheadedness. For ordinary minds have an ugly talent for seeing nothing in the deepest and richest saying except their own everyday opinion." And yet, in spite of this, Heraclitus did not escape the "small minds." Already the Stoics "re-explained" him in a shallow way. They dragged

his basic artistic insight, that the world is play, down to the miserable level of ordinary concern for the practical uses of the world, and more specifically for what benefits man. So in their heads, his teaching about nature turned into a crude optimism, with a constant invitation to every Tom, Dick and Harry: "Clap your hands, friends!"

8

Heraclitus was proud. And when a philosopher is proud, it is a huge kind of pride. His work never sends him looking for an audience, for the cheering of crowds or the praise of the people of his time. It is part of a philosopher's nature to walk his road alone. His gifts are the rarest of all. In a way they are the least natural gifts, and they also shut others out and even turn against people with similar gifts. The wall of his self-belief has to be made of diamond, or it will be knocked down and smashed, because everything around him is moving against him. His road to lasting fame is harder and more blocked than anyone else's. And yet nobody believes more firmly than the philosopher that this road will get him to his goal. That is because he does not know where else he could stand except on the wide-open wings of all time. Ignoring everything present and passing is part of what a great philosophical mind is. He has the truth. The wheel of time may roll wherever it likes, but it can never get away from the truth. It matters that we hear such men really lived. For example, nobody could ever just make up the pride of Heraclitus as an empty possibility. After all, every effort to know things seems by its very nature to be never satisfied and never satisfying. So nobody, unless history taught him, would easily believe in such kingly self-respect, in someone so sure that he alone is the true suitor of truth. Men like this live in their own solar system, and that is where you have to look for them. A Pythagoras or an Empedocles also thought of themselves as more than human, almost with religious awe. But a bond of sympathy, joined to their deep belief in the rebirth of souls and in the oneness of all living things, led

them back to other people, to help them and save them. But the feeling of loneliness that filled Heraclitus, the hermit of Ephesus who stayed at the Temple of Artemis, can only be guessed at when you are going numb in the wildest mountain wilderness. No strong feeling of pity or worry comes from him, no wish to help, heal or save. He is like a star with no air around it. His eyes burn as they look inward, but when they look outward, just for show, they are dead and icy. All around him, right up against the fortress of his pride, crash the waves of foolishness and wrong thinking, and he turns away from them in disgust. But people with a tender heart would also stay away from such a monster, like a Gorgon cast in bronze. Such a being might make more sense inside a hidden temple, among statues of gods, next to cold, calm, grand buildings. As a man among other men, Heraclitus was hard to believe. Even when people saw him watching noisy children at play, he was thinking about something no one else ever thought of at such a moment: the play of Zeus, the great child who plays with the world. He did not need other people, not even for his insights. He did not care about anything one might find out from them, or about what the other wise men before him had tried to find out. He spoke with scorn about such people who ask questions and collect facts, in short, "historical" men. "I searched and questioned myself," he said. He used a word that is normally used for consulting an oracle, as if he alone were the one who truly carried out the command of the oracle at Delphi: "Know yourself."

What he learned from this oracle he thought of as wisdom that would never die. He thought it deserved to be explained forever, and that it would have endless power even far into the future, just like the prophecies of the Sibyl. It is enough for even the last people on earth. Let them have it explained to them like the sayings of an oracle, sayings that he, like the god of Delphi, "neither states plainly nor hides." He announces it "without smiles, decorations or the smell of

perfume," but rather as if with a "foaming mouth." Even so, it must push its way through thousands of years to come. For the world will always need truth, and so it will always need Heraclitus too, even though he does not need the world. What does fame matter to him? Fame among "mortals who keep flowing on!" as he cries out with scorn. His fame matters to humanity, not to him. The lasting life of humanity needs him; he does not need the man Heraclitus to be remembered forever. What he saw was the teaching of law within constant change, and of play within necessity. From now on, people must keep seeing it forever. He has pulled back the curtain on this greatest play ever staged.

9

Every word of Heraclitus shows the pride and greatness of truth. But it is truth grabbed by sudden insight, not climbed up to step by step on the rope ladder of logic. In a lofty trance he sees, but he does not spy out details. He understands, but he does not calculate. Next to him stands his fellow thinker of the same time, Parmenides. He too was a kind of prophet of truth, but he was made, so to speak, out of ice instead of fire, and he gave off a cold, piercing light.

Once, probably when he was older, Parmenides had a moment of the purest abstract thinking, not clouded by any reality, completely lifeless. This moment was not Greek at all, unlike any other moment in the two hundred years of the age of tragedy. Out of it came his teaching about true, unchanging existence. That moment became a boundary stone in his own life, splitting it into two periods. At the same time, the same moment splits the thinking before Socrates into two halves. The first half could be called the age of Anaximander, the second the age of Parmenides. The first period of Parmenides' own thinking still carries Anaximander's mark. In that period he built a detailed system of philosophy and physics as an answer to Anaxim-

ander's questions. Later that icy horror of pure abstraction took hold of him, and he put forward the simplest statement about "Being" and "Not-Being." Then, among the many older teachings he threw onto the scrap heap, was his own system too. But he does not seem to have lost all of a father's love for the strong, well-formed child of his youth. So he got himself out of the problem by saying: "It is true there is only one right way. But if anyone ever wants to take another way, then my earlier view is the only right one, because of how pure and consistent it is." Hiding behind this statement, he gave his old physical system a proper and large place in his great poem on Nature, even though that poem was really meant to announce his new insight as the only signpost to truth. This fatherly fondness, even if a mistake may have slipped in because of it, is a leftover bit of human feeling in a nature that had been turned to stone by rigid logic and almost changed into a thinking machine.

Parmenides may well have known Anaximander personally; that does not seem hard to believe to me. And it is not only believable but obvious that he started out from Anaximander's teaching. Like Heraclitus, Parmenides did not trust the idea of splitting things completely into two worlds: one world that only exists and never changes, and another world that only changes. This same distrust had gripped Heraclitus and led him to deny true, unchanging existence altogether. Both men looked for a way out of this split, this division of the world into two different orders. Anaximander had once made a jump into the Boundless, into something that cannot be defined. With that jump he escaped, once and for all, from the realm of constant change and from the qualities we actually experience in that realm. But for minds as independent as those of Heraclitus and Parmenides, that jump was not an easy thing to make. First they tried to walk as far as they could on solid ground. They saved the jump for the spot where the foot finds nothing more to stand on, and where you have to jump so as not

to fall. Both of them kept looking at that very world which Anaximander had condemned so gloomily. He had called it the place of reckless crime, and at the same time a prison cell where things are punished for the injustice of constant change. As we already know, when Heraclitus looked at this world he discovered a wonderful order, regularity and reliability showing itself in every kind of change. From this he concluded that constant change could not be anything evil or unjust. Parmenides saw things quite differently. He compared the qualities of things with one another. He believed they were not all of the same kind, but should be sorted into two groups. For example, if he compared bright and dark, the second quality was clearly just the absence, the negation, of the first. So he told apart positive qualities and negative qualities, and he seriously tried to find and record this basic opposition everywhere in nature. His method went like this. He took a few pairs of opposites, for example light and heavy, thin and thick, active and passive. Then he compared them with the model pair of bright and dark. Whatever matched the bright was the positive quality; whatever matched the dark was the negative one. If he took, say, heavy and light, then light went on the side of the bright, and heavy went on the side of the dark. So to him "heavy" was only the negation of "light," while "light" was a positive quality. This method alone shows that he had a stubborn talent for abstract logical reasoning, a mind shut tight against what the senses suggest. After all, "heavy" seems to present itself very strongly to the senses as a positive, real quality. But that did not stop Parmenides from labelling it a negation. In the same way he set earth against fire, cold against warm, thick against thin, female against male, and passive against active, treating the second of each pair simply as a negation. So, as he looked at it, the world we experience split into two separate areas. One was the area of the positive qualities, which had a bright, fiery, warm, light, thin, active and masculine character. The other was the area of the negative qualities. These negative qualities really only express a

lack, the absence of the positive ones. So he described the area where the positive qualities are missing as dark, earthy, cold, heavy, thick, and on the whole feminine and passive in character. Instead of the words "positive" and "negative," he used the fixed terms "existent" and "non-existent." With this he had arrived at a new claim, going against Anaximander: that this world of ours itself contains something that truly exists, and of course also something that does not exist. We should not look for what truly exists outside the world, as if it were somewhere beyond our horizon. Instead, right in front of us, everywhere, in every kind of change, there is something that truly exists and is active.

But that still left him with the job of giving a more exact answer to the question: What is constant change? And here came the moment when he had to jump, so as not to fall. Though perhaps, for a nature like Parmenides', any jumping at all is really a falling. Well, enough! Here we enter a fog, into the mysticism of "hidden qualities," and even a little into myth. Parmenides, like Heraclitus, looks at the way everything keeps changing and nothing stays put. He can only explain the passing away of things by saying that what does not exist is to blame. For how could what truly exists be to blame for passing away? In the same way, the coming into being of things, that is, constant change, must happen with the help of what does not exist. For what truly exists is always there. It could not first come into being out of itself, and it could not explain any coming into being, any change. So coming into being and change, as well as passing away and dying, have all been caused by the negative qualities. But a thing that comes into being has some content, and a thing that passes away loses some content. This means that the positive qualities, which are exactly that content, must also take part in both processes. In short, this rule follows: "For constant change, both what truly exists and what does not exist are needed. When they work together, change happens." But

how do the positive and the negative come together? Shouldn't they, on the contrary, forever run away from each other as opposites, and so make all change impossible? At this point Parmenides calls on a "hidden quality": a mysterious tendency of opposite pairs to move toward each other and attract each other. He pictures this strange pull between opposites with the name of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, and with the well-known relationship between male and female. It is the power of Aphrodite that acts as matchmaker between the opposite pair, what truly exists and what does not exist. Passion brings together elements that are hostile to each other and dislike each other, and the result is change. When desire has been satisfied, hatred and their built-in hostility drive what truly exists and what does not exist apart again. Then people say: the thing dies, it passes away.

10

But no one can lay careless, disrespectful hands on such terrible abstract ideas as "what truly exists" and "what does not exist" without paying for it. When you touch them, your blood slowly turns cold. One day a strange idea suddenly came to Parmenides. This idea seemed to make all his earlier combinations worthless, so that he felt like throwing them away, like a money bag full of old, worn-out coins. People commonly believe that something from outside also helped bring about that day's discovery, along with the way ideas like "existing" and "not existing" naturally pull apart from each other. That outside influence was his getting to know the religious teaching of Xenophanes of Kolophon, an old wanderer and reciter of poems, who sang about Nature as something mysteriously divine. Throughout his remarkable life, Xenophanes lived as a travelling poet. Through his travels he became a well-informed man who could teach a great deal, and who knew how to ask questions and how to tell stories. For that reason Heraclitus counted him among the people who know many things, and above all among the "historic" kind of people, in the sense

explained earlier. Nobody will ever be able to work out where and when Xenophanes got his mystical leaning toward the One, the thing that rests forever. Perhaps it is simply the idea of an old man who has finally settled down. After the restlessness of his wandering life, and after all his eager learning and searching for truth, the vision of a divine rest, with all things staying the same inside a first, original peace where God is everything, seems to him to be the highest and greatest ideal. In the end, it seems to me a pure accident that two men lived for a while in the same town, Elea, and that each of them carried in his head an idea of unity. They did not form a school. They had nothing in common that one might have learned from the other and then passed on. For with these two men, the origin of that idea of unity was completely different, in fact opposite. And if either of them got to know the other's teaching at all, he would have had to translate it into his own way of thinking first, just to understand it. But in that translation, the very thing that made the other teaching special was lost. Parmenides reached the unity of what truly exists purely through what he claimed was logical reasoning, and he spun that unity out of the ideas of "true, unchanging existence" and "not existing." Xenophanes, on the other hand, was a religious mystic, and with that mystical unity he fit perfectly into the sixth century before Christ. He was not as world-changing a person as Pythagoras, but in his travels he still had the same urge and drive to improve people, to make them purer, and to heal them. He was a teacher of right and wrong, but still at the stage of a travelling reciter of poems. In a later age he would have been a sophist, a paid teacher of clever argument. In boldly attacking the customs and values of his time, he had no equal in Greece. What's more, he did not withdraw into solitude like Heraclitus and Plato. Instead he stood right in front of the public. He harshly criticised, with anger and scorn, their wild admiration of Homer, their passionate hunger for prizes at the athletic games, and their worship of stones carved in human shape. Yet he did not do this

like Thersites, the loud-mouthed troublemaker in Homer's story. In him, the freedom of the individual reached its highest point. And this almost unlimited breaking free from all custom made him much closer to Parmenides than that final divine unity did, which he had once seen in a kind of vision, as was fitting for that century. His unity hardly shared even a way of speaking or a single word with Parmenides' one "true, unchanging existence," and it certainly did not come from the same source.

Parmenides found his teaching about "true, unchanging existence" in a very different, even opposite, state of mind. On that day, and in that mood, he was examining his two opposites that work together, "what truly exists" and "what does not exist," the positive and the negative qualities. According to his earlier view, the world and its constant change are made out of these, through Desire and Hatred. Suddenly he was seized by doubt about the idea of a negative quality, about "what does not exist." For can something that does not exist be a quality? Or, to ask it more broadly: can anything that does not exist actually exist? The only kind of knowledge that we trust completely right away, and which it would be madness to reject, is the simple statement that a thing is itself: A equals A. But exactly this kind of knowledge called out to him without mercy: what does not exist, does not exist! What is, is! Suddenly he feels the weight of a huge logical sin lying on his whole life. For hadn't he always assumed, without thinking twice, that negative qualities really existed, in short, that there was a "what does not exist"? Put as a formula, that would mean A equals not-A, something only the most completely twisted thinking could ever claim. True, he remembered, the great mass of people judge in the same twisted way. He himself had only taken part in everyone's shared crime against logic. But the very moment that accuses him of this crime also surrounds him with the glow of a great discovery. Apart from all human illusion, he has found a principle, the

key to the secret of the world. Now he goes down into the deep pit of things, led by the firm and frightening hand of the simple truth that what exists, exists.

On the way there he runs into Heraclitus. What an unlucky meeting! At just that moment, Heraclitus' playing with contradictions was bound to seem hateful to Parmenides, who now cared above all about keeping "true, unchanging existence" and "not existing" strictly apart. Statements like "We are and at the same time we are not," or "'Existing' and 'not existing' are at the same time the same thing and also not the same thing," made everything he had just cleared up and untangled become cloudy and hopelessly knotted again, and this made him furious. "Away with these people," he cried, "who seem to have two heads and yet know nothing! With them, truly, everything is flowing and changing, even their thinking! They stare at things stupidly, but they must be deaf as well as blind to mix up opposites like that!" For him it was a painful experience he could not understand: the lack of good sense in ordinary people, praised and dressed up with playful contradictions, and hailed as the very peak of all knowledge.

Now he plunged into the cold bath of his frightening abstract ideas. Whatever is true, he said, must exist in an everlasting present. You cannot say of it "it was" or "it will be." What truly exists cannot have come into being. After all, what could it have come from? From what does not exist? But that does not exist, so it can produce nothing. From what truly exists? Then it would produce nothing but itself. The same goes for passing away. It is just as impossible as constant change, or any kind of change at all, any growing, any shrinking. As a whole, this rule holds: everything about which you can say "it has been" or "it will be" does not exist. But about what truly exists, you can never say "it does not exist." What truly exists cannot be divided, because where is the second force that could divide it? It cannot move, because where would it move to? It cannot be endlessly big or

endlessly small, because it is complete, and something endless that is also complete and finished is a contradiction. So what truly exists hangs there, with fixed limits, complete, unmoving, balanced the same everywhere, and just as perfect at every point, like a ball. But it is not inside a space, because then that space would be a second thing that truly exists. And there cannot be several things that truly exist, because to keep them apart, something would have to exist that does not exist, and that idea cancels itself out. So there exists only one eternal oneness.

But now, when Parmenides looked back at the world of constant change, the world he had once tried to explain with such clever guesses, he was angry that his eyes could see change at all and his ears could hear it. "Do not follow your weak, blurry eyes," he now commands, "nor your ringing ears, nor your tongue. Test everything only by the power of thought." With this he made the first, very important criticism of the tools we use to know things. But this criticism still fell short, and its results were disastrous. He tore the senses completely apart from our ability to think in abstract ideas, that is, from reason, as if they were two totally separate powers. By doing this he wrecked the mind itself. He also pushed people toward that completely mistaken split between "mind" and "body," which, especially since Plato, has hung over philosophy like a curse. Parmenides decides that all sense impressions only create illusions. Their biggest illusion is that they trick us into believing that even what does not exist exists, and that even constant change has true, unchanging existence. All the many things, all the differences and variety of the world we know by experience, the way its qualities change, the pattern in its rises and falls, all of this he throws away without mercy as mere appearance and trickery. Nothing can be learned from it. So all the effort anyone spends on this false, completely pointless world is wasted, since our idea of that world comes from being fooled by our senses.

Anyone who judges in such sweeping general terms as Parmenides did stops being someone who studies nature in detail. His interest in the things around him dries up. He even starts to hate the fact that he cannot escape this endless cheating of the senses. From now on, truth is supposed to live only in the palest, most abstract general ideas, in the empty shells of the vaguest words, as if inside a tangle of cobwebs. And beside this kind of "truth" the philosopher now sits, as bloodless as an abstract idea, wrapped in a web of formulas. A spider, of course, wants the blood of its victims. But the philosopher who follows Parmenides hates the very blood of his victims, the blood of real experience, which he has sacrificed.

11

And this was a Greek, one who was at the peak of his life around the time the Ionian Revolt broke out. Back then it was possible for a Greek to run away from the overflowing richness of reality, treating it as nothing but a fake pattern made up by the imagination. He did not run, as Plato later did, into the land of eternal ideas, into the workshop of the world's maker, to feast his eyes on the flawless, unbreakable original forms of things. No, he ran into the stiff, deathlike stillness of the coldest and emptiest idea there is: true, unchanging existence. We must be careful not to explain such a striking fact with false comparisons. That escape was not a turning away from the world like that of the Indian philosophers. No deep religious belief that life is wicked, short-lived and cursed demanded that escape. That final goal, resting in true, unchanging existence, was not pursued as a mystical melting into one single idea that is enough for everything and fills you with bliss, the kind of thing that puzzles and shocks ordinary people. Parmenides' thought does not have the slightest trace of that heady, mystical Indian scent, which you can perhaps faintly sense in Pythagoras and Empedocles. What is strange about this fact, in that period, is instead the total lack of scent, color, soul

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and shape, the complete absence of blood, religious feeling and moral warmth, the dry, abstract, diagram-like quality, and all this in a Greek! Above all, though, what is truly striking is our philosopher's fierce, frightening drive for certainty, in an age that thought in myths and was full of strong feeling and wild imagination. "Just give me one certainty, you gods!" is Parmenides' prayer. "Even if, in the ocean of uncertainty, it is only a plank, just wide enough to lie on! Everything that changes, everything lush, varied, blooming, deceiving, exciting, alive, keep all of that for yourselves, and give me only that one poor, empty certainty!"

In the philosophy of Parmenides, the question of what exists comes first, like an opening act. Nowhere in his experience did he ever meet "true, unchanging existence" as he pictured it in his mind. But because he could think of it, he decided that it must exist. This conclusion depends on one assumption: that we have a way of knowing that reaches right into the nature of things and does not depend on experience at all. According to Parmenides, the stuff our thinking is made of does not come from what we see and feel. It is brought in from somewhere else, from a world beyond matter, and thinking gives us a direct path into that world. Aristotle long ago argued against every line of reasoning like this. He said that existing is never part of what a thing is, never part of its nature. For exactly that reason, you cannot prove that "true, unchanging existence" actually exists just from the idea of it, even though the whole meaning of that idea is simply "existence." The opposition between "existing" and "not existing" has no real logical content at all, unless you can point to the actual thing underneath it, the real thing we experienced and then stripped down into this abstract opposition. Without going back to that real experience, the opposition is just a game played with ideas, and it helps us understand nothing. As Kant teaches, there is a purely logical test of truth: a piece of knowledge must agree with the general, formal rules of the

mind and of reason. This test is, it is true, something we cannot do without. So it is a necessary condition for any truth, but only a negative one. Logic cannot go any further than that. Logic has no test that can catch a mistake in the content of a thought, as opposed to a mistake in its form. Now suppose you go looking for the content behind the logical truth of the statement "What is, is; what is not, is not." You will not find any simple reality that fits that rigid opposition. Take a tree. I can say "it is," when I compare it with all other things. I can just as well say "it is becoming," when I compare it with itself at another moment. And finally I can also say "it is not," for example "it is not yet a tree," while I am perhaps looking at it as a young shrub. Words are only signs for how things relate to each other and to us. They never reach absolute truth. And on top of all that, the word "being" only names the most general relation of all, the one that connects all things. The same goes for the word "not-being." But if we cannot prove that things themselves exist, then the relations between things, the so-called "being" and "not-being," will not bring us any closer to the land of truth. With words and ideas we will never get behind the wall of relations, into, let us say, some made-up first cause of all things. Even in the pure forms of our senses and our understanding, in space, time and cause and effect, we gain nothing that looks anything like an "eternal truth." It is completely impossible for a person to see and know anything beyond himself. It is so impossible that knowing and "true, unchanging existence" are the two most opposed areas there are. Back then, the study of the limits of the mind was still simple and untaught. So Parmenides could be forgiven for imagining that, starting from an idea that was always only in his own head, he had reached "existence as it is in itself." But today, after Kant, it is bold ignorance when some people, especially poorly informed theologians who like to play at being philosophers, say that the job of philosophy is "to grasp the Absolute through consciousness." Some even put it this way, as Hegel did: "the Absolute is already there,

otherwise how could anyone look for it?" Or they say, like Beneke, "that 'being' must be given to us in some way, must be within our reach in some way, because otherwise we could not even have the idea of 'being.'" The idea of "being"! As if the very history of the word did not already show that it comes from the poorest, most ordinary experience. For the Latin word "esse," "to be," at bottom means "to breathe." When a person uses it about all other things, he is passing on his own feeling that he himself breathes and lives. He does this through a metaphor, that is, through something that is not logical. He carries this over to other things and imagines their existence as a kind of breathing, by comparing them to humans. Soon the original meaning of the word fades away. But this much still remains: a person imagines the existence of other things by comparing it to his own existence. So he does it in a human-shaped way, and in any case through a transfer that is not logical. And even for a person himself, leaving that transfer aside, the statement "I breathe, therefore 'being' exists" is not nearly enough. The same objection applies to it as to the statement "I walk, therefore I am," or "I walk, therefore it is."

12

There is a second idea, even more important than the idea of "what truly exists." Parmenides came up with it too, though his student Zeno used it much more clearly. This is the idea of the Infinite. Nothing infinite can exist, they said. If it did, we would end up with a self-contradicting idea: an infinity that is complete and finished. But our real world, the world we live in, shows this kind of complete infinity everywhere. So by its very nature our world contradicts logic, and so it also contradicts reality. It is a trick, a lie, a ghost. Zeno in particular liked to prove things in a roundabout way, by showing that the opposite leads to nonsense. For example, he said: "Nothing can move from one place to another. If such movement happened, then an infinity would have to be completed, and that is impossible." Achilles,

the fastest runner, can never catch a tortoise that starts a little ahead of him in a race. Just to reach the spot where the tortoise started, he would first have to run through countless, endlessly many stretches of ground: first half the distance, then a quarter, then a sixteenth, and so on forever. If he really does overtake the tortoise, then that is something that goes against logic. So it is certainly not a truth, not a reality, not true, unchanging existence. It is only an illusion. After all, you can never reach the end of something endless. Another well-known way of putting this teaching is the arrow that flies and yet stays still. At every single instant of its flight, the arrow is in one position, and in that position it is at rest. So, could all those endless positions of rest added together make up movement? Could resting, repeated endlessly, turn into movement, which is its own opposite? Here the Infinite is used like a strong acid poured onto reality, and reality is dissolved by it. Now suppose that ideas are fixed, eternal and truly real, and remember that for Parmenides, true existence and thinking are the same thing. Then, if the Infinite can never be completed, and if rest can never become motion, the arrow has really not flown at all. It never left its resting place, and not one moment of time has gone by. Or to put it another way: in this so-called real world, which is only claimed to be real, there is no time, no space and no motion. In the end, the arrow itself is only an illusion. That is because it comes from the many things, from the dreamlike show of "what is not one" that our senses put on. Suppose the arrow truly existed. Then it would have to be unmoving, outside of time, never created, stiff and eternal, which makes no sense at all! Suppose motion were truly real. Then there would be no rest, so the arrow would have no position, so there would be no space, which also makes no sense! Suppose time were real. Then it could not be divided endlessly. The time the arrow needed would have to be made of a limited number of moments, and each moment would have to be an "atom," a tiny piece that cannot be cut, which makes no sense either! All our ideas lead to

contradictions as soon as we take what they contain, which we got from experience of this solid world, and treat it as an eternal truth. If there is absolute motion, there is no space. If there is absolute space, there is no motion. If there is absolute true existence, there are no many things. If there are absolutely many things, there is no oneness. At the very least, it should become clear to us how little such ideas reach the heart of things, or untie the knot of reality. Parmenides and Zeno, however, did the reverse. They held tightly to the idea that ideas are true and valid everywhere. They condemned the world we see and touch as the opposite of those true, all-valid ideas, as something illogical and self-contradicting made solid. All their proofs start from an assumption that cannot be proved at all and is even unlikely. That assumption is that our power of thinking in ideas gives us the final, highest test of what is and what is not, in other words, of what is objectively real and what is not. In their view, ideas do not have to prove themselves true, or be corrected by the real world, even though they actually come from it. Instead, the ideas are supposed to measure and judge the real world, and if the world goes against logic, to condemn it. To give ideas this power to judge, Parmenides had to give them the same kind of existence that he allowed as the only true existence. Thinking, and that single, uncreated, perfect ball of what truly exists, could no longer be seen as two different kinds of existence, since no doubling of existence was allowed. So a wildly daring flash of imagination became necessary: to declare that thinking and existence are the same thing. No picture, no symbol, no comparison could possibly help here. This imagination could not be pictured in any way, yet it was necessary. In fact, precisely because it could not be illustrated at all, it won its greatest victory over the world and over the claims of the senses. According to Parmenides' command, thinking and that lumpy, ball-shaped, completely dead and solid, stiff and unmoving existence had to melt into each other and be the same in every way, to the horror of the imagination. What does it matter that

this sameness goes against the senses! That very contradiction is the proof that such sameness was not borrowed from the senses.

13

On top of that, someone could bring a strong pair of arguments against Parmenides, arguments aimed at the man himself, or built on things he had already granted. It's true that arguments like these could not bring the truth itself to light. But at least they could show that two of his ideas were false: first, that the world of the senses and the world of ideas are completely separate, and second, that true, unchanging existence and Thinking are one and the same. Here is the first argument. If reason really does think in ideas, then the many things and motion must also be real. That is because rational thinking moves. More exactly, it is a movement from one idea to the next, and so it happens inside a world of many real things. There is no way to dodge this. It is simply impossible to describe Thinking as something stiff and permanent, as a mind forever frozen in place, quietly looking inward at a single unity. Here is the second argument. Suppose only trickery and illusion come from the senses. Suppose that in reality the only thing that exists is the true sameness of true, unchanging existence and Thinking. Then what are the senses themselves? They too must surely be mere appearance, since they are not the same as Thinking. And what they produce, the world of the senses, is not the same as true, unchanging existence. But if the senses themselves are mere appearance, then to whom do they appear? How can they still fool anyone if they are not real? What does not exist cannot even fool anyone. So the question of where trickery and illusion come from stays a puzzle. In fact, it becomes a contradiction. We call these two arguments aimed at the man himself the moving-thought argument and the argument about where illusion comes from. The first would prove that motion and the many things are real. The second would prove that Parmenides' idea of mere appearance is impossible. And

both work even if we accept as true Parmenides' main teaching about true, unchanging existence. That main teaching says only this: only what truly exists has true, unchanging existence, and what does not exist does not exist. Now, if motion has this kind of existence, then whatever is true of what truly exists in general is also true of motion. It was never created. It is eternal. It cannot be destroyed. It neither grows nor shrinks. But suppose we deny mere appearance, and make belief in it impossible by asking where illusion comes from. Suppose we protect the stage of what is called constant change, the stage of all change, our restless, colourful, rich existence with its many shapes, from Parmenides' rejection. Then we have to describe this world of change and alteration as a total, a sum, of truly existing basic things, all existing at the same time, forever. Of course, even if we assume this, there can be no talk of change in the strict sense, of constant change. But now the many things truly exist. All qualities truly exist, and so does motion. Take any moment in this world, picked at random, even if the moments are thousands of years apart. About every one of them it would have to be possible to say: all the real basic things in this world are, without a single exception, existing together, unchanged, not reduced, not increased, not decreased. A thousand years later the world is exactly the same. Nothing has changed. If, despite this, the world looks completely different at one time than at another, then that is not a trick and not mere appearance. It is the result of eternal motion. What truly exists is simply moved around, sometimes one way, sometimes another: together, apart, up, down, into one another, in a jumble.

14

With this idea, we have already stepped into the world of Anaxagoras's teaching. He raised both objections against Parmenides with full force: the one about thinking that moves, which we can call the moving-thought argument, and the one about where illusion

comes from. But on the main point, Parmenides won him over, just as he won over all the younger philosophers and students of nature. All of them deny that things can come into being and pass away in the way ordinary people imagine. Anaximander and Heraclitus had also believed in this, more carefully, but still without thinking it through. From now on, people considered it nonsense to believe in a mythical coming-into-being out of nothing, or a vanishing into nothing. They also found it nonsense that nothing could be changed at will into something, or that qualities could be randomly swapped, put on and taken off like clothes. But for the same reasons, they also rejected the idea that the many things could come out of the one, that many different qualities could come out of a single first quality. In short, they rejected explaining the world as coming from one original substance, as Thales and Heraclitus had done. Instead, the real problem now was this: how to apply the teaching of true, unchanging existence, which is never born and never destroyed, to the world we actually live in, without hiding behind the theory that it is all mere appearance and deception. But if the world we experience is not to be mere appearance, and if things are not to come out of nothing, nor out of one single something, then these things must have true, unchanging existence inside themselves. Their matter and content must be completely real. And all change can then only concern their form, that is, their position, order, grouping, mixing and separating. These basic realities have always existed side by side. It is just like a game of dice. The dice are always the same dice, but because they fall one way one time and another way another time, they mean something different to us. All the older theories had gone back to one first element as the womb and cause of constant change, whether that was water, air, fire, or Anaximander's the Boundless. Against this, Anaxagoras now claims that what is unequal could never come out of what is equal, and that change could never be explained from a single thing that truly exists. Suppose you imagined this one assumed substance getting thinner or

thicker. You would still never manage, by thinning or thickening it, to explain the very problem you wanted to explain: why there are so many different qualities. But if the world really is full of all sorts of different qualities, then, unless they are mere appearance, they must have true, unchanging existence. That means they must be eternal, never born, never destroyed, and always existing side by side. And they cannot be mere appearance, because the question of where illusion comes from has no answer. In fact, the question answers itself with a 'no'! The earlier seekers of truth had tried to make the problem of constant change simpler by proposing just one substance, which carried inside it the possibility of all change. Now, on the contrary, the claim is this: there are countless substances, but never more and never fewer, and never any new ones. Only motion, playing dice with them, throws them into ever new combinations. Against Parmenides, Anaxagoras proved that motion is real and not mere appearance. His proof was the undeniable fact that our ideas follow one after another when we think. So the very fact that we think and have ideas gives us the most direct proof that motion and succession are real. Because of this, at least the one stiff, resting, dead 'true existence' of Parmenides has been cleared away. There are many things that truly exist, just as surely as all these many existing things, these substances, are in motion. Change is motion. But where does motion come from? Does this motion perhaps leave the real nature of those many independent, separate substances completely untouched? And if we take the strictest idea of what truly exists, must motion not be something foreign to them? Or does motion, after all, belong to the things themselves? Here we face an important choice. Depending on which way we turn, we will step into the world of Anaxagoras, or of Empedocles, or of Democritus. The tricky question has to be asked: if there are many substances, and if these many substances move, what moves them? Do they move each other? Or is it perhaps only gravity? Or are there magic forces inside the things themselves that pull them together and

push them apart? Or does the cause of motion lie outside these many real substances? Or, to put the question more sharply: if two things change places one after another, does that come from the things themselves? And should this be explained mechanically, like a machine, or magically? Or if that is not the case, is there some third thing that moves them? It is a nasty problem. Even if we grant that there are many substances, Parmenides would still have been able to prove to Anaxagoras that motion is impossible. For he could say this: 'Take two substances that exist on their own, each with its own completely different, independent, unconditional true existence. And Anaxagoras's substances are exactly like that. Such substances can never crash into each other, never move, never pull on each other. Between them there is no cause and effect, no bridge. They never touch each other and never disturb each other. They have nothing to do with each other; they are completely indifferent to each other. So a collision is just as impossible to explain as a magic pull. Something that is completely foreign to another thing cannot have any effect on it. So it cannot move itself, and it cannot let itself be moved.' Parmenides might even have added: 'The only way out left to you is to say that motion belongs to the things themselves. But then everything you know and see as motion is really just a deception and not true motion. For the only kind of motion that could belong to those completely original substances would be a motion that comes from within each one, stays limited to itself, and has no effect on anything else. But you assume motion in order to explain those effects: change, things being shifted around in space, alteration, in short, the ways things cause and affect each other and relate to each other. Yet these very effects would still not be explained. They would stay just as puzzling as before. So no one can see why it should be necessary to assume motion at all, since it does not do the job you ask of it. Motion does not belong to the nature of things, and it is forever foreign to them.'

Those who opposed the Eleatic idea of one single, unmoving reality did not take this argument seriously. They were held back by assumptions that came from what we see and touch. It seems impossible to deny that every real thing that "truly exists" is a body that fills space. It is a lump of matter, large or small, but always with some size in space, so that two or more such lumps cannot be in the same place at once. Starting from this idea, Anaxagoras, and later Democritus, assumed that these lumps must bump into each other. If, while moving, they happened to meet, they would fight over the same space, and this struggle was the very cause of all change. In other words, those completely separate, completely different and forever unchangeable substances were, in the end, not thought of as completely different after all. Each one had its own special, unique quality, but they all also shared one exactly identical base underneath: a piece of matter that fills space. Because they all shared in matter, they were all equal, and so they could act on one another, that is, bump into one another. What is more, all change did not depend at all on how different those substances were, but on how alike they were, as matter. Underneath Anaxagoras's assumption lies a mistake in logic. Something that is supposed to be "what truly exists in itself" must be completely free of conditions and complete in itself. So it is not allowed to depend on anything else as its cause. But all of Anaxagoras's substances still depend on something: matter. They already assume that matter exists. For example, for Anaxagoras the substance "Red" was not simply red in itself. It was also, in a hidden or held-back way, a piece of matter without any qualities at all. And it was only through this matter that "Red in itself" acted on other substances. It did not act through its redness, but through something that is not red, not coloured, and has no definite quality of any kind. If "Red" had been taken strictly as "Red", as the real substance itself, and so without that base of matter underneath, then Anaxagoras would surely not have dared to talk about "Red" having an effect on other substances. He would not have

dared to say, for instance, that "Red in itself" was passing on a push it had received from "Flesh in itself". Then it would be clear that something that truly exists, in the fullest sense, could never be moved.

15

You only have to look at the opponents of the Eleatics to see how hugely useful Parmenides's assumption was. Parmenides had escaped many troubles, but those troubles were waiting for Anaxagoras and for everyone who believed in many substances. The first was the question: how many substances are there? Anaxagoras made the jump. He shut his eyes and said, "Infinitely many." In this way he at least flew past the incredibly hard job of proving that there is some fixed number of basic substances. But these "infinitely many" had to exist forever, without growing and without changing. So his assumption contained a contradiction: an infinity that had to be thought of as finished and complete. In short, Parmenides had chased away the many things, motion, and infinity with his amazing claim that there is only one true, unchanging existence. Now they came back from exile and threw their weapons at Parmenides's opponents, giving them wounds that cannot be healed. Clearly those opponents did not really understand or feel how terribly strong those Eleatic thoughts are. The Eleatics said: "There can be no time, no motion, no space. We can only think of all of these as infinite. To be more exact, we think of them first as infinitely large, and then as infinitely divisible. But nothing infinite has true, unchanging existence. It does not exist." Nobody doubts this, if he takes the word "existence" strictly and believes that something self-contradictory cannot exist, for example a completed infinity. But if the real world in action shows us everything in the form of a completed infinity, then it becomes obvious that the real world contradicts itself, and so it has no true reality. Those opponents might object: "But in your own thinking there is one thought after another. So your thinking can't be real either, and there-

fore it can't prove anything." Then Parmenides might have answered the way Kant did when he faced the same objection. Kant said: "It is true that I can say my ideas follow one after another. But that only means that we are not aware of them except in an order in time, that is, in the way our inner sense works. For that reason, time is not a thing in itself, and it is not an order or quality that really belongs to things." So we would have to tell apart two things. One is pure thinking, which would be outside time, like Parmenides's one true existence. The other is our awareness of this thinking. This awareness would already turn the thinking into the form of mere appearance, that is, into one-after-another, the many things, and motion. Parmenides would probably have used this way out. But then the same objection would have to be made against him that A. Spir makes against Kant, in his book "Thinking and Reality" (second edition, volume one, page 209 and following). Spir says: "First of all, it is clear that I cannot know anything about a sequence as such unless I hold all its parts in my mind at the same moment. So the idea of a sequence is not itself spread out in a sequence. That makes it quite different from the sequence of our ideas. Secondly, Kant's assumption leads to such obvious nonsense that it is surprising he did not notice it. According to this assumption, Caesar and Socrates are not really dead. They are still alive exactly as they were two thousand years ago, and they only seem dead because of the way my inner sense is built." People of the future are already alive too, and if they do not show up as living now, that is also caused by the way the "inner sense" is built. Here, above everything else, we must ask: how can the beginning and end of conscious life itself, along with all its inner and outer senses, exist only inside the ideas of the inner sense? The fact is simply this: you certainly cannot deny that change is real. If you throw it out the window, it sneaks back in through the keyhole. Suppose someone says: "It only seems to me that situations and ideas change." Then this very seeming, this appearance, is itself something that really exists. And inside

it, without doubt, the one-after-another is real: some things in it really do follow one another. Besides, we must notice something else. The whole critique of reason only has a reason and a right to exist if we assume that our ideas appear to us exactly as they are. Because if our ideas also appeared to us differently from how they really are, we could not say anything solid about them. And then we could not build any theory of knowledge, or any "transcendental" study of what is truly valid. But it remains beyond all doubt that our ideas appear to us as following one after another."

Watching this clear fact, that our thoughts follow one another and keep stirring, now pushed Anaxagoras toward a famous idea. It was plain to him that thoughts moved by themselves. Nothing pushed them, and the cause of their motion did not lie outside them. So he said to himself: there exists something that carries inside itself the source and the starting point of motion. But then he noticed something else. A thought did not only move itself. It also moved something completely different: the body. So, in the most direct experience of all, he found that thoughts have an effect on solid, space-filling matter, and that this effect shows up in matter as motion. To him that was simply a fact. Only on the side did it make him want to explain this fact. It was enough for him that he now had a guiding pattern for motion in the world. He understood every motion in one of two ways. Either it was a motion of the true, separate basic substances caused by the thinking principle, which he called Mind. Or it was a motion caused by something that was already moving. He probably did not see that, given his basic starting point, this second kind also hid a problem: the mechanical passing on of motions and pushes. Most likely, because pushing and bumping happen so commonly, every single day, his eye was dulled to how mysterious a push really is. On the other hand, he certainly felt that it was puzzling, even self-contradictory, for thoughts to act on substances that exist on their own. So

he tried to trace this effect back to a mechanical push and bump, which he considered perfectly easy to understand. After all, Mind too was without doubt one of these substances that exist on their own. He described it as a very fine, delicate kind of matter whose special quality was thinking. If Mind was imagined like this, then of course its effect on other matter had to be exactly the same kind of effect that one substance has on another: a mechanical effect that moves things by pressing and pushing. Still, the philosopher now had a substance that moves itself and other things, a substance whose motion did not come from outside and depended on nothing else. How exactly this self-motion was to be pictured seemed almost unimportant. Perhaps it was something like the way tiny, fragile drops of quicksilver push themselves this way and that. Of all the questions about motion, none is more troublesome than the question of how motion first began. Even if we are allowed to think of all other motions as effects and results, the very first, original motion still has to be explained. For in a chain of mechanical motions, the first link surely cannot itself be a mechanical motion. That would be as good as falling back on the nonsense idea of something being its own cause. But it also does not work to give the eternal, unconditioned things a motion of their own, as if they had it from the very beginning, like a wedding gift that came along with their existence. For motion cannot be imagined without a direction, without a 'where to' and a 'toward what.' So motion can only be imagined as a relation and a condition. But a thing is no longer something 'existing purely in itself' and 'unconditioned' if, by its very nature, it must point to something that exists outside of it. Stuck in this difficulty, Anaxagoras thought he had found extraordinary help and rescue in that Mind, which moves itself and is otherwise independent. The nature of this Mind was just dark and hidden enough to fool people, so that they did not notice that assuming it also brings in that forbidden idea of something being its own cause. For anyone who looks at experience, it is even an established fact that

thinking is not its own cause but the result of the brain. In fact, to such an observer it must look like a strange oddity to separate the 'mind,' which the brain produces, from its cause, and still to believe that it goes on existing after being cut off. That is just what Anaxagoras did. He forgot the brain, its marvelous design, the fineness and complexity of its folds and pathways, and he declared that there is pure Mind on its own. This pure Mind on its own, alone among all substances, had free will. What a grand insight! This Mind could start moving the things outside it at any moment it liked. On the other hand, it could also spend ages and ages busy only with itself. In short, Anaxagoras could allow himself to assume a first moment of motion in some ancient time, like the tiny starting speck in an egg from which all so-called constant change grows. By 'change' he meant all the shifting and rearranging of the eternal substances and their tiny particles. Although Mind itself is eternal, it is in no way forced to wear itself out for all eternity by shuffling grains of matter around. And surely there was a time and a condition of those materials, and it does not matter at all whether that time was long or short, during which Mind had not yet acted on them, during which they were still unmoved. That is the period of Anaxagoras's original jumble.

16

Anaxagoras's original jumble is not an idea that is obvious right away. To grasp it, you first have to understand what our philosopher thought about so-called constant change. For in itself, the state of all the different 'basic existing things' before any motion would not necessarily have to be a total mixture of all the 'seeds of things,' as Anaxagoras put it. He pictured this mixture as a complete jumble, disordered down to its smallest parts, as if all these 'basic existing things' had first been pounded in a mortar and crushed into specks of dust, so that now, in that original jumble, they could be swirled

together into a mess, like things stirred in a big clay jar. Someone might say that there was nothing unavoidable about this idea of the original jumble. You would only need to assume that all those 'existing things' were lying in some random positions, not that they were broken down without end. A messy side-by-side arrangement would already have been enough. There was no need for a jumble, let alone such a total jumble. So what put that difficult and complicated idea into Anaxagoras's head? As already said: his idea of constant change as we see it in experience. From his experience he first drew a most unusual claim about constant change, and this claim necessarily led to that teaching about the original jumble as its result.

Anaxagoras did not get his teaching from studying some earlier philosophical system. He got it from watching how things grow and change in nature. His teaching was that everything came from everything. This was the belief of a scientist of nature, built on many observations, although at bottom, of course, those observations were far too few to prove it. He proved it like this: if even an opposite can come out of its opposite, for example black out of white, then anything is possible. And that does happen, he said, when white snow melts into dark water. He explained to himself how food feeds the body in this way: inside the food there must be tiny, invisible bits of flesh or blood or bone. While we eat and digest, these bits come loose and join with the same kind of material in the body. But if everything can come out of everything, the solid out of the liquid, the hard out of the soft, the black out of the white, flesh out of bread, then everything must also be contained in everything. In that case, the names of things only tell us which substance is there in the largest amount. The other substances are there too, but in smaller amounts, often too small to notice. So in gold, that is, in the thing we call "gold" because gold is the main part of it, there must also be silver, snow, bread and flesh,

but in very tiny amounts. The whole thing is named after the part that is strongest in it, the gold-substance.

But how can it happen that one substance wins out and fills a thing in a larger amount than the others that are there? Experience shows that this winning out only comes about slowly, through motion. It is the result of a process, the process we usually call constant change. On the other hand, the idea that "everything contains everything" is not the result of a process. Just the opposite: it is the starting condition for all constant change and all motion, and so it came before all constant change. To put it another way: experience teaches that like is always being added to like, for example through food. So at the start, those matching substances were not gathered together in clumps. They were apart from each other. In fact, in every natural process we can see with our own eyes, like is always being sorted out from unlike and carried off to join its own kind. For example, when we eat, the bits of flesh are pulled out of the bread, and so on. That means the jumble of different substances is the older form of how things were made up, and in time it came before all constant change and all motion. If everything we call constant change is a sorting-out, and if it needs a mixture to start from, then the question is: how thoroughly mixed must this jumble have been at the beginning? The movement of like toward like, which is constant change, has already gone on for an enormous length of time. And yet we can see that even now every thing still holds leftovers and seeds of all other things, waiting to be sorted out. We can also see that only here and there has one substance won out. So the first mixture must have been complete, that is, mixed right down to the endlessly small, since the separating and unmixing takes an endless length of time. In this way Anaxagoras holds firmly to one idea: that everything which has true, unchanging existence can be divided forever without losing what makes it the kind of thing it is.

Based on these assumptions, Anaxagoras pictures how the world first existed. Perhaps he imagined it like a dusty mass of endlessly small, real particles. Each particle is simple in kind and has only one quality. Yet they are arranged so that every quality is present in an endless number of separate particles. Aristotle called such particles like-parts, because they are the parts, all equal to one another, of a whole that is made of the same stuff as its parts. But it would be a serious mistake to treat this first jumble of all these particles, these "seeds of things," as the same as the single first material of Anaximander. Anaximander's first material, called the Boundless, is one completely connected mass of its own special kind. Anaxagoras's first jumble is a collection of many substances. It is true that you can say exactly the same things about this collection of substances as about Anaximander's Boundless, as Aristotle does. It could be neither white nor grey nor black nor any other colour. It had no taste and no smell. And as a whole it could not be described at all, neither by how much there was nor by what kind it was. That is as far as the likeness goes between Anaximander's Boundless and Anaxagoras's first mixture. But apart from this likeness in what they are not, they differ clearly in what they are: Anaxagoras's mixture is made of many parts, while Anaximander's Boundless is a single unity. By assuming his original jumble, Anaxagoras at least gained this much: he did not have to explain how the many things came out of the one, or how constant change came out of what truly exists.

Of course, even with his complete mixing of the "seeds," he had to allow one exception. Mind was not mixed with anything back then, and it is not mixed with anything now. For if Mind were mixed with even one thing that exists, it would, through endless dividing, have to live in all things. This exception is very doubtful in terms of logic, especially since Mind, as described before, is a kind of material. It has something of a myth about it and seems made up on purpose. But ac-

cording to Anaxagoras's own starting points, it was absolutely necessary. Mind can also be divided endlessly, like any other material, but not by other materials, only by itself. When it divides itself, it gathers sometimes into big masses and sometimes into small ones. Yet from all eternity it keeps the same total amount and the same quality. The Mind that exists right now in animals, plants and people was the same Mind, no more and no less, a thousand years ago, only spread out in a different way. But whenever Mind had contact with another substance, it was never mixed with it. Instead, it took hold of it freely, moved it and pushed it as it wished. In short, it ruled it. Mind alone has motion within itself, so Mind alone has the power to rule in this world, and it shows this power by moving the grains of matter. But where does it move them? Can we even imagine motion without a direction, without a path? Are Mind's pushes just as random as the timing of when it pushes and when it does not? In short, does chance, that is, the blindest kind of choice, rule over motion? At this edge, we step into the most sacred part of Anaxagoras's world of ideas.

17

At the very start, before anything moved, there was only a messy jumble. What had to happen to that jumble so that the world we know could come out of it, without adding any new materials or new forces? How could it turn into a world with stars moving in regular paths, with seasons and days that follow set patterns, and with so much beauty and order? In short, how could the original jumble become an ordered universe? The only answer is motion, and not just any motion, but a definite and well-organised one. This motion is the tool that Mind uses. Its goal is to sort things out completely, so that every kind of thing is gathered together with its own kind. That goal has not been reached even now, because the disorder and mixing at the beginning had no limit. The goal can only be reached through a huge, long process. It cannot happen all at once, like a magic wand

being waved in an old myth. Imagine that someday, at a point in time infinitely far away, the goal is finally reached. Everything of the same kind would be brought together. The "first existences" would lie side by side, whole and undivided, in beautiful order. Every tiny particle would have found its companions and its home. After all the great dividing and splitting of materials, a great peace would come, and nothing would be left that is divided or split up. Then Mind would go back to its self-motion. It would no longer be divided itself. It would wander through the world, sometimes in larger amounts and sometimes in smaller ones, as the mind of a plant or the mind of an animal, and it would never again move in to live inside other matter. For now, though, the job is not finished. But the kind of motion that Mind came up with to do the job is amazingly well suited to it, because with every new moment this motion carries the job further along. This motion is a circular movement that keeps spreading outward in rings around one centre. It started at a single point in the mixed-up jumble, as a small spinning. Then, in wider and wider circles, this spinning sweeps through all of true, unchanging existence, and everywhere it jerks like things toward like things. First, this spinning brings everything thick to the thick and everything thin to the thin. In the same way it brings everything dark, bright, wet and dry to its own kind. Above these general groups there are two even bigger groups. One is Ether, meaning everything that is warm, bright and thin. The other is Air, meaning everything that is dark, cold, heavy and solid. When the ethereal masses separate from the airy masses, something forms like a whirl in still water. This is the most direct result of that smaller circle whose centre travels around the edge of ever larger circles. Heavy mixtures are pulled toward the middle and pressed together. In just the same way, that moving waterspout in the original jumble forms itself: on the outside, out of the ethereal, thin and bright parts, and on the inside, out of the cloudy, heavy and wet parts. Then, as the process goes on, water separates out of that airy mass,

which is clumping together on the inside. Out of the water, in turn, comes the earthy element. And out of the earthy element, because of the terrible cold, the stones separate out. Then at some moment, the force of the spinning tears masses of stone away sideways from the earth and flings them into the region of hot, light Ether. There, in the Ether's fiery element, they are made to glow. Carried along by the spinning of the Ether, they give off light, and as the sun and the stars they light up and warm the earth, which is dark and cold in herself. This whole idea is wonderfully bold and simple. It has none of that clumsy belief that nature is built for human-like purposes, which people have often linked with the name of Anaxagoras. Its greatness lies exactly here: it explains the whole ordered universe of constant change as coming from a circle set in motion. Parmenides, by contrast, saw what truly exists as a ball that lies still and dead. Once Mind sets that circle moving and makes it roll, all the order, law and beauty of the world follow naturally from that first push. People are very unfair to Anaxagoras when they blame him for wisely holding back from talk of purposes in this idea. They are unfair when they mock his Mind as a "god from the machine", like a god lowered onto a stage to fix the plot. In fact, because he threw out the miracles of myths and gods, and threw out human-like goals and uses, Anaxagoras could have spoken proud words like those Kant used in his Natural History of the Heavens. For it really is a grand and noble thought. It means tracing all the greatness of the universe and the amazing arrangement of the stars' paths back to one simple, purely mechanical motion, as if to a mathematical shape set in motion. It means not explaining all this through purposes, or through the hands of a god stepping in like a machine, but only through a kind of swinging motion. Once that motion has started, it goes on in a necessary and definite way. And it produces results that look like the wisest planning and the most carefully thought-out fit, without actually being anything of the kind. Kant says: "I enjoy the pleasure of seeing

how a well-ordered whole builds itself, without the help of made-up inventions, driven only by fixed laws of motion. This well-ordered whole looks so much like our own system of the world that I cannot help thinking it is the same. It seems to me that here, in a certain sense, one could say without being too bold: 'Give me matter, and I will build a world out of it.'"

18

Now suppose that, just this once, we accept that first mixture as a correct conclusion. Even so, some objections, mostly from the science of mechanics, seem to stand against this grand plan of how the world was built. For even if Mind starts a circular movement at one point, it is very hard to picture how that movement keeps going. This is especially true because the movement is supposed to be endless and, little by little, to set all the existing masses spinning. Naturally, you would expect the weight of all the rest of the matter to have crushed this small circular movement almost as soon as it started. If that does not happen, then Mind, which sets things moving, must have started working all at once with tremendous force, or at least so fast that we have to call the motion a whirlpool spin, the very kind of whirlpool spin Democritus himself imagined. And since this whirlpool spin must be endlessly strong so that the whole weight of the endless world pressing on it does not stop it, it will also be endlessly fast, because strength can first show itself only as speed. On the other hand, the wider the rings around the center become, the slower this motion will be. If the motion could ever reach the edge of the endlessly stretching world, it would by then be spinning with almost no speed at all. Turning it the other way around: if we picture the motion as endlessly great, that is, endlessly fast, at the very first moment it begins, then the first circle must have been endlessly small. So what we get at the beginning is a tiny particle spinning around itself, a particle holding an endlessly small amount of matter. But this would

not explain the motion that comes after at all. You could even imagine every particle of the first mass spinning around itself, and still the whole mass would stay still and unseparated. But suppose that endlessly tiny particle of matter, caught and swung by Mind, did not just spin around itself, but traced a circle a little larger than a point. Then it would bump into other particles of matter, push them along, fling them, make them bounce back, and so gradually stir up a great and spreading uproar. Within that uproar, as the next result, the airy masses had to separate from the heavenly, fiery ones. Just as the starting of the motion is a free choice made by Mind, so the way it starts is also a free choice, in the sense that the first motion traces a circle whose radius is chosen to be a little larger than a point.

19

Here, of course, someone might ask: what sudden whim came over Mind at that moment, to bump some random particle of matter out of all those particles and spin it around in a whirling dance? And why did that not occur to it earlier? To this Anaxagoras would answer: "Mind has the right to act freely, just as it pleases. It may begin at any random moment. It depends only on itself, while everything else is controlled from outside. It has no duty and no goal it is forced to chase. If it did once start that motion and set itself a goal, then this, after all, was only—the answer is hard, Heraclitus would say—play!"

That seems always to have been the final solution or answer resting on the lips of the Greek. Anaxagoras's Mind is an artist. In truth it is the most powerful genius of mechanics and building, creating the most magnificent shapes and paths with the simplest means, a kind of moving architecture. But it always does this out of that unreasonable freedom of choice that lives in the soul of the artist. It is as if Anaxagoras were pointing at Phidias, the great sculptor, and, standing before the huge work of art that is the ordered universe, were calling

out to us as he would in front of the Parthenon: "Constant change is not a moral event, but only an artistic one." Aristotle reports that when Anaxagoras was asked what made life worth living, he answered: "Gazing at the heavens and at the whole order of the ordered universe." He treated the things of nature with deep devotion, with the same mysterious awe we feel when we stand in front of an ancient temple. His teaching became a kind of free-thinking religious practice. It protected itself with the attitude of the old Latin line "I hate the common crowd and keep it away," and it chose its followers carefully from the highest and noblest people of Athens. In the closed circle of Anaxagoras's followers in Athens, the people's myths were allowed only as a language of symbols. All myths, all gods, all heroes were seen there only as picture-writing that explained nature. Even Homer's great poems were said to be the official song about the rule of Mind and about the struggles and laws of nature. Now and then a note from this group of lofty free-thinkers reached the ordinary people. Above all Euripides, the great and always daring Euripides, who was forever thinking of something new, dared to make many things known from behind the tragic mask of his plays. These were things that pierced the minds of the crowd like an arrow, and the crowd freed itself from them only by turning them into silly caricatures and laughable new interpretations.

But the greatest of all the followers of Anaxagoras is Pericles, the most powerful and most worthy man in the world. Plato tells us that it was the philosophy of Anaxagoras, and nothing else, that gave Pericles' genius its lofty, soaring power. Picture him as a speaker standing before his people. He stood like a marble statue of an Olympian god, beautifully stiff and still. He was calm, wrapped in his cloak, and its folds never stirred. His face never changed, he never smiled, and his voice kept the same strong tone from start to finish. He spoke in a way that was nothing like Demosthenes, only like

Pericles himself. He thundered, he struck like lightning, he destroyed and he set free. At such moments he was the perfect picture of the ordered universe as Anaxagoras saw it. He was the image of Mind, which has built for itself the most beautiful and dignified home. At such moments Pericles was, so to speak, the visible, human form of the force of Mind: the force that builds, moves, separates, puts in order, and looks over everything, a force that is like an artist and is not bound by anything. Anaxagoras himself said that man was the most thinking of all beings. Or rather, man must hold Mind inside himself more fully than any other being does, because he has such wonderful tools as his hands. From this Anaxagoras concluded something more. As Mind takes control of a physical body, it always makes for itself, out of that body's material, the tools that match how much power it has. So Mind made the most beautiful and fitting tools when it appeared at its fullest. Now, the most wonderful and fitting thing Mind ever did was that first circling motion, back when Mind was still gathered together, whole and undivided in itself. So perhaps, as Anaxagoras listened, the effect of Pericles' speeches often seemed to him like a picture of that first circling motion. For here too he saw a whirlpool spin of thoughts. At first it moved with tremendous force, but in an orderly way. In circles around one center, it slowly caught up and swept along whatever was near and whatever was far. And when it came to its end, it had reshaped the whole nation, organising it and sorting it out.

The later philosophers of ancient times found it strange how Anaxagoras used his idea of Mind to explain the world. To them it seemed almost unforgivable. They felt he had found a great tool but had not really understood it, and they tried to make up for what its discoverer had left undone. So they failed to see what Anaxagoras meant by holding back. His restraint came from the purest spirit of the scientific method. That method always asks first: "What causes

something?" (in Latin, the efficient cause). It does not ask: "What is something for?" (the final cause, or purpose). Anaxagoras did not bring in Mind to answer a special question like: "What causes motion, and what causes regular motions?" Plato, however, blamed him for this. Plato said he should have shown that everything, in its own way and in its own place, was the most beautiful, the best and the most fitting, and that he had failed to do so. But Anaxagoras would never have dared to claim that in any single case. To him, the world as it is was not even the most perfect world one could imagine. He saw everything come out of everything. And he did not find that Mind had finished separating the substances, either at the edge of the filled space of the world or inside single beings. For his way of thinking, it was enough to have found a motion that, just by going on and on, could produce the order we see out of a completely mixed-up original jumble. And he was very careful not to ask why the motion happened, or what reasonable purpose it served. Here is why. Suppose Mind had to carry out, through motion, some purpose built into its own deepest nature. Then it would no longer be free to start the motion at any moment it happened to choose. Since Mind is eternal, it would also have been driven by this purpose for all eternity. Then there could never have been a moment when there was not yet any motion. In fact, logic would have forbidden us to assume any starting point for motion at all. And that, in turn, would have made the idea of an original jumble logically impossible too, though that idea is the foundation of Anaxagoras's whole explanation of the world. To escape these problems, which come from explaining things by their purposes, Anaxagoras always had to stress and insist that Mind has free will. All its actions, including that first motion, were acts of "free will." But after that first moment, the whole rest of the world shaped itself in a strictly fixed way, and more exactly, in a mechanically fixed way, like a machine. Yet a will that is completely free can only be imagined as having no purpose, something like children's play, or an artist's urge

to play. It is a mistake to blame Anaxagoras for the usual confusion of people who explain everything by purpose. Such people marvel at how amazingly well things fit, how well the parts match the whole, especially in living things. So they assume that whatever makes sense to the intellect must also have been created by an intellect. They assume that whatever a person does only by following an idea of a goal must have been done by Nature through thinking and planning toward a goal too. (See Schopenhauer, "The World As Will And Idea," volume two, Second Book, chapter 26: On Teleology.) But in Anaxagoras's way of seeing things, it is the opposite: the order of things and how well they fit is nothing more than the direct result of a blind, mechanical motion. And only to start this motion, only to break, just once, out of the dead stillness of the original jumble, did Anaxagoras assume a Mind with free will that depends on nothing but itself. What he valued in Mind was exactly that it was a thing of chance, something that acts by chance. That meant it could act without any conditions, without being fixed in advance, and without being guided by causes or by purposes.

Notes for a Continuation

(Early 1873)

1

We can be sure that this overall picture of Anaxagoras's teaching is right. The clearest proof is the way the thinkers who came after him, Empedocles from the city of Agrigentum and Democritus, the teacher of atoms, actually criticised and improved that teaching in their own competing systems. Their way of criticising is, above all, a further act of giving things up, in the spirit of natural science we spoke about earlier: the law of economy, applied to explaining nature. The rule is this. The idea that explains the world as it is, using the fewest assumptions and tools, should be preferred. That is because such an

idea contains the least amount of guesswork, and it does not allow anyone to play freely with mere possibilities. If there are two ideas that both explain the world, then we must test strictly which of the two better meets this demand for economy. Suppose one person can give the explanation using simpler, better-known forces, especially mechanical ones, and builds the whole structure of the world out of the smallest possible number of forces. That person will always be preferred over someone who lets more complicated and less-known forces, and more of them, carry on a game of creating the world. And so we see Empedocles trying to strip away the extra, unneeded ideas from the teaching of Anaxagoras.

The first idea to be dropped as unnecessary is Anaxagoras's Mind. Assuming such a thing is far too complicated just to explain something as simple as motion. After all, only two kinds of motion need explaining: one body moving toward another, and one body moving away from another.

2

Suppose the constant change we see now is a process of things separating out, though not completely. Then Empedocles asks: what stops the separation from being complete? Clearly some force is working against it, that is, a hidden pull that draws things together.

There is more. To explain the original jumble, some force must already have been at work. A movement is needed to bring about such a complicated tangle.

So it is certain that first one force and then the other takes the upper hand, in turns, again and again. The two forces are opposites.

The force that pulls things together is still at work today. If it weren't, there would be no things at all. Everything would be completely separated.

This is the plain fact: there are two kinds of motion. Mind does not explain them. Love and Hate, on the other hand, do. And we can certainly see that these two set things in motion, just as much as we see that Mind does.

Now the idea of the very first state of the world changes. For Empedocles, it is the most blessed, happiest state. For Anaxagoras, it had been the jumble before the building work began, a bit like a pile of stones lying on a building site.

3

Empedocles had come up with the idea of a sideways force, produced by things spinning around, which works against gravity. (See Aristotle's "On the Heavens," book one, page 284, and Schopenhauer's "The World as Will and Idea," volume two, page 390.)

He thought it was impossible for the circular movement to keep going the way Anaxagoras described. It would end up as a whirlpool spin, which is the opposite of orderly motion.

If the tiny particles were mixed together endlessly, in a total jumble, then you could break bodies apart without any effort at all. They would not stick or hold together. They would be like dust.

Empedocles calls the forces that press the atoms against one another, and that make a lump of matter stable, "Love." It is a force between the tiny particles, a force that builds up and holds together physical bodies.

4

The case against Anaxagoras.

1. The original jumble already takes motion for granted.

2. Nothing stopped things from separating completely.

3. Our bodies would be shapes made of dust. How can motion exist, if there are no opposite motions inside all bodies?

4. A steady, orderly circular motion that goes on forever is impossible. There could only be a whirlpool spin. Empedocles thinks the whirlpool spin itself is caused by strife, the force of Hate. He also speaks of outflows, tiny streams that flow off things. How do far-apart things act on one another, for example the sun on the earth? If everything were still caught in a whirlpool spin, that would be impossible. So there must be at least two powers that cause movement, and they must be built into things themselves.

5. Why assume an endless number of basic substances? That goes beyond what experience shows us. By his basic substances, Anaxagoras meant the chemical atoms. Empedocles tried assuming only four kinds of chemical atoms. He took the states that matter can be in to be what really matters, and he placed heat on the same level as them. So the states of matter come about through pushing apart and pulling together, and matter comes in four forms.

6. The idea of things repeating in cycles is necessary.

7. Empedocles also means to explain living beings using this same principle. Here too he denies that things are made for a purpose. That is his greatest achievement. With Anaxagoras, by contrast, there is a split into two separate kinds of cause.

5

Sexual love as a symbol. Here, as in Plato's story, we see the longing to become one again. And here too we are shown that a greater unity once existed. If this greater unity were set up again, it would in turn reach out for an even greater one. The belief that all living things are one makes it certain that there was once a huge Living Something, and we are pieces of it. That is probably the perfect sphere itself. It is

the most blessed god. Everything was joined together only by love, and so everything fitted together perfectly. Love was torn apart and shattered by hate. Love was split into her elements and killed, robbed of life. No living individual beings come out of the whirlpool spin. In the end everything is separated, and now our own age begins. (Against Anaxagoras's original mixture, Empedocles sets an original split.) Love, blind as she is, rushes wildly to throw the elements against each other again, trying to see whether she can bring them back to life. Here and there she succeeds. It goes on. In living beings a feeling arises, a sense ahead of time, that they should strive for unions even higher than home and the first state. That feeling is Eros, the god of love. Killing anything alive is a terrible crime, because by doing so you push things back toward the original split. One day everything will be one single life again, the happiest state of all.

Empedocles takes the teaching of Pythagoras and the Orphic religion and explains it again in the style of natural science. He knowingly masters both ways of speaking, the scientific and the religious, and so he is the first real public speaker. He also has political goals.

His double nature: one side loves to compete and fight, the other side is loving and full of pity.

An attempt to reform all of Greek life.

All non-living matter came from living matter. It is dead living matter. Think of a corpse and a living man.

6

DEMOCRITUS

Making the basic assumptions as simple as they can possibly be.

1. Motion exists. So empty space exists. So "what does not exist" exists. Thinking is a kind of motion.

2. If there is something besides "what does not exist," it must be impossible to divide, that is, completely full. Dividing something can only be explained if it has empty spaces and tiny holes in it. Only "what does not exist" is something made entirely of holes.

3. The secondary qualities of matter, like color and taste, exist only by human agreement. They do not belong to matter as it really is in itself.

4. Working out the basic qualities of the atoms. In what ways are they all alike, and in what ways are they different?

5. The states of matter that Empedocles talks about, his four elements, need nothing more than atoms that are all of the same kind. So these states themselves cannot be the basic things that truly exist.

6. Motion is tied to the atoms so tightly it can never be separated from them. It is the effect of gravity. Epicurus. A criticism: what can gravity even mean in an endless empty space?

7. Thinking is the movement of the fire-atoms. The soul, life, and what our senses perceive. . . . . What materialism is worth, and the problems it runs into.

Plato and Democritus.

The noble searcher for truth, living like a hermit, without a home. Democritus and the Pythagoreans, between them, lay the foundation of the natural sciences. . . . . What were the causes that cut short a thriving science of experimental physics in ancient times, after Democritus?

7

Anaxagoras took from Heraclitus the idea that opposites are found together in all constant change and in all true, unchanging existence.

He felt strongly the contradiction that one body has many qualities. So he ground it to powder, believing that he had now broken it down into its true qualities. . . . . Plato: first a follower of Heraclitus, later a Sceptic, someone who doubts we can know anything for sure. He held that everything, even thinking, is constantly flowing and changing.

Through Socrates, he was led to the idea that the good and the beautiful are lasting and do not change.

He took these to be things that really exist.

All general ideals share in the idea of the good and the beautiful. So they too really exist; they have true, unchanging existence, just as the soul shares in the idea of Life. The idea has no shape or form.

Pythagoras' teaching of the rebirth of souls answered the question of how we can know anything about the ideas.

How Plato ended up: with doubt, in his dialogue "Parmenides." There he refutes his own theory of ideas.

8

Conclusion

Greek thought in the age of tragedy is either pessimistic, seeing life as dark, or optimistic in an artistic way.

What they judged about life says more than that.

The One is an escape from constant change. Either unity, or artistic play.

There is a deep distrust of reality: nobody believes in a good god who made everything in the best possible way.

The Pythagoreans, a religious sect. Anaximander. Empedocles. The Eleatics. Anaxagoras. Heraclitus. Democritus: the world with no moral meaning and no meaning of beauty, a pessimism of pure chance.

If you set a tragedy in front of all these thinkers, the first three would see in it a mirror of how existence is ruled by fate. Parmenides would see a passing appearance. Heraclitus and Anaxagoras would see a work of art built up like a building, and a picture of the laws of the world. Democritus would see the result of machines. . . . . .

With Socrates, optimism begins. But it is no longer an artistic optimism. It is an optimism that believes everything has a purpose and puts its faith in a good god, and faith in the good man who has been enlightened by reason. The instincts break down. Socrates breaks with the knowledge and the culture that had ruled until then. He means to go back to the old virtues of the citizen and to the State.

Plato separates himself from the State when he sees that the State has become the same thing as the new real culture.

The doubting method of Socrates is a weapon against the culture and knowledge that had ruled until then.

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