

Heraclitus and Zoroaster in Emerson

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(I)

Around February 1844, Emerson wrote down two ancient sentences in his journal (*JMN* 9: 68). One is: Ζωμεν τον εκεινων θανατον, τεθνηκαμεν δε τον εκεινων βιον. Heraclitus [*On the Universe*, LXVII]¹ (One living the other's death and dying the other's life). The other: "The oracles assert that the impression of characters & other divine visions appear in aether." Τους τυπους των χαπακτηρων και των αλλων θειων φασματων εν τω αιθερι φαινεσθαι τα λογια λεγουσιν. [Simplic. in *Phys.* p. 144 ap. T. Taylor ["Collection of the Chaldaean Oracles,"] in *Monthly Magazine* [and *British Register*,] Vol III [1797,] p. [522] (*sic*). To Heraclitus' sentence, Emerson adds the title: "The dead," and another to Zoroaster's sentence, "The Daguerrotype of the Soul." It is not only Emerson but also Nietzsche that was charmed by both of the two ancient philosophers.

The sentence and word structure in Heraclitus' fragment is symmetrical and well balanced, in which seems hidden something suggesting Heraclitus' cosmic and death-and-life view. Cosmos, as well as the phenomena of death and life, is beautifully balanced and orderly connected. Death and life are linked to each other inter-

changeably, and suggest something like metamorphosis or transmigration. The death of a living being in this world does not always mean the absolute extinction of life, nor does its opposite remain the final and absolute life, with each transmuting into each other in any way under “the law of the Universe.” This law is, Emerson thinks, indispensable to his way of thinking, and “Metamorphosis is the law of the Universe” (*JMN* 9: 301). He copies a sentence of Heraclitus in his journal, “a great amount of knowledge did not make wisdom but it consisted in discovering the law which governs all things” (*JMN* 3: 369). Emerson seems to confirm the inevitability of the mutation of life into death and death into life, so long as they obey the law of the Universe, under which there would be nothing definitely and finally mortal or immortal. As the birds fly from bough to bough restlessly, “so the thoughts of God pause but a moment in any form, but pass into a new form, as if touching the earth again in burial, to acquire new energy.” Nothing pauses for rest, since all forms foresee “the new departure, and departure after departure, in long series” (*JMN* 9: 301). For, “in nature every moment is new,” as Emerson writes in “Circles” (189), and as Heraclitus says, “Into the same rivers we step and we do not step; we are and we are not” (Fr. LXXXI). Mortals and immortals are connected with, and in result reflect each other, without any estrangement between them. In a sense, each is respectively a daguerreotype of the other, and there cannot be death or life without alteration and new departure.

That death is a new form of life with new energy — this seems the way Emerson tries to approach the fragment of cyclical alteration of life into death, and his own view of metamorphosis. According to G. S. Kirk, “Heraclitus held the living and the dead to be in a way identical, because each succeeds the other That they can so become proves the essential connection between the two states” (*Heraclitus* 248). This connection in Heraclitus, based on his view of cosmos, means ‘order’ or ‘regularity,’ rather than ‘world’ in our practical sense. “Change is a property of life,” and the change of life into death obeys the cosmic order or regularity as the central idea of Heraclitus, and it is believed to “underlie and to control natural change in all its forms (Natural Change 38-39). Emerson responds to and agrees with this idea of change, and writes in regard of the mind in the lecture “The Natural Method of Mental Philosophy,” “All things flow, said the Ancient; all flows; πάντα ρεῖ. The Universe is only in transit, . . . ,” since change or transition is “the

essential act of life,” with which we pass “into new earths and new heavens” (91). Sticking to this theme of transition, more and more, as years pass on, Emerson comes to confirm that “becoming somewhat else” is the law of the Universe. It seems to Emerson to be “the whole game of nature.” As a result, he repeatedly stresses, “Liberty is the power to flow. To continue is to flow. Life is unceasing parturition,” confessing here, interestingly, that liberty and life are not in opposition, but correlated as his way of thinking or philosophy. As nature without transition is impossible, so is life without liberty. In addition, in Emerson’s philosophy, “inspiration is power to carry on and complete the metamorphosis” (92). Thus, Heraclitus’ death-and-life fragment comes to be a basis of Emerson’s philosophy as the law of nature and mind, being connected to inspiration.

On the other hand, Charles H. Kahn writes that “the mortals and immortals ... are the same as in the usual notion of men and gods, who are distinguished by war,” and refers to Fr. LXXXIV, which reads: “War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free” (217). Part of this fragment is cited repeatedly in Emerson’s journal (*JMN* 15: 7 & 170). Responding to this fragment, Nietzsche’s Zarathustra strikes here a bow to the traditional idea of Western love, “One can be silent and sit still only when one has bow and arrow. ... War and courage have accomplished more great things than love of the neighbor” (*Zarathustra* 159). At the same time, a sentence with a similar theme in Zoroaster attracts Emerson so much that he writes it in his journal: “Zoroaster has a line saying ‘that violent deaths are friendliest to the health of the soul’” (*JMN* 16: 5).

War and conflict suggests generally something violent, but at the same time, harmony is thought born of war and conflict. It is because harmony is produced from war or conflict, so long as death and life obey the law of the Universe, that gods and men, and immortals and mortals are said born of war. If there exists “the essential connection” between death and life, mortals and immortals, men and gods, then, is it possible to base one’s thought on the traditional Greek view of afterlife? Plato writes in his *Phaedo*:

Suppose we consider the question whether the souls of men after death are or are not in the world below. There comes into mind an ancient doc-

trine which affirms that they go from hence into the other world, and returning hither, are born again from the dead. Now if it be true that the living come from the dead, then our souls must exist in the other world, for if not, how could they have been born again? (209)

What is said about the soul is also applicable to animals and plants: death comes from life, and life from death. All things, in like manner, are born from their opposites, that is to say, “such things as good and evil, just and unjust — and there are innumerable other opposites which are generated out of opposites” (209). There are naturally many kinds of opposites, for example, the weaker is the opposite of the stronger, the worse the better, the more just the more unjust, and so on. Similarly, “the state of sleep is opposed to the state of waking, and out of sleep waking is generated, and out of waking, sleeping; ...” (211). In what is here called “an ancient doctrine,” there is nothing like eternal end or extinction of life or soul, but every soul and form stay in the other world, returning hither to be born again. That is, every soul and form, so long as it obeys the law of the Universe, is born again and again.

In Heraclitus, moreover, life exists not only in animals and plants, but in earth and water, as is shown in Fr. LXVIII: “To souls it is death to become water, and to water it is death to become earth, but from earth comes water, and from water, soul.” Death is not the end of life in itself, but another kind of birth, since the death of water, as Kahn explains, “compensates for the generation of earth,” in which is shown “a process of elemental transformation within the present world order” (Kahn 144). At the same time, Heraclitus adds to his compensation another kind of sameness between the living and the dead in Fr. LXXVIII, and says: “Living and dead, awake and asleep, young and old, are the same. For these several states are transmutations of each other.” Each pair of the weaker and the stronger, the worse and the better, the more just and the more unjust, in that ancient doctrine, does not seem constituted of opposites in strict logic. Exactly considered, there would not be considered sameness in these three transmutations. As the sense of sameness might be different from that in the moderns, so Kahn explains that Heraclitus “systematically blurs the distinction between these three kinds of ‘survival’” (225). While, according to Marcovich, “the three pairs of opposites quoted in the saying

are meant only as *a few typical examples* among so many,” and Heraclitus thinks that “out of each thing [i.e. pair of opposites] there can be made a unity, and actually this unity lies under all existing things” (106).

In this respect, however, there would be some other ways to understand, more convincing, to which Emerson’s law of the Universe is connected. If the law is attainable, knowledge or wisdom must be that which grasps the cosmic reality, in which “all forms are fluent and ... the thoughts of God pause but for a moment in any form.” This is accounted in T. M. Robinson as two states of reality: “both everlastingly stable and everlastingly subject to change; prescriptively it is that divine law which underpins all human law” (182-183). Though good and evil, just and unjust, weaker and stronger, young and old, day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, are all evenly said to be opposites, they are so only seemingly, and “apparent opposites are in fact in some basic sense connected” (Robinson 183), so long as they undergo incessant changes under that law. As for the statement concerning day and night, winter and summer, and war and peace, “God and the real are taken to be synonymous, and its clear import is that change in the cosmos is never more than the incidental change of what is in itself changeless” (183).

In Heraclitus’ cosmic view, the three world-masses are fire, water, and earth, which are changed into each other, and the cosmic soul substitutes for the cosmic fire. According to Kirk’s explanation, “Soul, then, occupies the position which fire might have been expected to fill” (340). When fire turns into water, fire dies and water is born. Death entails birth. That is, “‘death’ for fire, which happens whenever fire ceases to be fire, necessarily entails the ‘birth’ of water” (342). However, there are some other scholars like M. L. West who thinks, “Heraclitus can hardly have held that all gods die and become mortals, or that all mortals after death become heroes or gods. The whole scheme is difficult to reconcile with the birth and death of souls from water” (West 153).

Stimulated by these ancient thoughts about death and life, Emerson becomes interested in various kinds of mutation, elemental and psychological. In the Greek religion or philosophy, souls are believed to become water, water becomes earth, and then water arises from earth, soul arising out of water. They are mortal as well as immortal because of their cyclic metamorphosis, which to Emerson seems to mean a kind of divine insight and expanded thinking of revelation, for death must

be a form of life and a new departure for a new energy. To Emerson, the mythology is a kind of divine thinking, not an imaginary and primitive fabrication of ancient people. Thus, Emerson struggles to form a new way in his philosophy, and writes in his "Fate":

The revelation of Thought takes man out of servitude into freedom. We rightly say of ourselves, we were born and afterward we were born again, and many times. We have successive experiences so important that the new forgets the old, and hence the mythology of the seven or the nine heavens. The day of days, the great days of the feast of life, is that in which the inward eye opens to the Unity in things, to omnipresence of law: — sees that what is must be and ought to be, or is the best. This beatitude dips from on high down on us and we see. It is not in us so much as we are in it (Fate 34).

Death in Emerson is not only physical but also mental, psychic, and intellectual, provided with a new life, new energy, developments, and enlargements in thinking. It covers in its wide scope both ancient imagination and modern thinking. It is also suggested by Heraclitus' view of death and birth of water and earth, which is considered parallel to those of human beings, as Kahn suggests (226). The death-and-life fragment suggests primarily to Emerson that we are born and born again, with energy newer and newer. Nietzsche's Zarathustra says, "Indeed, there must be much bitter dying in your life, you creators. ... / Verily, through a hundred souls I have already passed on my way, and through a hundred cradles and birth pangs" (199). If Heraclitus' fragment regards the elemental mutation of fire, water and earth, "we are in it," and "he who enunciates a law of nature, enunciates a law of the mind" (Natural Method 87, 88, & 96). The narrow world must be broken with "the revelation of thought" for our thinking to be freed from "the sepulchers of the fathers," from tradition, — "Whatever in me has feeling, suffers and is in prison; ... Now my hammer rages cruelly against its prison" (*Zarathustra* 199) — to get out of this world, and Western thoughts as well.

(II)

It is around 1844, the correct date unknown, that Emerson for the first time came across Heraclitus' *On the Universe* directly and quoted in his journal the death-life fragment along with the sentence from Zoroaster, as shown at the beginning of this article. Emerson is now confronted with the question that the fragment asks, more seriously than ever before. His concerns with these questions, it seems, were not irrelevant to his deep experience induced by the loss of Waldo, January 27, 1842, about two years before. It beat Emerson all hollow, beyond all descriptions and more than any of his life experiences. Emerson would never have gone through so severe cruelty, calamity, and lamentation as were all of his words and emotions numbed and desensitized. Knowing no way to deal with this delusion and desolating grief like a flood, he could not help but cry, "the lost, the lost," and "farewell and farewell," in his dreams. Indeed, "never was a greater hope disappointed — a more devoted love bereaved" (Cabot 483-484; Allen 395-397; Richardson 358-360). Two years after this, Emerson read Ben Johnson's narrative of his son's death, in which Johnson, staying in the country at that time, saw the boy who died of the plague in London in a vision "of a manly shape, & of that growth he thinks he shall be at the resurrection." And then, inspired by the story, Emerson writes to Margaret Fuller, "That same preternatural maturity did my beautiful statute assume the day after death, & so it often comes to me to tax the world with frivolity" (*Letters* 3: 239). Emerson was living since that day with a real vision of that preternatural maturity, or of the resurrection of his beloved. Really, with too much "anger and shock and bitterness," Richardson writes, he "did not believe in a conventional afterlife" (Richardson 359).

Then, what is death, and what is life? At this time, Emerson becomes fascinated by the death-and-life fragment of Heraclitus, which saves him from bitter dreams filled with anger and shock. Heraclitus now entices Emerson to get out of his personal narrow world, suggesting something like a universal idea around the death-and-life linkage, which to Emerson cannot be anything but Metamorphosis as the law of the Universe. Death is only a temporal phenomenon in the process of alteration, since life is the other's death and death is another life, a new form with new energy. All things change and flow, and in Emerson's words, there is reciprocity,

identity, or unity among them so long as they all obey the law of the Universe. As Kahn writes, “we mortal men are immortal in that our death is really a new kind of (divine) life; they, the gods, are mortal not because they die but because their life is derived from *our* death” (217).

Is it the view of afterlife of the ancient Greeks that the immortal gods are nourished by human deaths? Wheelwright writes, “the words ‘immortals’ and ‘mortals’ are traditional synonyms for gods and men respectively” (Wheelwright 74). Then, are gods immortal and men mortal, simply and fatally? Or is it possible that gods and men are both mortal and immortal? It is impossible that anything mortal becomes immortal in a strict sense, to Heraclitus as well as to Emerson. What is finally and eternally mortal or immortal cannot be possible in the world of endless flow and alteration. Then, “... in the whirligig of universal change there comes a god and the soul-force that constituted him turns into something else, quite possibly into a man; likewise men, when they die, may turn into gods or something like gods for a while. ... the soul or self must survive death in some way of other” (75). Is this the Greek view of afterlife, really? We see above what Plato writes in his *Phaedo* of the soul being born again after death, and Aristotle observes, also, in regard of what Thales said nearly a century before Heraclitus, “soul is diffused throughout the entire universe” (Wheelwright 74). Emerson writes in his “Plato,” referring to the scene of Socrates’ imprisonment and the drinking of the hemlock — it is to Emerson “one of the most precious passages in the history of the world,” — “when accused before the judges of subverting the popular creed, he [Socrates] affirms the immortality of the soul, future reward and punishment; ...” (Plato 74). The immortality of the soul is rooted indelibly in his mind. After the experiences of “anger and shock and bitterness,” together with his reading of Heraclitus, Emerson presumably opens up a new feature in his way of thinking, and otherwise, Emerson would not have written like the following in his “Plato: New Reading”:

His (Plato’s) perception of the generation of contraries, of death out of life and life out of death, — that law by which, in nature, decomposition is recomposition, and putrefaction and cholera are only signals of a new creation; ... his clear vision of the laws of return, or reaction, which secure instant justice throughout the universe, instanced everywhere, but specially

in the doctrine, "what comes from God to us, returns from us to God," and in Socrates' belief that the laws below are sisters of the laws above (82-83).

The generation of contraries, that is, death is born out of life, and life out of death — this idea impresses Emerson through his reading and thinking of Heraclitus' fragments, and he knows that it is succeeded by Plato, as we see above, along with such contraries as "good and evil, just and unjust — and there are innumerable other opposites which are generated out of opposites." And what is stressed here is Emerson's new acknowledgement that "in nature, decomposition is recomposition," in his own words. Tempted here to write 'scarlatina,' with which Waldo died, instead he writes, "putrefaction and cholera are only signals of a new creation." But since no one can deny "the laws of return," and as we see in Heraclitus, "The way upward and downward are one and the same" (Fr. LXIX), Emerson adds here his new thought that "the laws below are sisters of the laws above." And this theme is repeated in "The Natural Method of Mental philosophy," "All above, as below, is organized" (88). Heraclitus' idea of cosmic change is here partly succeeded by Plato, and then, those ancient sentences and thoughts urge Emerson toward a wider and deeper way of thinking, and he comes to some other connectedness between death and life in Heraclitus: "Fire lives in the death of earth, air lives in the death of fire, water lives in the death of air, and earth in the death of water" (Fr. XXV); and "To souls it is death to become water, and to water it is death to become earth, but from earth come water, and from water, soul" (Fr. LXVIII). The elemental transmigration is here connected with Emerson's concept of decomposition and recomposition, and is at the same time upheld by Heraclitus' words: "The beginning and end are common" (Fr. LXX), which "[refers] to a point on the circumference of a circle" (Jones 492-493). Kahn gives a different reading, rendering, "the beginning and the end are shared in the circumference of a circle" (Kahn 85). What Heraclitus alludes to here is, according to Kahn's explanation, "the cycle of the year, the cosmic seasons, the transformations of elements into one another, and so on" (235). Needless to say, it regards the cyclical generations of immortality, that is to say, "the pattern of ring composition," or "the cyclical form of immortality-through-dying" (235). In other words, "in this symmetrical pattern of periodic recurrence the immortality of mankind does not differ in principle from that of

beast or even elements, ... since they 'have shares (*moroi*)' in the universal life of nature" (235). These insights sound bold and unconventional, and so much impresses modern readers as Brooks Haxton writes, "the insights of Heraclitus are strikingly postmodern. ... [Heraclitus'] poetic aphorisms show a deconstructive mind at work" (Haxton xi). For Emerson, as he writes in the lecture "Powers of the Mind," to think of "the laws of the mind" is nothing but to "rewrite literature, reconstruct science and art" (69).

In *The Oracles of Zoroaster*, the cyclical generations of immortality are thought to be spiral, as well as circular: the mundane god, or the god of the Universe, is celebrated "as a circulating and eternal god, ... and moreover infinite through his power and of a spiral form" (*Phenix* 148), and God has "a spiral force." Emerson reads in "Swedenborg," who is incomparably bold and brilliant in treating the human soul, and writes that nature "wreath[s] through an everlasting spiral, with wheels that never dry, on axles that never creak" (Swedenborg 112). Swedenborg discovers "a constant law of the organic body," under which large forms subsists from smaller forms, and "the least forms [act] so perfectly and universally as to involve an idea representative of their entire universe." According to Swedenborg, "Forms ascend in order from the lowest to the highest," and the forms from the lowest to the highest are called "angular, or the terrestrial and corporeal," "the circular, which is also called the perpetual-angular, because the circumference of a circle is as perpetual angle," "the spiral, ... the perpetual-circular," "the vortical, or perpetual-spiral," "the perpetual-vortical, or celestial," and lastly, "the perpetual-celestial, or spiritual" (Swedenborg 115). As Emerson thinks in "The American Scholar," the spirit resembles nature, and is "so entire, so boundless," with no beginning and end. He writes:

What is nature to [the scholar]? There is never a beginning, there is never an end to the inexplicable continuity of this web of God, but always circular power returning into itself, therein it resembles his own spirit, whose beginning, whose ending he never can find — so entire, so boundless" (54).

Emerson repeats the same effect in "The Method of Nature," "we can ... never find the end of a thread; never tell where to set the first stone" (124). If there can-

not be a beginning and an end to what is circular or spiral, it is because of “the result of infinite distribution” that nature and the soul are eternal and boundless. When Emerson writes that we are born again and again, he means that “every natural fact is an emanation, and that from which it emanates is an emanation also, and from every emanation is a new emanation,” since the soul always communicates with the Infinite (124). Furthermore, as is written in the lecture “Self-Possession,” all is initial, because there is “no terminus” “on this road of the mind,” with new reception after new reception, self-surrender after self-surrender (see 129). Also, as is written in “The Natural Method of Mental Philosophy,” it is “distinguished by the power to add a second, a third, and perhaps a fourth step, in a continuous line” (93).

Then, “Eternity ... is,” as Zoroaster’s Oracles say, “the cause of never-failing life, of unwearied power, and unsluggish energy,” and “All fountains and principles whirl around, and always remain in a ceaseless revolution” (*Phenix* 148 and 156). There cannot be death to “every natural fact,” and “there is no finalities in nature” (Natural Method 92). It moves in a circle and always returns to itself, remaining in its communication with eternity. The idea of this recurrence, the spiral force, or circles, revives in our times as the thought of “the ring of recurrence” in Nietzsche, whose Zarathustra cries, “O, how should I lust after eternity and after the nuptial ring of rings, the ring of recurrence? ... I love you, O eternity” (*Zarathustra* 341). Why do the fountains and principles remain in a ceaseless revolution, and why do they need recurrence? It is because of the interrelation between an individual and his society, between man and men, according to Emerson, and man and men are born in the sphere of the immensities and eternities, out of which they always come and return to. “They reach down to that depth where society itself originates and disappears” (Society and Solitude 4-5). It is originality or individuality that gives energy to and renews society. As is argued in the lecture, “Powers of the Mind,” however, both originality without society, and society without organic solitude, are sick and dead. Emerson calls it “the tragic necessity” and “the life of the All,” which are rooted in the organic source, since “the determination of each is *from* all the others, like that of each tree up into free space” (Society and Solitude 4). Each must always return to the source from which each comes. As Emerson writes in “Powers of the Mind,” the thought leaves its own narrow world for the wider sky of universal

truths, in order to come back enriched, “importing its generousities into all its particular thoughts” (83).

The spirit of Emerson, whose beginning, whose ending he never can find, whirls around, and always continues in the ceaseless revolution, familiarly and habitually returning to the immensities and eternities. Familiarly and habitually it does not come back poor, but enriched, enlarged, and deepened — in this point exists Emerson’s idea of the eternal resurrection or recurrence (to use a Nietzschean term), which has importance in the philosophy of our times.

(III)

The idea of the transmigration is not to be treated slightly in Emerson’s philosophy. All that breathe will die, but as we see above, if they are considered to resemble such elemental bodies as fire, earth, air, and water, which are interchangeably connected to each other, repeating deaths in constant alteration, as Kahn suggests (217), the transmigration, to be sure, concerns the soul, or the spirit, which never dies. According to the *Vishnu Purana*, the soul does not exist in the body, which is composed of ether, air, fire, water, and earth (507-509). The soul is declared to be distinct from them, because the body dies, but the soul will not. If fire and water are considered to be contraries, “when the latter is placed over the former, in a caldron, it bubbles, and boils, and exhibits the properties of fire” (508). The soul, since it does not die, must transmute, as we read in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and “must pass through childhood, youth, and age, / so too [at death] will [the soul] take another body up” (*Hindu Scriptures* 255). It moves from body to body, and so it needs transmigration. All things outside and material are, as Krishna teaches, filled with pleasure and pain, and impermanent, but the soul is eternal, indestructible, and incommensurable. So there is written about Krishna:

Never is he born nor dies; / Never did he come to be, nor will he ever come to be again: / Unborn, eternal, everlasting he — primeval: / He is not slain when the body is slain. ... As a man casts off his worn-out clothes / and takes on other new ones [in their place], / so does the embodied soul cast off his worn-out bodies / And enters others anew (*Hindu Scriptures* 256).

The soul is “unborn, eternal, and everlasting,” “a man casts off his worn-out clothes and takes on other new ones,” — this Indian way of thought is connected with Emerson’s familiar sentence in his first book, “a man cast off his years, as the snake his slough, and at what period soever of life, is always a child” (*Nature* 10). The soul of man, if it casts off its clothes for new ones, is always a child, or a man who is eternal does not get old. Anything like a final death, as well as getting old, is impossible, and the soul’s transmigration is, with good reasons, compared to a circle without end or beginning. When this idea of transmigration enters Emerson’s thinking as an idea of circles, the differences of good from evil are transcended, like old clothes cast off for new ones. He therefore writes: “Our crimes may be lively stones out of which we shall construct the temple of the true God” and “no evil is pure, nor hell itself without its extreme satisfactions” (Circles 188). Both good and evil are on the same circle, with their positions interchangeable, reflecting each other, just as, as Emerson observes in his essay on Swedenborg, “every particular idea of man, and every affection, yea, every smallest part of his affection, is an image and effigy of him” (Swedenborg 114-5). In other words, every idea of man and affection, is “a picture-language to tell another story of beings and duties” (118). Emerson’s “daguerreotype of the soul” suggests divine visions to tell another story of human characters, and ‘death’ is nothing but a divine vision of ‘life.’ It comes to be in some other life just as a designer exists in his design. Krishna is “the splendour in the sun, ... in the moon, and fire,” and he says, “I penetrate the earth and so sustain / [All] beings with my strength; / ... Becoming the digestive fire, I dwell / In the body of all that breathes” (West 172n; and *Hindu Scriptures* 311). The soul, as Krishna says, dwells in ether, that is to say, it is omnipresence to ‘another story,’ and we know therefore that the visible characters are the divine visions and daguerreotype of the invisible soul.

These speculations and inferences come to be connected in Emerson with the *Vishnu Purana* and Zoroaster, and he cites two sentences in his journal: “Man (the soul of man) goes everywhere, and penetrates everywhere, like the ether” (*Vishnu Purana* 206), and the human characters are “apparent imitations of unapparent natures” (*JMN* 9: 4, 352, and 356). The latter is from the Oracles:

The principles, which have understood the intelligible works of the Father,

he has clothed in sensible works and bodies, being intermediate links standing to communicate between the Father and matter, rendering apparent the images of unapparent natures, and inscribing the unapparent in the apparent frame of the world (*Phenix* 156).

And we should “Invoke not the visible Image of the Soul of Nature” (*The Oracles* 148, <<http://www.esotericarchives.com/oracle/oraclez.htm>>). From these, the soul is clothed in material works and bodies, which are destined to die. The mortals are intermediate links between the soul and matter, so that men see only the apparent images or imitations of the invisible soul. In other words, one is the daguerreotype, or a picture-language, of the other. It is not without any reason that the soul is thought to be fire or ether, because, as Kirk-Raven observes, “the pure cosmic fire was probably identified by Heraclitus with αἰθήρ (aither), the brilliant fiery stuff which fills the shining sky and surrounds the world: this aither was widely regarded both as divine and as a place of souls” (Kirk-Raven 200).

These observations enable Emerson to develop his own idea of a cyclical transmigration of elements. To him, the earth is fundamentally a machine in which is produced the development of intellect. The tree draws air by its leaves and water from the ground through its roots. Oxygen or lime is contained abundantly in the rocks as “the sacred power.” It takes the gas and mingles it with water, by which plants and animals can grow. And as the sea receives all rivers, so the air does all things springing from there, and then, all returns there again. Solid mass and form thus originate from the air, and the mountains are made up of gases and wind. Emerson calls this “the chemical fact,” and makes us recollect, “Nature is as subtle as she is strong.” He continues in his essay, “Farming”:

The plants imbibe the materials which they want from the air and the ground. They burn, that is, exhale and decompose their own bodies into the air and earth again. The animal burns, or undergoes the like perpetual consumption. The earth burns, the mountains burn and decompose, slower, but incessantly. ... Nations burn with internal fire of thought and affection, which wastes while it works. We shall find finer combustion and finer fuel. Intellect is a fire: rash and pitiless it melts this wonderful bone-house which

is called man (Farming 73-74).

Here is, we may say, unfolded an Emersonian way of the cyclical transmigration, in which every element is connected to the other, undergoing the perpetual consumption of death. When they burn and decompose, then again they are born, and recomposed. In human beings, intellect is a fire, that is, according to Emerson, internal fire of thought and affection, and it looks infinitely for its combustion and fuel to get better and better on the flowing movement, circular or spiral. If the fire gets so strong as to be disastrous, then a phlegm arises, and if a centripetence becomes so high as to need a tempering, then comes up a centrifugence equal to the centripetence. "This is," Emerson believes, "invariably supplied." In terms of Water, also, as he says, the mountains and rocks are eroded and deformed by the sea, that is, decomposed and recomposed, since the sea "performs an analogous office in perpetual new transplanting of the races of men over the surface — Exodus of nation" (Country Life 60). The elemental transmigration as the sacred power, thus, "yields almost gratuitous service to every application of intellect," and "obey the thought of men" (Farming 73). In the lecture "The Natural Method of Mental Philosophy," again, Emerson says in referring to the cyclic mutation of the waters, when the rain falls into river, then into the sea, and the sea into the air; and then, it begets clouds in the sky, and falls in rain, to renew its round. And as for the gas:

The circulation of the gas locked up in blocks of basalt, in globe-crusts of granite, in beds of coal that floor counties and states, then heaved, in new ages, and unlocked by chemic affinities, and the joyful vesicle, with all its eternal properties safe and sound, there is no tear or wear to it, — through all its changes indescribable; — millions of years, but as good as new, — sails away to enter into new combining; to make part of the plant, then part of the animals that feeds on it; then part of the man that feeds on the animal; then, by and by, buried once more in stone, inundated by new seas, for more millions of years; to wait for new fires to lift it again, to repeat the like circulation (Natural Method 97).

It is because of "a fundamental secret of nature, exist[ing] in intellect" (97), need-

less to say, that Emerson hold on to this circulation. This is his way of philosophy. A law of nature is a law of the mind, and as he says in the lecture “Self-Possession,” also, his philosophy maintains that “the healthy mind lies parallel to the currents of nature” (128).

(IV)

In Heraclitus’ view of the cosmos, such elements as Fire, Soul, and Aether, along with Water and Earth, are thought to be the fundamental existence, and they are interchangeably and cyclically connected to each other, rooted in unity or identity. As Emerson writes that beatitude dips from on high down on us along with them, transmigration and the unity in things causes the revelation of thought. Whatever he understands from Heraclitus’ fragments, it doubtless alludes to the Emersonian wisdom in regard to transmigration, in which the unity in things is rooted deeply. Emerson mentions a few words on this in his journal: “Like to Like — Identity” (*JMN* 9: 301). What is in question here is not the unity of parts and particles. Emerson writes in his journal:

Succession, division, parts, particles, — this is the condition[,] this the tragedy of man. All things cohere & unite. Man studies the parts, strives to tear the part from its connexion, to magnify it, & make it a whole. He sides with the part against other parts; & fights for parts, fights for lies. & his whole mind becomes an *inflamed part*, an amputated member, a wound, an offence. Meantime within him is the Soul of the Whole, the Wise Silence, the Universal Beauty to which every part and particle is equally related, the eternal One. ... An ignorant man thinks the divine wisdom is conspicuously shown in some fact or creature: a wise man sees that every fact contains the same” (*JMN* 7: 105-106, around October 1838).

There is no denial that there is a tendency in Heraclitus’ insight toward connectedness and unity, and it strikingly affects Emerson’s way of seeing things. Emerson confirms through Heraclitus “the tragedy of man” in thinking things in parts, for it drives men away from the sense of the whole, and as a result from

human wisdom as well. All things governed by the laws necessarily should come to the whole, and “the phenomena themselves which appear discordant concur in the harmony of the whole. It is an accord which results from discords” (1830; *JMN* 3: 369-370). For that reason, Emerson prefers to call it the Soul of the Whole, the Wise Silence, the Universal Beauty, and the eternal One. Thinking of Heraclitus’ view of unity, Emerson strangely feels sympathy to Heraclitus, and writes, “Heraclitus grown old complained that all resolved itself into identity. That thought was first his philosophy, & then his melancholy — the life he lived, & the death he died” (June 29, 1831; *JMN* 3: 266).

Why is it melancholy, his idea of identity? Because it is un-Greek, or anti-Greek, to think that both gods and men are mortals and immortals. If some one asserts in Greek society that the gods are mortal and immortal, it would be “extraordinarily shocking.” It is to break “completely with the traditional Greek piety,” as Kahn writes (218). Heraclitus, a presocratic Ionian philosopher, is generally called Heraclitus of Ephesus (ca. 535-475 B.C.), where he was born to an aristocratic family, present-day Efes, Turkey. (Efes is the Turkish name for the ancient Greek city of Ephesus). His native town, a prominent Ionian city on the Greek-inhabited coast of Asia Minor, was subject to Persian rule in his lifetime, and while it lies close to Miletus, there is no record of his relation with such Milesian thinkers as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. Rather, his thinking is inseparably combined with Eastern religion — in respect of this hybrid philosophy Emerson must have said the same thing as he writes about Plato that European metaphysics is based on Asian religion — and because of his shocking views on death and life, as a Heraclitean scholar writes, “at Athens Heraclitus would have been put to death for impiety” (Kahn 219). It is also observed, “when individuals like Heraclitus first began to speculate on the problems of nature, existence and the cosmos, there were those who condemned them all as arrogant” (Geldard 35). Most of his life is obscure, and “the only details about Heraclitus’ life which it might be safe to accept as true are that he spent it in Ephesus, that he came of an old aristocratic family, and that he was on bad terms with his fellow-citizens” (Kirk-Raven 182). So long as Emerson reads and we read in Emerson, Heraclitus is, to be sure, closer to Zoroaster, the *Gita*, and the *Vishnu Purana* in the East rather than to the pre-Socratic philosophy in the West. Emerson tries to understand Heraclitus’ frag-

ments as part of the Indian doctrine of transmigration, whose meaning is rooted in Persian and Hindu religion and philosophy, though Martin Heidegger criticizes this way of understanding as the most fundamentally un-Greek misinterpretation (cf. *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 133).

Whatever the Heraclitean fragments mean for Emerson, death is a new form to acquire new energy, since all forms foresee a new departure, and departure after departure. Therefore, such statements as "Traveling the path of the world for many thousands of births ..." (*Purana* 508; *JMN* 9: 264, 290, and 317) strike Emerson so strongly that he copies them down in his journal. He confirms that this Indian doctrine is "practical" as well as "full of love" (*JMN* 9: 317), but never strange, peculiar, or nonsensical. Not 'death,' but "the path of the world by birth after birth" (*JMN* 9: 317), leads to Emerson's way of thinking: "decomposition is recomposition." With this, "all mean egotism vanishes" (*Nature* 10), and his "anger and shock and bitterness" come to lessen gradually, and instead, the beatitude takes their place. So there is no melancholy in Emerson's conception of identity, though there is assimilated the Heraclitean conception of unity. Thinking of Heraclitus, Emerson is at the same time immersed in the *Vishnu Purana*, which impresses him with the theory of "thousands of births," and writes in a letter to J. E. Cabbot that he, bringing it on his trip to Vermont, "read with wonder in the mountains," and that "nothing in theology is so subtle as this and *Bhagavat*" (*Letter* 3: 293).

To be sure, the problem of 'death' seems to be an important idea in Heraclitus' view of the world, but it is the problem of 'births,' or rebirth, as well. Such elemental bodies as fire, ether, earth, and water are in universal alteration and connected interchangeably to each other, so the soul also changes into each of them. The similar views of things are in Zoroastrianism, and it is said in the *Bundahishn* (*Pahlavi*), for instance, that Ahura Mazda created six elements like sky, water, earth, plants, cattle, and man. And fire is in all six elements, as West suggests (West 172; *Bundahishn* 1: 28), and as the Oracles says, "all things are the progeny of one fire" (*Phenix* 149), and "the soul, being a bright fire, by the power of the Father, remains immortal, and is mistress of life, and fills up many of the recesses of the world" (*Phenix* 150). So the Oracles say to "hear the voice of fire" (*Phenix* 171). The voice of fire is that of the Father, and that of the soul as well. Therefore comes another quotation in Emerson's journal, "let the immortal depths of your soul lead you"

(*Phenix* 168; *JMN* 12: 547), to which Emerson responds: "Intellect is a fire: rash and pitiless it melts this wonderful bone-house which is called man" (Farming 73).

Fire is "the symbol of Zoroastrian Religion," as Tarapolevala writes (84). It is believed there that "Fire has got the power of immediately transmuting everything it touches into a likeness of itself. . . . the flames of fire always tend *upwards*, and thus aptly symbolise our yearning for the Higher Life" (84). Or, fire is "the holiest of the Elements," and it "symbolizes the spiritual nature of the Eternal Truth" (99). As we saw above, "likeness" is connected to "the manner of the spiritual discernment," necessity, and unity. In the *Yasna*, also, fire is prayed to as "Thy holy Fire, O Ahura Mazda, Thou most bounteous Spirit!" (*Yasna* 36: 1-3; see West 171). Heraclitus, according to West, must have been stimulated by "the extraordinary status accorded by the Persians to fire," from which comes "the doctrine of the soul's ascent from earthly fire to the fires of heaven" (West 173). At the same time, as is pointed out there, a similar theory of elemental interchange is found elsewhere in the *Upanishads*. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, for example, it is said that "all things are food for death, Death is fire and the food of water. [Whoso knows this] overcomes repeated death" (*Hindu Scriptures* 50). Under the law of the Universe, water cannot remain as it is, and so, "when water dries up, *it* goes to the wind; for it is the wind that consumes all these" (*Hindu Scriptures* 91). West points out (see 174), also, that the *Kaushitaki Upanishad* tells of "the cyclic death of natural phenomena," in which Brahman, the fire, and the sun, thus, go to the wind, and die, and "so all these natural phenomena enter and die in the wind, but they do not congeal, for they rise up again from it" (*Hindu Scriptures* 152). In the *Dabestan-e Mahaheb, or School of religious doctrines* (17th century description of religions and occult practices of India), fire or the solar ray is praised as "the light of lights," "the First Intelligence," "the Pure Ether," "the ethereal sphere, or the region of pure spirit" (Sect. I).

It is well known that Emerson is interested in the power of air, ether, or the wind on the intellect, and explains it in his lecture, "Country Life":

"The air," said Anaximenes, "is the Soul, and the essence of life. By breathing it, we become intelligent, and, because we breathe the same air, understand one another." Plutarch thought it contained the knowledge of the

future: "that souls are naturally endued with the faculty of prediction, and that the chief cause that excites that faculty, is a certain temperature of air and winds. —" Even Lord Bacon said, "the stars inject their imagination or influence into the air."

The air that we breathe is an exhalation of all the solid material of the globe. An aerial fluid of some kind streams all day, all night, from every flower and leaf, yes, and from every mineral substance. It is the last finish of the work of the Creator. We might say, the Rock of Ages dissolves himself into the mineral air to build up this mystic constitution of man's mind and body (53).

What Emerson stresses here primarily is "the importance to the intellect of exposing the body and brain to the fine mineral and imponderable agents of the air." It is Emerson's favorite theory that there is steadily an intimate relatedness between the mind and the body, and between the intellect and nature. From these observations by these three philosophers, notwithstanding differences among them, his inferences regard the air as exhalation of matters and things. He is a mystic observer when he refers to the aerial fluid emitted from flowers and leaves as the finishing work of God. And here again, as we saw above, visible things are the divine visions of the invisible soul, the daguerreotype of the soul, or as shown above in his quotation from Zoroaster, the "apparent imitations of unapparent natures." Emerson admits the greatest effect of the air "in the way of virtue and of vice" (Country Life 54). Other than the air, Emerson refers to "the Winds as the conveying *Maruts*, (whom "our Aryan progenitors in Asia celebrated"), traversers of places difficult of access," that "invigorate mankind." *Asvins*, Waters, goddess bearers of wealth, bring ambrosia, medical herbs, in us. *Agni*, the Hindoos called Fire so, is the sovereign of the forest, imperial lord of sacred rites, thousand-eyed, and all-beholding, with his countenance turned on all sides. These references are collected from his readings of the *Rig-Veda*, and alive so vividly in his mind daily, that Emerson, writing of *Maruts* who harness the spotted deer to their chariot, with weapons and war-cries, really sees them ride with irresistible strength and hears "the cracking of the whips in their hands" (55). Emerson seems happiest when he sees these gods at work and hears them cry and clamor. Then, as Emerson might

put it, the beatitude dips from on high down on him and he sees and hears. It is not in him so much as he is in it.

The ethereal sphere as a region of pure spirit is seen elsewhere in the *Vedas*, the *Avesta*, and the *Upanishads*, which Emerson must have ardently read in early 1840s. He refers to the *Debistan*, [sic] along with the *Upanishads* (JMN 8: 559), and later he, seeing that since the pure spirit is in the ethereal sphere, and the fiery light is an intelligent light, copies in his journal from the *Svetasvatara Upanishad* a sentence: “until man is able to compress the ether like leather, there will be no end of misery, except through the knowledge of God”² (*Hindu Scriptures* 217; JMN 14: 101). Max Müller renders the same sentence: “Only when men shall roll up the sky like a hide, will there be an end of misery, unless God has first been known,” and the note shows his own way of reading it: “Only when the impossible shall happen, such as the sky being rolled up by men, will misery cease, unless god has been discovered in the heart” (*Upanishads* 15: 266). Müller seems to stress that God must be discovered in the heart. Though we are not sure if Emerson understood it this way, he must have been impressed a great deal, and cites in the Summer 1856 many lines from the *Upanishads* over several pages in his journal (JMN 16: 101-107). Emerson’s interests are focused in the inner existence of God, since it is his long standing belief that the infinite law is in us and that “God incarnate himself in man” (Divinity 81). That God “is not born nor dies” (*Katha Upanishad; Hindu Scriptures* 174), and that self which “a certain sage, in search of immortality, turned his eyes inward and saw the self within” (177). Since it is not born nor dies, it is self-existent, and self-moving, as Emerson says, “described by the ancient as κινετικον, that which is moved by itself” (Powers 75). And interestingly, the cyclical transmigration in Heraclitus is connected with the central idea in the *Upanishads*, and it is doubtless that there is “a historical connection between the Indian and Heraclitean theories,” as West suggests (West 175). In the *Gita*, also, Krishna calls himself the splendor, light, fire, or the heavenly spirit, and says: “I penetrate the earth and so sustain all beings with my strength; ... Becoming the digestive fire, I dwells in the body of all that breathes” (*Gita* 311). As we read about thousands of births in the *Vishnu Purana* above, Krishna also says: “many a birth have I passed through, ... unborn am I, changeless is my Self” (267). The one who passes through many births is said unborn and changeless. Then, is it not an inter-

esting fact that in order to approach Heraclitus, Emerson depends on such Eastern materials as the *Upanishads*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Gita*, rather than on the views of Heraclitean scholars over the context and perspectives of the Western pre-Socratic philosophy?

As we see above that Emerson's idea of death as "a new form ... to acquire new energy," so *Shkand-gumanig Vizar (Pahlavi)* also denies death as a complete dissolution of existence, and stresses that the soul has to move from body to body:

The spiritual parts, which are the rudimentary appliances of the life stimulating the body, are mingled with the soul — on account of unity of nature they are not dispersed — and it is assisted eternally in virtuous progress. ... And ultimately, the compassionate creator, who is the forgiver of the creatures, does not leave any goal creature captive in the hands of the enemy. But, one day, he saves even those who are sinful, and those of the righteous through atonement for sin, by the hands of the purifiers, and makes them proceed on the happy course which is eternal (*Shkand* 4: 89-101).

There cannot be death of the soul, and all sins are forgiven — this reminds us of young Emerson's idea of Mercy and Justice, as we saw above, which he thinks are boundlessly absorbing, swallowing the recollection of guilt, and unmindful of transgression against pardon, with the just and the holy associated with demons. When the spiritual parts are mingled with the soul, — then, "in that world is no crime and no sorrow," Emerson says in his lecture, "Powers of the Mind" (79).

(To be continued). November 2008.

Notes

¹ The fragment numbering follows that of I. Bywater in *Heraclitus of Ephesus* (Chicago: Argonaut, 1969).

² According to the editor of *JMN* VIII, Emerson's quotation is from the *Upanishads* translated by E. Röer (Calcutta, 1853), vol. XV of *Bibliotheca Indica* ... , p. 68. Zaehner's translation reads: "When men shall roll up space / As though it were

a piece of leather, / Then will there be an end of suffering / For him who knew not God." *Hindu Scriptures*, p.217.

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