

SHORTER NOTES

ON FIRE IN HERACLITUS AND IN ZENO OF CITIUM

In a recent discussion note¹ C. D. C. Reeve investigates the reasons for Heraclitus assigning a primary position to fire, as contrasted with the other substances like earth and water which go to make up the physical universe. (I shall henceforth refer to these substances as 'elements'; the term is strictly incorrect for Heraclitus, in that the substances can change into one another, but it is a convenient form of shorthand.) Reeve considers and rejects other reasons for the primacy of fire that have been put forward, such as the symbolic associations of fire, the role of fire in governing the universe, or the claim that everything becomes fire at some time or other. Rather, Reeve argues, the primacy of fire in Heraclitus' physical theory can be explained purely in terms of that physical theory.

First of all, Reeve argues for a thesis that I shall label

- (1) The differences between the elements can be explained in terms of their respective degrees of fieriness.²

This seems to be clearly correct for Heraclitus; it is, I think, correct for Zeno the Stoic as well (see below). But two of Reeve's further assertions seem open to question.

Firstly, in arguing that one polarity in cosmic change (fire, in Heraclitus) is superior to the other, he claims that, if Anaximander's theory were expressed in Heraclitean terms, strife would cause transformation between the opposites in one direction, and justice would cause it in the other (p. 301). But this does not seem to be right; Anaximander refers to the opposites – *both* opposites, it is implied – as paying a penalty *to each other*.³ It is true that, if there were no encroachment by one opposite, there would be no need for compensating justice either; but, once the process has started, the restoration of the balance by *either* opposite is presumably just, and its going beyond this point not – which is as much as to say, with Heraclitus, that (if there is to be oscillation between the extremes at all) the contrast between justice and strife is an unreal one (22 B 80 Diels–Kranz).

Secondly, and more importantly, Reeve argues that (1) above is sufficient in itself to explain the choice of fire as primary. For, where a number of elements are arranged along a single scale, the differences between them can only be explained in terms of the extent to which they are characterized by one of the extremes, and not in terms of the degree to which they are characterized by an intermediate. If fire and earth are the extremes, and water is intermediate, one cannot distinguish between fire and earth just in terms of their wateriness (pp. 302–3). This is true enough; but it does not in itself explain why Heraclitus could not have chosen the other extreme, earth, as primary, and argued for example that fire is that which is furthest removed from earthiness. It does in fact seem that it is after all necessary to appeal to other factors to explain the choice of fire; for example, the rarity of fire and the denseness of earth, which Aristotle gives as the reason why no one chose earth as the primary element

¹ 'Ekpyrosis and the priority of fire in Heraclitus', *Phronesis* 27 (1982), 299–305.

² Reeve argues that air, as well as earth, water and fire, is an 'element', one of the basic substances of which the universe is made up, for Heraclitus; this is debatable, but it does not seem to affect the general issue.

³ Anaximander, 12 A 9 in H. Diels–W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*⁵ (Berlin, 1934).

(*Metaphysics* A8 988b34–989a8), or the connection between fire and soul (cf. Heraclitus, 22B36 Diels–Kranz) supported by the association of warmth and life, coldness and death.

Reeve further argues that his explanation for the primacy of fire removes the only compelling reason for attributing the Stoic doctrine of the conflagration (*ekpurōsis*) of the universe to Heraclitus. That Reeve's explanation of the primacy of fire does not in fact seem sufficient in itself does not make it any more likely that Heraclitus did believe in a conflagration; other reasons for the primacy of fire can be given, and the question whether Heraclitus did believe in a conflagration must be judged on other evidence. However, the point is of interest because it raises the question of the relation between Stoic theories and Heraclitus.⁴ For, whether or not the Stoics were right to find the doctrine of the conflagration in Heraclitus, it does seem that (1) above has application to them, and especially to Zeno of Citium, the founder of the school.

Zeno, like his successors, distinguished between two principles, the active divine principle and the passive material principle; the action of the former on the latter produces the four 'elements', earth, air, fire and water.⁵ But the active principle is itself identified with fire by Zeno,⁶ and this may seem problematic. If fire is one of the ingredients that go to make up fire, we seem to be faced with the prospect of an infinite regress.⁷

There seem to be two ways out of the problem. (A) One can emphasize the distinction, which the Stoics certainly drew, between divine, creative fire and ordinary, destructive fire, and argue that the former is the active principle and the latter one of the four 'elements'.⁸ But alternatively (B) one might point out that, in spite of the differences, both sorts of fire *are*, after all, *fire*; and then one might perhaps argue, in a development of (1) above, that all the elements are composed of a combination of the active and passive principles, but that fire is the element in which the divine principle is most fully manifested – perhaps, in which the active principle has most fully transformed the passive principle into itself.⁹ Transformation by the divine principle will be most complete in divine, creative fire, and less so in ordinary, destructive fire. This explains how creative fire is, in a sense, identical with the active principle; it is so in the sense that it is the most perfect manifestation of the nature of that principle, and that in it the active principle has transformed the passive principle so completely that they can no longer be distinguished.¹⁰

⁴ On which cf. A. A. Long, 'Heraclitus and Stoicism', *Philosophia* (Athens), 5–6 (1975–6), 133–53.

⁵ J. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (SVF)* (Leipzig, 1903–24), vol. i, no. 102; cf. M. Lapidge, 'A problem in Stoic cosmology', *Phronesis* 18 (1973), 240–78.

⁶ *SVF* i. 157; Lapidge, art. cit. pp. 253 f.

⁷ cf. Lapidge, art. cit. pp. 267 f.; F. H. Sandbach, *The Stoics* (London, 1975), pp. 73 f. Chrysippus made matters more complex by introducing *pneuma*, a combination of fire and air, as the vehicle as it were of divine influence in the sublunary sphere; cf. Lapidge, art. cit. pp. 273–8; A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy* (London, 1974), pp. 155 f.; and R. B. Todd, 'Monism and Immanence', in J. M. Rist (ed.), *The Stoics* (Berkeley, 1978), pp. 148 ff.

⁸ This is the solution of Lapidge, art. cit. pp. 268–73; cf. also Todd, op. cit. p. 145, and Long, art. cit. (n. 4), p. 140.

⁹ cf. Todd, op. cit. pp. 143–8, on the embryological basis of Zeno's cosmology, and also Lapidge, art. cit. p. 258: 'Bodies might be less or more pure, depending on how much matter they contained, or depending on the relationship between the god and the matter'.

¹⁰ cf. Todd, op. cit. p. 145. Lapidge, art. cit. p. 258 suggests that the passive, material principle may not be present in the creative divine fire at all; but, as he recognizes, this raises problems, and it does not seem to be required by the evidence.

Thus, even if Reeve's (1) does not suffice on its own to explain *why* fire is primary for Heraclitus, it may – if suggestion (B) is correct – help to explain *how* it is primary for Zeno.¹¹

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¹¹ In the second part of this note I have benefited greatly from the discussion at the colloquium on Stoic physics held in Cambridge in 1977.

SOPHOCLES, *OEDIPUS TYRANNUS* 873

ὕβρις φυτεύει τύραννον· ὕβρις κτλ. Thus the MSS, Schol. (= *Suda* v 15) and Stobaeus 4. 8. 11 (p. 298 H.). ὕβριν φυτεύει τυραννίς· ὕβρις κτλ. Thus Blaydes, followed recently by R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *JHS* 91 (1971), 126 = *Sophocles. An interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 192 ('What is positively gained by making this correction? Three things'); R. D. Dawe, *Sophoclis Tragoediae* (Teubner, 1975), i. 156 and *Sophocles. Oedipus Rex* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 18, 61, 182 f. ('We may be sure of this for two reasons'); R. W. B. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies* (Oxford, 1980), p. 164 ('The resulting sense is admirable'); J. Diggle, *CR* n.s. 32 (1982), 14 ('My heart warms... What is drastic about altering three letters?').

First: ὕβριν weakens the anaphora (cf. *Ajax* 1198 f. κείνος... ἐκείνος..., Horace, *Odes* 3. 2. 17 ff. *virtus... virtus...*, etc.), and the rhythm is further spoilt by the ugly juxtaposition τυραννίς· ὕβρις.

Second: τυραννίς breaks the train of thought. There is a clear contrast between *strophe* and *antistrophe*: the Chorus pray for εὐσεπτος ἀγνεία (864), because they fear its opposite, ὕβρις, which leads to tyranny and destruction. 'They pray for purity and reverence. They assert that it is pride and violence that produce a Tyrant. They hope that Oedipus is not a Tyrant' (J. T. Sheppard, *The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles* (Cambridge, 1920), p. 151). Similarly J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles*. Part IV (Leiden, 1967), pp. 175 f. In this context the sequence 'May I be pure: Tyranny begets Hybris' would be lame and disjointed (or are we to imagine that the Chorus are tyrants?).

Third: a dull commonplace is no substitute for a splendid poetic image. Cf. Cratinus' *στάσις δὲ καὶ πρεσβυγενῆς|Χρόνος ἀλλήλοισι μίγνεντε|μέγιστον τίκτετον τύραννον* (= fr. 258 in *PCG* vol. iv). At *OT* 1080 Oedipus calls himself παῖδα τῆς Τύχης and at Eur. *Troades* 768 f. Helen is cursed as the daughter of Ἀλάστορος μὲν πρῶτον, εἶτα δὲ Φθόνου|Φόνον τε Θανάτου θ'. For other genealogical metaphors see Sandbach on Men. *Dysc.* 88.

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A NOTE ON ARISTOPHANES, *CLOUDS* 977–8

ἡλείψατο δ' ἂν τοῦμφαλοῦ οὐδεὶς παῖς ὑπένερθεν τότ' ἂν, ὥστε τοῖς αἰδοίοισι δρόσος καὶ χνοῦς ὥσπερ μήλοισιν ἐπήνθει.

K. J. Dover, in *Greek Homosexuality* (London, 1978), p. 125 n. 1, observes: 'My interpretation *ad loc.* (sc. in his Commentary), that *drosos* is Cowper's secretion, appearing when the boy's penis has been erected by titillation, is far-fetched (I am bound to agree with some reviewers on this), but no other interpretation so far seems to me to pay enough attention to the semantics of *drosos* or to explain why Right