

## HERACLITEAN FLUX AND UNITY OF OPPOSITES IN PLATO'S *THEAETETUS* AND *CRATYLUS*<sup>1</sup>

Heraclitean flux plays a large role in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus*. Yet Heraclitus himself did not hold anything like the *Flusslehre* of these dialogues.<sup>2</sup> If this is true, then an explanation of the fact must account both for the philosophical terms of the dialogues and fragments ('How do the two thinkers differ?'), and for Plato's literary depiction of Heraclitus ('Why does Plato treat Heraclitus as he does?'). These questions are significant because the notion of flux has played a large role in subsequent philosophical conceptions of the persistence of identity through change. Aristotle's doctrine of change—requiring an underlying subject to undergo the replacement of one property by its opposite—reflects the basic assumption: namely, if a thing is changing in some way, it cannot also have its identity (*idem*-tity) in terms of that change, but only in terms of some other aspect that remains the same. By the time of Aristotle, this assumption is so deeply rooted that in seeking to define substance (*οὐσία*) he uses a concessive participial clause to contrast change with numerical identity: *μάλιστα δὲ ἴδιον τῆς οὐσίας δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸ ταὐτὸν καὶ ἐν ἀριθμῷ ὃν τῶν ἐναντίων εἶναι δεκτικόν*, 'it is especially peculiar to substance that while being the same and one in number, it is capable of receiving contraries' (*Categories* 4a10–11). Change is one thing; being 'one and the same' is another. Aristotle had plenty of precedent for this contrast. As we shall see, Plato's Heraclitus holds the same assumption. But first, I would like to establish that the real Heraclitus does not.

### I. HERACLITUS' DOCTRINE

Although the point has been made before,<sup>3</sup> I would like to present some new reasons for thinking that the conception of flux in Plato's dialogues is not derived from Heraclitus. Space does not permit any interaction with the considerable literature spawned by the sharp controversy over Heraclitus' own view of flux. But since my main point is about Plato, let the following suffice. There are two images which Heraclitus uses as examples: one is the river, of course (fr. B12 DK)<sup>4</sup>. It has been discussed in great depth in all its varying versions, and has been taken both in antiquity and in modern times as the statement of Heraclitus' alleged flux doctrine. Yet discussions of the river almost never make reference to the other main image involving flux—namely, that of the *κυκέων*, or barley cocktail (fr. B125 DK). A comparison of the two is enough to disqualify the idea that the river fragment

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Prof. James Lesher for his helpful criticisms on an earlier draft, and Profs. Terence Irwin and Gail Fine for stimulating my thinking on this subject.

<sup>2</sup> I write in the minority tradition of G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge, 1962) and M. Marcovich, *Heraclitus: Greek Text with a Short Commentary*<sup>2</sup> (Sankt Augustin, 2001). The majority opinion would preserve flux for Heraclitus, and is represented most strongly by L. Tarán, 'Heraclitus: the river-fragments and their implications', *Elenchos* 20 (1999), 9–52; G. Vlastos, 'On Heraclitus', *AJPh* 76 (1955), 339–40; W. K.C. Guthrie, 'Flux and Logos in Heraclitus', in A. P. D. Mourelatos (ed.), *The Presocratics*. (New York, 1974); and C. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge, 1979), 147–53.

<sup>3</sup> Kirk (n. 2), 228.

<sup>4</sup> I agree with Marcovich (n. 2), 194–214 that the other river-fragments are spurious.

teaches a flux that is radical (more fundamentally explanatory than any other way of looking at the river) or global (that is, true of all things, not just rivers) or total (true of every aspect of the river, and if globally applied, then of other things too). Yet in both of the fragments, Heraclitus' language is carefully chosen to point out the paradoxical union of stability and flux: 'Upon those who step into the *same* rivers, different and still different waters flow' and 'The cocktail disintegrates *unless* it is moved.' The flux in question is not motion simply, but motion productive of stability. In these fragments, the unity of the two is the hidden truth, the 'unapparent connection' (*ἀφανὴς ἀρμονίη*, fr. 54 DK), which it is Heraclitus' self-appointed mission to reveal. The opposition of flux and stability is a starting point patent even to people like Hesiod (fr. 57 DK), to be subverted by the examples of the river and the cocktail. Flux in Heraclitus is always presented along with stability in the service of the unity of opposites; it is not an ultimate principle to which everything else must be reduced; it does not go 'all the way down'; and it does not pose a threat to our knowledge of things or to their identity; indeed, in the case of the river and the cocktail, Heraclitus' point is that flux constitutes these objects, gives them their respective character. Without flux, the cocktail is a mere collection of disparate ingredients; without flux, the river is only two slopes and a ditch: for things like cocktails and rivers, change or motion just *is* what makes them 'numerically one and the same'.

## II. PLATO'S FLUX AND COMPRESENCE OF OPPOSITES

In Plato, by contrast, flux is not presented as half of a paradoxical unity of opposites; instead, both flux itself and the unity of opposites are considered as phenomena inherent in the nature of sensibles. These two problems, though related (that is, one can give rise to the other), are nonetheless clearly distinguished from each other by the specific vocabulary Plato employs to describe the phenomena and the epistemological difficulties that arise from them.

For Plato, things in flux (material objects, or sensibles, or forms *per impossibile*) are undergoing diachronic change in themselves. But this is not obvious. In response to the many studies that repeat Aristotle's explanation of Plato's doctrine of forms as a solution to the problem of the flux of the sensible world,<sup>5</sup> T. H. Irwin proposes that although the doctrine of separated forms is indeed an answer to a problem denominated 'flux', the flux Plato had in mind was not the succession of properties in sensible objects.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Irwin suggests that Plato saw the compresence of opposed properties in sensible objects as a species of 'flux', and that it is this flux, and not succession, which Plato sought to avoid by positing stable and immaterial forms. In

<sup>5</sup> *Metaph.* a6, 987a29–b7: 'From his youth [Plato] was familiar first with Cratylus and the Heraclitean opinions that all things are always flowing (*ἀεὶ ῥέοντων*) and that there is no knowledge about them; and these things he held even later. But Socrates concerned himself with ethics, and not at all with the nature of the universe, and sought out the universal and was the first to focus his thought on definitions, [Plato] agreed with him, but because of the former (sc. his Heraclitean doctrine), supposed that this [a definition] was of other things, and not of sensibles. For it was impossible that the common definition should be of any sensible things, since they are always changing (*ἀεὶ γε μεταβαλλόντων*).' Guthrie (n. 2), 212–13 may be taken as typical of the interpretation Irwin opposes: 'Impressed by this, but unwilling to accept the impossibility of knowledge, Plato posited a permanent reality outside the physical world.'

<sup>6</sup> T. H. Irwin, 'Plato's Heracliteanism', *PhilosQ* 27 (1977), 1–13, especially p. 12: 'Plato's argument for Forms did not rely, and Aristotle knew it did not rely, on s-change in the sensible world.'

responding to Irwin, I hope to clarify the nature of Plato's flux and compresence of opposites.

Irwin refers to diachronic change of properties as 's-change',<sup>7</sup> that is 'the succession of properties in the same subject over time'.<sup>8</sup> This is the brand of flux that the tradition ascribes to Cratylus. Now, not every instance of s-change or succession of properties need be constant and total; some might be intermittent and limited to certain aspects. But in the *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus*, this s-change is run out to an extreme, so that everything is experiencing this succession constantly and in every respect. Constant and total succession of properties, however, does not seem to be what Plato thinks about sensibles, since 'it is discussed in the *Theaetetus*, and is there rejected'.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, Irwin suggests that the synchronic compresence of opposites, which he terms 'a-change' ('aspect-change'), is understood by Plato and Aristotle as a type of flux, despite the fact that there is not necessarily any time-dimension to it.<sup>10</sup> Irwin is ready to concede that the *Theaetetus* deals with s-change, and that Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1010a) thinks that this sort of flux, if sufficiently severe in degree and rate, is destructive of knowledge. But Plato is not mentioned in *Metaph.* 1010's critique of Cratylean s-change. Irwin concludes that 'Plato's argument for Forms did not rely, and Aristotle knew it did not rely, on s-change in the sensible world.'<sup>11</sup> Instead, the motivation for separated forms is the compresence of opposites in sensible objects: the problem with sensibles is that they are never 'just one thing', but always 'no more this than that'.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulty with Irwin's explanation is two-fold: first, mere compresence of opposites does not seem to be 'flux';<sup>13</sup> second, Plato's concern to guard his forms from diachronic qualitative change is different from his concern about the synchronic compresence of opposite qualities. His diction makes this difference clear. The two problems are not the same in Plato's mind; though both may meet their solution in immaterial forms, that is no proof that unity of opposites is a species of flux.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Irwin (n. 7), 2.

<sup>8</sup> T. H. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (Oxford, 1995), 161.

<sup>9</sup> Irwin (n. 7), 10.

<sup>10</sup> This is the objection of C. Kahn, 'Plato and Heraclitus', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 1 (1985), 244: 'In Greek as in English, the words for motion and change imply a temporal dimension.'

<sup>11</sup> Irwin (n. 7), 12.

<sup>12</sup> As is stated, for instance, in *Republic* 475E9–476A7, with its contrast between forms and sensibles on this score.

<sup>13</sup> Irwin (n. 9), 161 states that 'We ought not to assume, then, that when Plato speaks of flux he must have succession in mind; and so we ought not to be surprised when he begins by speaking of compresence and continues by speaking of change . . . we should simply suppose that he assumes a broad interpretation of flux.'

<sup>14</sup> Gail Fine attempts to buttress Irwin's view with the following textual evidence: 'in the *Tht.* (152D2–E9), for example, Plato counts cases of compresence, along with cases of succession, as all alike illustrating the thesis that "nothing ever is, but things are always coming to be (*γίνεσθαι*)."' In (152E1), both compresence and succession are types of "flux and change" (152E8). Cf. G. Fine, *On Ideas: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*, (Oxford, 1995), 55. Yet it is not compresence of opposites that is called 'flux' in *Tht.* 152D2–E9, but rather, presence of one opposite observed at one point in time, relative to one observer or circumstance, and then the presence of the other opposite observed later in time, relative to another observer or circumstance. This is diachronic s-change, garden-variety flux. The change itself may be relative (so-called 'Cambridge change') or absolute. On this point, see R. Polansky, *Philosophy and Knowledge: A Commentary on Plato's Theaetetus*, (Lewisburg, 1992), 95.

The epistemological problems generated by flux in the *Theaetetus*—unlike those generated by synchronic compresence of opposites in the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, or *Phaedo*—are described in explicitly diachronic language.<sup>15</sup> Socrates becomes ‘less’ relative to the growing *Theaetetus* over the course of two comparisons (ἐν ἐνιαυτῷ . . . νῦν μὲν μείζω εἶναι, ὕστερον δὲ ἐλάττω—‘within the space of a year . . . I am greater now, and later, less’). The same characteristic, height, is used to illustrate the compresence of opposites in *Phaedo* 102B1–5.<sup>16</sup> In that dialogue, the compresence is not said to be a result of flux, and is not described with any diachronic markers—indeed, it is marked with an indicator of *synchronicity*, the particle ἅμα, ‘at the same time’. By contrast, the concept of κίνησις in the *Theaetetus* is defined in stages. First, Socrates gains Theodorus’ assent for including not only locomotion, but also rotational motion in place—both diachronic changes—then he removes motion as a criterion entirely (ὅταν δὲ ᾗ μὲν ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ—‘whenever a thing be in the same place’ 181C9–D1) and admits qualitative change (ἀλλοιώσεις, 181D2) as a sort of κίνησις as well. We might imagine that by abstracting the temporal aspect as well, change could be rendered a species of compresence of opposites. But this would be our supposition, not Plato’s, since he never removes the temporal aspect, even in his conclusion.<sup>17</sup>

True, Plato discusses compresence of opposites too, in the *Theaetetus*. But it is of a peculiar sort, and derived from radical and total flux, not by removing the temporal aspect from a process of change, but via a circuitous route: ‘if all things are in motion, every answer on whatever subject is equally correct, both “it is thus” and “it is not thus”’ (*Theaetetus* 183A). This move is accomplished gradually in *Theaetetus* 182D–E. Socrates first uses colour as an example, and gets Theodorus to agree that a flow that is flowing white also experiences flux of its whiteness, so that there is a ‘change into another colour’ (μεταβολή εἰς ἄλλην χροάν). So far, Plato has got, not the compresence of *opposites*, but of *differents*—that is, of white and green or of white and red, no less than of white and black or white and not-white. He makes a further move toward compresence of opposites in 182E, where he specifies ὁρᾶν and μὴ ὁρᾶν and ἄλλη αἴσθησις and μὴ ἄλλη αἴσθησις. From this, Socrates then concludes that predication is impossible, since words might as well be their own opposites, and anything follows from a contradiction: ‘every answer, on whatever subject, is equally correct, both “it is thus” and “it is not thus” . . .’ This is a stronger point than the immediate observation Theodorus had made in response to the constant change of colour. He had said that it would be impossible to give any name to a colour that would ‘properly apply to it’ (ὁρθῶς προσαγορεύειν). Theodorus grounds this difficulty on the fact that each thing, ‘since it is in flux’ (ἅτε ρέον), ‘moves out from under you while you’re speaking’ (λέγοντος ὑπεξέρχεται). Naming things that are in flux is like trying to force the Scythians to fight a set-piece

<sup>15</sup> G. E. L. Owen, ‘A proof in the ΠΕΡΙ ΙΔΕΩΝ’, *JHS* 77 (1957), 103–11 at 108, n. 34, notes that Plato describes the compresence of opposites with the adverbs ἅμα (*Republic* 524E2, 525A4, 523C1, D5) and ἀεί (479B8), and with the phrase ταῦτα ὄντα (*Phaedo* 74B8 with 102B–C and *Prm.* 129B6). In none of these passages are any of the words for flux used, nor is there any indication that time must elapse, nor is any Heracliteanism in view.

<sup>16</sup> Tallness is unlike Simmias in part because it ‘is never willing to be tall and short at the same time’ (τὸ μέγεθος οὐδέποτε ἐθέλειν ἅμα μέγα καὶ μικρὸν εἶναι . . .).

<sup>17</sup> Irwin (n. 9), 162, commenting on this passage of *Theaetetus* calls the phenomenon ‘compresence’—confusingly in my opinion, especially since he allows that time must pass to bring it about: ‘These appearances of compresence are the *result* of motion, change, and mingling . . .’ (emphasis mine).

battle.<sup>18</sup> Yet if a thing is changing from orange to red, I would be more (*μᾶλλον*) correct in calling it orange than in calling it yellow.<sup>19</sup> Such an appellation would not of course apply *ὁρθῶς*, but it would apply better than some others. This sort of flux does not rule out approximations; it does not make reference impossible, only imprecise.

In order to arrive at unity of opposites, Socrates must clarify further, replacing 'one colour' and 'another colour' with 'seeing' and 'not-seeing'. After this modification, the objects are no longer changing merely from one quality to another nearby, but *away* from one quality, and *to* the opposite one. Because the changing *quale* is, not merely changing, but *en route* from opposite to opposite, Socrates is able to conclude that the negation of any given name is just as correct an appellation for a thing as the original name for it. This inference would not have been possible if the change had not been from opposite to opposite. Something that is changing from X to not-X is X in a way, but also not-X in a way. Whatever such a thing is, it is so only in a way, and always equally not. Thus, the phrase used to express the language difficulty resulting from the compresence of opposites (itself derived from flux) is 'no more X than not-X' (*οὐ μᾶλλον . . . ᾗ*).<sup>20</sup> This is *prima facie* different from the epistemological difficulty Theodorus observed a few lines earlier, which was expressed by the idea of things 'slipping out from under' our words (*ὑπεξέρχεται*).<sup>21</sup> While he can derive the latter difficulty from flux alone, Plato must qualify the flux specifically as involving opposite qualities before he can arrive at 'no more X than not X'. (It is, of course, possible to have compresence of opposites not arising from any diachronic change at all, and Plato considers such compresence in other dialogues.)

Finally, Plato applies the first sort of difficulty to the results of the second sort: having derived a unity of opposites from flux, and having arrived at 'no more X than not-X' from this compresence, he then discovers that such *οὐ μᾶλλον* expressions, too, suffer from the difficulties of flux. 'Thus' and 'not-thus' *also* 'slip out from under' our very words, so that we will need a new language if we are to speak at all.

It is this sort of merely flux-based difficulty, this tendency of things to slip out from under our words (and not the failure of things to be X rather than not-X) that Plato raises also in the *Cratylus*, a dialogue which is, after all, primarily concerned with *naming*. At the end of the dialogue, Socrates confronts Cratylus with the difficulties that would arise if all things were 'always moving and flowing' (*ἰόντων ἀπάντων ἀεὶ καὶ ρεόντων*—439C). The result is what we should expect: 'the beautiful is not always such as it is' because it 'is always slipping away' (*ἀεὶ ὑπεξέρχεται*). Socrates describes the disastrous result in 440A6–D6: knowledge, the beautiful, the good, etc., would be changing (*μεταπίπτει*) into other things. But because Plato has not here raised the compresence of opposites, the difficulty is expressed by saying that knowledge 'would

<sup>18</sup> Hdt. 4.120, dealing with the Scythians constant flight from the Persians, employs vocabulary very similar to Plato's *ὑπεξέρχεται*: verbs used of the Scythians' handling of the Persians are *ὑπεξάγειν*, *ὑπεξίοντες*, and *ὑπεξελαύνοντες*. Cf. J. Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus* (Berkeley, 1988), 41–2: 'The other company of the Scythians is also ordered to lure the Persians on and lead them astray, always keeping a day's march ahead of them. The verb used is *ὑπεξάγειν*, which through its prefix indicates that this movement is carried out surreptitiously . . .'

<sup>19</sup> Correctly, R. Bolton, 'Plato's distinction between being and becoming', *Review of Metaphysics* 29 (1975), 71: 'Plato agrees that there is no absurdity in supposing that some object is continuously changing its place. Equally, no absurdity arises from supposing that an object is continuously changing its color.'

<sup>20</sup> On this phrase, cf. P. DeLacy, 'οὐ μᾶλλον and the antecedents of ancient scepticism', *Phronesis* 3 (1958), 59–71.

<sup>21</sup> J. MacDowell, *Plato: Theaetetus, Translated with Notes* (Oxford, 1973), 180–4, attempts to derive the 'no more X than not-X' difficulty from flux alone.

pass on into a different form than knowledge' (*μεταπίπτοι εἰς ἄλλο εἶδος γνώσεως*), but *not* by saying that we are stuck, at the outset, with words and concepts that refer to 'no more knowledge than not-knowledge'.

Another difference between these two sorts of epistemological difficulty is the time-dimension required for the flux-based sort (the 'slipping out from under' problem), but not for the compresence of opposites. This factor is expressed, in both the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*, with words indicating time:

For if it ever (*ποτε*) stays the same, then it is clear that at that time (*ἐκείνῳ τῷ χρόνῳ*), at least, it is not changing. (*Cra.* 439E2–3)

For as soon as (*ᾧμα*) the person about to know it approaches, it would become a different thing, and of a different sort (*ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλοιον*). (*Cra.* 439E8–440A1)

The words that express the result of the flux are *ἄλλο* and its compounds, rather than negatives denoting opposites (as was the case for compresence). Plato typically uses *μεταπίπτει* and *μεταβάλλει* to express this sort of change, and that *μετα-* prefix has a diachronic force. The use of *ἀεὶ* to express the sameness of a subject from one occasion or inspection to the next also indicates that flux in the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* involves succession over time.

### III. PLATO'S DIALECTICAL CONSTRUCTION OF HERACLITEANISM

Having established that Heraclitus has a certain view of flux, and second, that Plato has a different view, there remains to show what Plato was doing by employing Heraclitus' name for this quite different sort of problem.

In the *Theaetetus* 179C–181B, Theodorus and Socrates discuss certain philosophers who advocate a flux thesis. These thinkers, designated 'the comrades of Heraclitus' (*οἱ τοῦ Ἡρακλείτου ἐταῖροι*, 179D8) or 'the men at Ephesus' (*οἱ περὶ τὴν Ἐφεσον*, 179D4) appear as a comic caricature. In 179D5–8, the issue of 'moving being' is depicted as a hot topic of the day, and they are the major advocates of it:

SO: And a battle over it [sc. over the idea that Being is always moving] has arisen—one of no mean size and involving not a few men. THEO: It is far from being small, but around Ionia it is even growing huge. For the comrades of Heraclitus (*οἱ τοῦ Ἡρακλείτου ἐταῖροι*) are conducting a campaign for this *λόγος* very forcefully.

What is meant by 'the comrades of Heraclitus'? It would be a mistake to think that this term refers to 'Heracliteans' in the same way that one might refer to 'Epicureans' or 'Stoics'. These men are the army of Heraclitus within the larger martial metaphor, not in the sense that Crito is the *ἐταῖρος* of Socrates (*Crito* 54D). What is more, they are an army that employs tactics appropriate to men who are crusading for flux. Theodorus says that 'you could no more have a discussion with them than with madmen'. There is in them 'not so much as the least bit of repose'. They do not utter or say, but *shoot* as their arrows 'little enigmatic phrases' (*ῥηματίσκια αἰνιγματώδη*) which are 'full of strange turns of language' (*καινῶς μετωνομάσμενα*, literally, 'strangely name-changed'). Their strategy is like that of the Scythians against the Persian army in Herodotus 4.120: they will not stand still for their attackers. Instead, both Scythians and Heracliteans avoid any close engagement, answer cryptically when interrogated, and shoot arrows at their opponents.



It is not immaterial in this connection that Socrates and Theodorus have served as Athenian hoplites, and that the Scythians' and Heracliteans' characteristic failure to stand firm in conflict martial or dialectical is, for a hoplite, the mark of cowardice (famously, Archilochus fr. 5 West). Recall, too, that the opening of the dialogue saw Theaetetus being transported home from Corinth, wounded and afflicted with dysentery. Euclides terms him *καλός τε καὶ ἀγαθός* and remarks on how he has heard others *ἐγκωμιαζόντων αὐτὸν περὶ τὴν μάχην*—‘singing his praises over the battle’ (142B8). While this model of hoplite valour is by no means a pervasive theme in the dialogue, it is a very real component of the Athenian outlook, and thus must shape our understanding of Plato’s remarks about Heracliteans.

The Heracliteans’ refusal to play the dialectical game, and their preferred oracular style, are thus contrasted unfavourably with Socrates’ way of doing philosophy. Plato is playing upon the apothegmatic quality of Heraclitus’ own prose; upon his famed obscurity of expression; and upon the flux doctrine. All this is plainly enough a caricature poking fun at attributes of Heraclitus’ own writing; there is no need to suppose that his ‘followers’ wrote books sharing this style.

Socrates suggests that perhaps the exasperating dart-throwing and avoidance of stable conclusions is only for show; doubtless they have an esoteric doctrine which they teach to their own pupils. But Theodorus remonstrates (180C) that it is not a question of masters and pupils, or of teaching at all:

What pupils, my good man? Among such men one does not become the pupil of another, but they sprout up of their own accord from wherever each of them happens to be inspired, and each supposes that the other knows nothing. From them, as I was saying earlier, you could never get an explanation (*λόγος*), whether they be willing or unwilling. We must ourselves take hold of it and examine it just as we would a problem (*πρόβλημα*).

So not only are Theodorus’ complaints levelled against *nameless* Heracliteans, but these persons are explicitly said not to constitute a school.<sup>22</sup>

The declaration that the question is to be taken over for examination ‘like a problem’ serves to bracket the question of the flux doctrine’s authorship for the purposes of the dialogue. Since we will never get a fixed answer from the Ephesians, ‘we ourselves must take it up and examine it as we would a problem’ (180C56).<sup>23</sup> (There is backhanded humour in the words ‘you could never get a *λόγος* from them’ since it is precisely Heraclitus’ evangelistic aim to help other men recognize the *λόγος*.) Taking over ‘flux’ as a ‘problem’ (*πρόβλημα*) should be understood as the opposite of treating it as a *λόγος*: Theodorus is steering Socrates away from his original intention to examine the words of the Heracliteans themselves.<sup>24</sup> That will not work, so the question of change is being taken in hand by Socrates and Theodorus as their own project; the *λόγοι* of previous thinkers, and their *λόγος*-doctrines, are put aside. Plato’s usage in *Republic* 530B6 affords a perfect parallel to our present passage:

<sup>22</sup> M. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato* (Indianapolis, 1990), 47–8 and at n. 61 inclines to this conclusion as well.

<sup>23</sup> αὐτοὺς δὲ δεῖ παραλαβόντας ὥσπερ πρόβλημα ἐπισκοπεῖσθαι. D. Bostock, *Plato’s Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1988), 99, detects this implication: ‘This means, presumably, that Plato is not claiming to portray the [sc. flux] doctrine exactly as Heraclitus himself held it, but to be examining what seems to him to be its most fundamental claim.’

<sup>24</sup> Τῷ τοι, ὦ φίλε Θεόδωρε, μάλλον σκεπτέον καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς, ὥσπερ αὐτοὶ ὑποτείνονται—‘All the more reason why we ought to examine it from the beginning, as they themselves put it forward’ (*Tht.* 179D9–E1).

Astronomy then, I said, we shall pursue like geometry, using problems (προβλήματα χρονόμενοι), and we shall let the things in the sky go (τὰ δ' ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἑάσομεν).

Socrates' and Theodorus' agreement to treat flux as a 'problem' likewise involves reasoning about principles without reference to particulars. It strengthens the divorce between Heraclitus and the flux doctrine here considered. Just as in the *Republic* true astronomy does not study sensible stars, so Socrates and Theodorus will put to one side any actual instances of the flux doctrine in the writings of others. They agree to treat it, not only as a πρόβλημα, but as one inherited from 'the ancient poets',<sup>25</sup> no less than from 'later men who make it clear by demonstrating it, so that even shoemakers may learn their wisdom' (180D3–4). This would be a very odd thing to say if it were meant to apply to Heraclitus, with his obscure style and his complaint that the many do not understand his teaching.

Of course, Heraclitus' is still the primary name in view in all of this, 'the ancient poets' notwithstanding. But that is because Plato is using him for purposes of ἐνδόξα,<sup>26</sup> rather than because he is engaged in scrupulous history-of-philosophy, still less in any interpretation of Heraclitus' words. Aristotle defines ἐνδόξα as 'reputable opinions', that is, those which seem right πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς πλείστοις ἢ τοῖς σοφοῖς, καὶ τούτοις ἢ πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς μάλιστα γνωρίμοις καὶ ἐνδόξοις—to all, or to the majority, or to the wise—to all of them, or to most, or to the most notable and esteemed' (*Topics* 100b21–3). I take this description not as a private definition peculiar to Aristotle's school, but as an attempt to describe common practice in philosophical dialectic as he knew it. It applies, therefore, also to Plato. To wit: the flux thesis is posited by Plato in order to serve as one half of a dialectical opposition with the thesis of total stability ascribed to Parmenides and Melissus, two more of 'the most notable and esteemed'. As proof, consider Plato's handling of the Eleatics: just as he removes the flux thesis from any too-close association with Heraclitus, lest anyone take him to be doing history-of-philosophy rather than dialectic investigation of ἐνδόξα, so Plato also takes pains to distance the idea of stability from the philosophers he names as its champions. Of Parmenides Socrates says (184A1): φοβούμαι οὐδὲν μὴ οὔτε τὰ λεγόμενα συνιῶμεν, τί τε διανοούμενος εἶπε πολὺ πλέον λειπώμεθα. So we should not be surprised that the *Theaetetus*' Heraclitean arguments require a premise which Heraclitus almost certainly did not hold. As D. Bostock notes, 'The implications Plato seeks to extract can only be got from the premise that things are changing in all ways.'<sup>27</sup> It is Plato himself, and not Heraclitus, who has staked out the extreme position on flux.

The other dialogue in which Heraclitus is mentioned prominently is the *Cratylus*. As in the *Theaetetus*, Heraclitus is introduced as a representative of flux:

SO: I seem to myself to spy (δοκῶ καθορᾶν) Heraclitus uttering ancient words of wisdom, things simply as old as the days of Cronus and Rhea, which Homer also says. (*Cra.* 402A3–6)

<sup>25</sup> *Tht.* 180C7–D1: τὸ δὲ πρόβλημα ἄλλο τι παρειλήφαμεν παρὰ μὲν τῶν ἀρχαίων μετὰ ποιήσεως ἐπικρυπτομένων τοὺς πολλούς . . .

<sup>26</sup> In Aristotelian dialectic (e.g. Aristotle, *Top.* 100a), πρόβλημα is used as a technical term for a question (e.g. 'Are sensibles in constant and total flux?') to be answered dialectically by jumping off from ἐνδόξα, 'generally accepted views', which could include paradoxical θεσεῖς such as the Heraclitean flux thesis in Plato. For a brief discussion of Peripatetic dialectic, cf. H. Baltussen, *Theophrastus Against the Presocratics and Plato: Peripatetic Dialectic in the De Sensibus* (Leiden, 2000), 34–5. If the *Theaetetus* is a literary representation of oral dialectic in Plato's day, it is not surprising to find some of the same terminology being used.

<sup>27</sup> Bostock (n. 23), 101.



Again the flux thesis is older than Heraclitus, and derives from the poets. There follows a statement of the thesis in paraphrases, probably not verbatim fragments,<sup>28</sup> of Heraclitus:

Heraclitus says somewhere (λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος) that all things flow and nothing stands still, and likening the things that are to the stream of a river he says that you could not step twice into the same river. (Cra. 402A8)

The word που may mark the quotation as inexact, or as a reminiscence rather than *ipsissima verba*—as would be expected given the vagueness of the introduction (δοκῶ καθορᾶν).<sup>29</sup>

A similarly hyperbolic tone permeates 411B–C, the next occurrence of the flux idea in the *Cratylus*:

SO: And by the dog, I seem to myself to be prophesying (μαντεύεσθαι) not too far from the mark—what I just now noticed . . .

The word μαντεύεσθαι is ironical, and serves as a warning to the reader. There follows a jocular description of spinning wise men making themselves dizzy. As in the *Theaetetus*, the flux thesis ascribed to these wise men is radical and extreme: ‘No single thing is stable or steadfast (μόνιμον οὔδε βέβαιον), but everything is flowing (ρεῖν) and moving (φέρεσθαι), and full of every kind of motion and constant coming-to-be (γενέσεως ἀεί).’ This is fairly close to the thesis in *Theaetetus* 181E that ‘everything is always changing with every kind of change’. In fine, in the *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* there is neither any exegesis of Heraclitus’ words, nor any evidence that Plato has in mind any historical Heracliteans (at least, no more than that he seriously thinks that Homer teaches a flux-doctrine). Instead, we have a radical theory with no apparent limits to the flux.

#### IV. THE LEGACY OF PLATO’S HERACLITUS

Thanks to Plato, a rather caricatured version of ‘Heracliteanism’ came down to later writers: when we read the Platonic and Aristotelian commentators, we find that to be a Heraclitean is not to hold doctrines about the λόγος, or to call fire the element, or even to hold to the unity of opposites—though certainly these are mentioned in connection with Heraclitus. Rather, in all subsequent philosophical writings, to be a Heraclitean is pre-eminently to believe in total, and especially material, flux. With the exception of a certain Antisthenes who is called Ἡρακλείτειος in Diogenes Laertius 6.19, and a Pausanias Ἡρακλειτιστής in 9.6, the epithet is applied to no person in all of Greek literature except Cratylus. His Heracliteanism is always said to consist in his views about flux. This is specified by Aristotle in *Metaph.* 987a32,

<sup>28</sup> So also Kirk (n. 2), 14 and Marcovich (n. 2), 194.

<sup>29</sup> This raises the question of whether Plato was even in a position to exegete Heraclitus directly. The number of direct quotations has been variously estimated, with the pessimistic Kirk giving it as his opinion that only the references to fr. 22B82–3 DK (man considered in relation to god and to ape) in the *Hippias Maior* 289A,B; to 22B51 DK (διαφερόμενον συμφέρεται κτλ.) in the *Sophist* 242D, E and *Symposium* 187A; and to 22B6 DK (the sun new every day) in *Republic* 498A are Heraclitus’ words. Against this is set the total of references to flux without any anchoring quotation in the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus*; in the *Phaedo* 90C, *Philebus* 43A, and *Sophist* 249B. Cf. Kirk (n. 2), 13–16. With this assessment S. Mouraviev, *Heraclitea* 2.A.1 (Sankt Augustin, 1999) is in apparent agreement, devoting pages 68–90 to flux, and 91–4 to all other doctrines, and presenting the same passages as Kirk.

where he explains that Plato was familiar 'with Cratylus and the Heraclitean doctrines that all sensible things are flowing and that there is no knowledge about them'. Later, in *Metaph.* 1010a10–15, Aristotle relates how Cratylus went beyond Heraclitus: 'He found fault with Heraclitus for saying that it is not possible to step into the same river twice; for he thought [it was possible to do it] not even once.' We thus have two mere names in Diogenes Laertius, and a Cratylus who is probably more than half a literary creation of Plato.<sup>30</sup> On such slim evidence, speculations about historical Heracliteans are doubtful. It seems likely that the *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* themselves depict the most common manifestation of Heracliteanism in Plato's day: namely, as a *topos* in oral dialectic, employed by thinkers who themselves had no allegiance to it.

Whether Cratylus himself attributed flux to sensibles only or to other things as well, Aristotle's school probably contributed heavily to that interpretation with *De Caelo* 298b, where 'all is being generated and is flowing, nothing having any stability except one single thing which persists as the basis of all these transformations', and also with *Metaphysics* 1078b12–17, where idea-theorists (Pythagoreans and Plato) are said to have come to their view thus:

Those who hold the theory of ideas were led to it because they were persuaded of the truth of the Heraclitean arguments that all sensible things are always in flux, so that if there is knowledge and thought of anything, there must be some other, abiding entities besides sensibles. For there is no knowledge of things that are in flux.

With this weight of Aristotelian opinion guiding the characterization of the flux doctrine and of Cratylus, it is no surprise to find that the Aristotelian and Platonic commentators echo the same understandings. They speak of Κρατύλος ὁ Ἡρακλείτειος who holds that all things (or sometimes specifically sensibles) are in process of change (πάντα ἐν κινήσει εἶναι) because of 'their own unstable nature' (τῇ ἀστάτῃ ἐαυτῶν φύσει), so that no thing is ever the same 'with respect to the same time and the same substance' (κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον κατὰ τὸ αὐτὸ ὑποκείμενον).<sup>31</sup> When the commentators say 'flux', they mean physical, local, or qualitative alteration of the sort which, when taken to an extreme, thwarts predication. This is not an understanding of Heraclitus that is based on a thorough and sympathetic reading of his words, but on the caricature of Heraclitus which Plato constructed in the *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus* to suit his dialectical purposes.

## CONCLUSION

Plato's Heraclitean flux is not Heraclitus' flux, but is far more radical and epistemologically upsetting. Further, Plato's compresence of opposites is also not Heraclitus' unity of opposites. Why then did Plato select Heraclitus as his representative of instability, and not some other philosopher? The association of the river-saying with flux appears to have been a received commonplace by the time of Plato, perhaps

<sup>30</sup> I agree with G. S. Kirk, 'The problem of Cratylus', *AJPh* 72 (1951), 225–3 and D. N. Sedley, *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge, 2003) that Cratylus is shown taking his ideas about flux from his encounter with Socrates, rather than bringing them to that (historical?) meeting. But *contra*, cf. D. J. Allan, 'The problem of Cratylus', *AJPh* 75 (1954), 271–87.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Alexander, in *Metaph.*, 49.21 Hayduck; Asclepius, in *Metaph.* (987a32), 49.21 Hayduck; Proclus, in *Platonis Cratyl.* 10 and 14, all reproduced in Mouraviev (n. 29), 2.A.1.

through Hippias, as Jaap Mansfeld suggests;<sup>32</sup> perhaps through Cratylus, as Marcovich hazards. The playful way in which Plato handles Heraclitean flux, with comic and hyperbolic imagery, suggests that his audience would have known and recognized Heraclitean flux as a familiar theory from the context of contemporary oral dialectic.<sup>33</sup> This altered version of Heraclitus' philosophy seems to have prevented later philosophers from grasping Heraclitus' own intended point about flux: namely, its harmonious unity with stability.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jaap Mansfeld, building on an idea first put forth by Bruno Snell, suggests that the sophist Hippias compiled a handbook of philosophical and poetical commonplaces arranged by theme, such as 'water', and that this was Plato's source for the linking of Heraclitus and Homer with the flux doctrine. Cf. B. Snell, 'Die Nachrichten über die Lehren des Thales und die Anfänge der Griechischen Philosophie- und Literaturgeschichte', *Philologus* 96 (1944), 170–82, repr. in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (Hildesheim, 1966), 119–28 and J. Mansfeld, 'Cratylus 402a–c: Plato or Hippias?', in L. Rosetti (ed.), *Atti del Symposium Heracliteum* 1 (1981), 63–4.

<sup>33</sup> The flux thesis, whether from Heraclitus or elsewhere, was familiar enough to be fodder for popular comedy well before Plato's day. Cf. Epicharmus, fr. 170 Kaibel and Plutarch, *De comm. not.* 44 (1083 A).

<sup>34</sup> A lone exception is the use of the river by the Stoic Cleanthes in his physiological psychology, in which flux of the soul constitutes it as intelligent. Cf. M. Colvin, 'Heraclitean flux in Stoic psychology', *OSAPh* 28 (2005), 257–72 and A. A. Long, 'Soul and body in Stoicism', *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 34–57, repr. in id., *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge, 1996), 224–59.

## THE *ASTYNOMOI*, PRIVATE WILLS AND STREET ACTIVITY

Isaeus 1 is an oration on the estate of a certain Cleonymus, who seems to have taken under his wing his nephews (sister's sons) after their guardian Deinias had died. Cleonymus apparently had feuded with Deinias and during that time wrote up a will transferring his property to others whose exact kinship, if any, with Cleonymus is unknown (4ff.). Cleonymus specifically ignored his nephews despite his own father's wishes that Cleonymus' property devolve on them (5). Cleonymus had his will deposited at the office of the *astynomoi*, explicitly named in 15 but referred collectively as ἐπὶ τῇν ἀρχήν in other sections of the oration (3, 14, 18, 21, 22).<sup>1</sup> According to the speaker who was one of the nephews, Cleonymus wished to annul the will and sent for someone from the office of the *astynomoi* to carry out his wishes (3, 14, 15, 21, 22). The opponents, on the other hand, claimed that Cleonymus summoned the magistrate to confirm the terms of the will (18). Cleonymus' bequest was an adoption by testament. In Attic law a man who had no male heirs could adopt whomever he wished—he did not have to adopt a close kinsman, for instance. Although the cases of adoption do reveal that a testator frequently adopted kinsmen, especially through

<sup>1</sup> W. Wyse, *The Speeches of Isaeus* (repr. edn. New York, 1979.), 185.