HERACLITUS AND THE RIG VEDA: A CROSS-TRADITION ENGAGING EXAMINATION

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ABSTRACT: As early as the 18th century, the similarities between Greek and Iranian thought have raised questions about the origins of Greek philosophy and a possible Oriental influence many have ventured to highlight parallels and to explain this proximity of ideas. However, although it is very well-known that Iranian philosophy is influenced by the early Hindu thought, and there are studies on the analogies between the Greek and the Indian philosophy, only few scholars have studied the closeness of the Heraclitean philosophy with the early Indian thinking. This article attempts to compare some fragments of the Ionian philosopher on fire as the primordial element of the world, his concept about the “One” and the unity of opposites with some verses of Rig Veda that seem to share quite comparable ideas. Where possible, attempts are made to compare them with other philosophical systems that share similar concepts, such as the Parmenidean philosophy or the Chinese.

Keywords: fire, Heraclitus, hymn of creation, One, opposites, Rig Veda

1. INTRODUCTION

Since very early on, the similarities between Greek and Iranian thought have raised questions about the origins of Greek philosophy and a possible Oriental influence. Since F. D. Schleiermacher and his successors F. Creuzer and A. Gladisch, many have ventured to highlight parallels and to explain this proximity of ideas. However, though it is very well-known that Iranian philosophy is influenced by the early Hindu thought, and there are studies on the analogies between the Greek and the Indian philosophy,

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1 See Garbe 1894, 176-193 in which he cites and comments all previous scholars who have pointed out similarities between the two philosophies. See also West 1971; Burkert- Curd- Graham 2008.
2 The subject had drawn the attention as early as the 18th century when the Orientalist Sir William Jones introduced the Hindu culture to the West. Jones compared Greek philosophers to Hinduist and Buddhist religious personalities e.g., Gautama with Aristotle, Jaimini with Socrates. On the subject, see Marlow 1954 and Cannon 1977. For more recent studies see Sedlar 1980; Adrados 1999, 1994; Škof 2021; Tablan 2002; Seaford 2016, 2019; Franklin 2002.
focusing mainly on the Eleatic philosophy - only few scholars have studied the closeness of the Heraclitean philosophy with the early Indian thinking. This article attempts to compare some fragments of the Ionian philosopher on fire as the primordial element of the world, his concept about the “One” and the unity of opposites with some verses of Rig Veda that seem to share quite comparable ideas.

2. THE VEDIC HYMN OF CREATION 10.129

The first fragment analyzed is the famous seven-stanzas hymn 10.129 that belongs to a cluster of cosmogonic hymns from the tenth and last, mandala of the Rig Veda. The Vedic literature attempts to explain the origin of the world without, however, presenting a coherent and cohesive system of cosmogony. This hymn has been translated more than any other in the collection but despite the attention it has received and the interpretations that have focused on its content, its narrative remains obscure and ambiguous. Its most remarkable element remains the great skepticism or even agnosticism at the end of the hymn, where a doubt is expressed as to whether even the God knows what happened in the first moments of the creation of the world.

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3 See Bernabe 2013, 2021; Rusza 2002.
4 Heraclitus lived in Ephesus, an important Ionian city, in the latter part of the sixth century and the early part of the fifth century. During this period, parts of the Greek world, such as the Greek cities of Asia Minor in 545 BC, came under the control of Achaemenid Persia. This marked the beginning of political relations between the Persian and Greek civilizations and reinforced the cultural exchanges between them. During his life, Heraclitus witnessed the Ionian revolt against the Persian rule and, at the end of his life, perhaps the Persian Wars. See Duchesne-Guillemin 1963.
5 Colebrooke (1837, 437) emphasizes that Heraclitus, like Sánkhya (major Hindu philosophies) admitted only one material principle and no efficient cause. He asserts that Heraclitus’ ἱσυγμώτα correspond to the sheer particles of Kapila’s Sánkhya, and that the development of corporeal existences, along with their return to the first principle at their dissolution, correspond to the upward and downward way of Heraclitus. Garbe (1894, 179) states that Heraclitus’ doctrine touches upon Iranian ideas in its main topic. West (1971) and Kahn (1979) established a dialogue on the subject, as Kahn dedicated a chapter in his books to comment West’s arguments on Heraclitus and its possible oriental influence. See also Kwietniewska 2000.
6 The translation is from Jamison-Brereton 2014, which the latest complete English translation of the Rig Veda and the transliteration of the Sanskrit text comes from Brereton 1999. Only two complete English translations had been published before: Wilson (1850-7) (with reprints) and Griffith (1889-1892 with revised later editions) but both were criticized as philologically unreliable and were subsequently ignored. There are two full translations of the Rig Veda into another languages: In French by Langlois (1848-51) and in Russian by Elizarenkova (1998-99). However, the hymn has been translated many times. Among the earliest translation is that by Muller (1859, 559–565). Oxford’s first Professor of Comparative Philology. For more recent translations, not used in this article, see Doniger 1981; Kramer 1986; Christian 2011. Although the three scholars translated tápas as heat, Basham (1954) translated the term as ‘knowledge’.
7 Maurer (1975, 219) stresses that the already difficult translation of the hymn is worsened by the use of “an awkward obscurity of phraseology, occasionally enhanced by an insistence upon a metrical translation”.

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nāsad āśīn nō sād āśīt tadānīṃ/ nāsīd rájo nō viomā parō yāt/ kim ávarīvāh kūḥa kāṣya/ sārmāṃ/ āmbhaḥ kim āśīd gāhanāṃ gabbhārāṃ

The non-existent did not exist, nor did the existent exists at that time. There existed neither the airy space nor heaven beyond. What moved back and forth? From where and in whose protection? Did water exist, a deep depth?

nā mṛtyūr āśīd amṛṭaṃ nā tārhī/ nā rātriya āhna āśīt prakætyaḥ/ ānīd avātāṃ svadhāyā tād ēkam/ tāsmād dhānān nā parāh kim canāsa

Death did not exist nor deathlessness then. There existed no sign of night nor of day. That One breathed without wind through by its independent will. There existed nothing else beyond that.

tāma āśīt tāmasā gūḥālam āgre/ aprakætaṃ salilāṃ sārvam ā iḍāṃ/ tuchyēṇābhū āpihitam yād āśīt/ tāpasas tān mahaṇāja-yataikaṃ

Darkness existed, hidden by darkness, in the beginning. All this was a signless ocean. What existed as a thing coming into being, concealed by emptiness, that One was born by the power of the heat.

kāmas tād āgre sām avartatādīḥ/ mānaśo rētaḥ prathamāṃ yād āśīt/ satō bāṇdhum āsati nīr avindan/ ḫriḍi pratiṣṭhitā kavāyo maniṣā

Then, in the beginning, from though there evolved desire, which existed as the primal semen. Searching in their hearts through inspired thinking, poets found the connection of the existent in the non-existent.

tiraścno vitato raśmīr eṣāṃ/ adhiḥ śvīd śvīd upārī śvīd āśīt/ retodhā āsan mahimānā āsan svadhā avāstāt prāyātiḥ parāstāt

Their cord was stretched across: Did something exist below it? Did something exist above? There existed placers of semen and there existed greatness. There was independent will below, offering above.

kō addhā veda kā īhā prā vocat/ kūta ājātā kūta iyaṃ visṣṭat/ arvāg devāv āṣyā visārjanena

ātā hā kō veda yāta ābhaḥvā

Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it? from where was it born, from where this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?

iyaṃ visṣṭat yāta ābhaḥvā/ yādi vā dadhē yādi vā nā/ yā asādhyakṣaḥ paramē vyoman/

This creation—From where it came to be, if it was produced or if not—he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven, he surely knows. Of if he does not know ...

The hymn is familiar to scholars of the ancient Greek philosophy, as it is a text studied and commented upon in comparison with doctrines of Presocratic philosophy (Bernabé-Mendoza 2013). The ekam described in the hymn recalls the Parmenidean to eon and the research has tempted to find analogies and differences between the two cosmogonic entities (Nikolova 2021; Bernabé-Mendoza 2019). However, as stated
above, the multilayer content of the hymn can be approached from different perspectives and offer more than one interpretation.

My discussion focuses mainly on the first four stanzas. Although I do not proceed to a full analysis of the text, it is important to make some preliminary remarks concerning the sequence of the happenings and their position in the hymn’s temporal axis. Cosmogonic narrations generally could be divided in three temporal levels, the “before”, the “during” and the “after” of creation. The hymn provides us some temporal clues to determinate the order of the events. Whatever is described in the first stanza is placed “at that time”, ṭadānīṃ, which seems to be the most remote, indeterminate past of the time before creation. The second stanza happened “then” tārhi, but still before creation, as the beginning takes place in the third stanza, āgre. The fourth stanza describes what happened still ‘in the beginning’ but “then”, tād āgre. Therefore, we could identify two levels of time in the narration: the first two stanzas belong to pre-creation time, ‘that time’ and the two latter belong to “the beginning” of creation. In each pair of stanzas, there is further differentiation of what happened first and what happened latter.

In the pre-creation time, although “the non-existent did not exist, nor did the existent exists” there was something moving “back and forth”. Still in the same temporal window but closer to the moment of creation, ‘that One’ also breathes without wind, by its inherent will. The third stanza signals the dawn of creation, the beginning: “what existed as a thing coming into being” with the power of heat. In the fourth stanza, the being with thought and desire, which was the primal semen, starts to create the world. The fourth is the last stanza with a temporal indication.

2.1 THE UNITY OF OPPOSITES

The hymn starts with a description of the pre-creation stage, stating that “then was not non-existent nor existent”, two contradictory and mutually exclusive qualities. This can plausibly be interpreted as merely a poetic way to express the void and the emptiness of that time. However, the impression of nothingness conveyed in the first lines is cancelled by an unexpected question that denotes the existence of “something” that “moves back and forth”.

To understand what this moving ekam was, it is interesting to begin with what it was not, citing Nikolova’s (2021, 54) recent comment about the differences between the Vedic “One”- as it is called in the second stanza- and the Parmenidean being: “while in Parmenides’s vision, the being is the one, that one that is the only indeed existing, in Indian thought sat (being) is an aspect of “that One” (tad ekam) that precedes both sat and its opposition asat (not being or existing)”. She correctly rejects the identification of the Vedic pre-creation One with Parmenides’ to eon because in the text we find “that One” also in the pre-existence time.

8 The Sanskrit terms used here, sāt and its negation, āsāt, are the present active participle of the verb asmi.
Maurer’s (1975, 222) more precise description states “though it did not exist in the sense of the existent world about us, yet it did not wholly not exist”. Maurer’s claiming could be understood as ekam being existence-to-be and inexistence-to-be. Brereton’s interpretation (1999, 253) follows the same line, arguing that ekam was in “a state hovering between nonexistence and existence”. Bearing in mind that ekam has been imagined by some scholars, Brereton included, as an egg that has produced the universe and all the cosmos, Maurer’s interpretation is quite attractive as it recalls the human birth and the semen, which is not yet a human existence but it is a human existence-to-be.

Kramrisch (1962) and Bernabe and Mendoza (2019) propose a second possibility: egg-like or not, instead of hovering between two states ekam could be formed by and encompass two undivided complete states. Kramrisch refers to a dyadic monad and the wholeness of the undifferentiated and Bernabe and Mendoza write:

“The result of this violation, as Aristotle saw it, was that Heraclitus appeared to be stating that the same thing is and is not” and he follows “it is clear that Aristotle had no objection in principle to the idea that opposites could, in certain circumstances, unite or be called ‘one’. The surviving Heraclitean fragments that perfectly expresses this idea are the fragments D51 (B60) and D54 (B103).”

οὖν δὲν κάτοι μία καὶ ὑπότη

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9 Maurer’s and Brereton’s interpretation echoes Anaximander’s idea that the opposites are initially latent within the originative principle he called “the Boundless” (to apeiron) prior to being separated from it.

10 Kramrisch (1962) has highlighted the unity of the opposites in the Rig Veda. Although Bernabe and Mendoza (2019) made a brief reference to Heraclitus, their analysis is fundamental and very elucidating.

11 The same hymn, in the stanza before, reads “existence was born from non-existence”.

12 Regarding the second fragment, it is important to stress the editors’ warning that it is uncertain how much of this sentence is attributed to Heraclitus besides the ionic term ‘in common’.
the way upward and downward: one and the same\textsuperscript{13}

\[\xiυν\, γάρ \, ἄρηγ\, καί \, πέρας \, ἐπ\, κύκλου\, περιφερείας\, κατά\, τόν\, Ηράκλειτον.\]

for on the circumference of a circle, the beginning and the end are in common, according to Heraclitus.

This deep insight into the unity of opposites was erroneously interpretated, mainly by Nietzsche and Hegel, simply as a circular becoming, but is much more than this.\textsuperscript{14} Ὅδος is a unity formed by two inseparable opposites (and contrasts): There is no way upward and no way upward and downward divided because both are the same thing. It encompasses both opposites in a complete state and at the same time is formed by them. This concept where seemingly contrary forces are interconnected and interdependent, plays a key role in his philosophy.

This idea is also unexpectedly found, although well-hidden in Parmenides. In the proem of his poem, there is the verse “\[ἢθα\, πούλω \, Ὀσκτός\, τε\, καί\, Ἡματός\, εἰσί\, κελεύθων\]” [that is where the gate of the paths of Night and Day is] (fr. D4.10) (B1).\textsuperscript{15} The text seems to imply that the path of two opposites, day and night, have the same departing point. Gallop (1984, 7) interpreted this verse arguing, correctly in my point of view, that “they are a point at which Night and Day meet, a place where opposites are undivided (…). Thus, the youth’s encounter with the goddess is located where all difference or contrast has disappeared”.\textsuperscript{16} However, it is imperative to clarify the difference between Parmenides’ and Heraclitus’ ideas. Parmenides seems to believe that the meeting of the opposites, the time when they are undivided, is limited, if not momentary, and then each one takes its own path. In contrast, Heraclitus considers the unity of opposites as perpetual and as the base of the existence.\textsuperscript{17}

As in the Heraclean way and as in the Parmenidean gate, ekam is the complete and inseparable antithetical qualities of existence and inexistence, ‘that One’ which can be in two opposite or even contrasting ways simultaneously.\textsuperscript{18} The fourth stanza seems to bolster this reading: “Searching in their hearts through inspired thinking, poets found

\textsuperscript{13} The edited text and the translation are from Laks and Most (2016).
\textsuperscript{14} There is one more fragment, the D48 (B67), that speaks about God himself, saying that he is one, but also all the opposites: ὁ\, θεὸς\, ἡμερή\, εὐφροσύνη,\, χειμών\, θέρος,\, πόλεμος\, εἰρήνη,\, κόρος\, λυμάς [God: day night winter summer, war piece, satiety hunger]. However, the difference here is that there is no synchronic relation. The states are consecutive, one after the other and that is why Nietzsche and Hegel interpreted the unity of opposites as circular becoming. Transformation is generally one of the ways that the unity of the opposites is understood. Nevertheless, the fragment with the way is of particular interest because it reveals a synchronic, internal and structural relation.
\textsuperscript{15} Tr. that is where the gate of the paths of Night and Day is.
\textsuperscript{16} It is very interesting that Brereton (1999, 250) comments similarly on the first lines of the hymn. While Gallop commenting on Empedocles’ verse, says “a place where opposites are undivided”, Brereton writes “the narrative begins at that time when none of the divisions that characterize the world existed”.
\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, it was Parmenides who demonstrated the philosophical dead-end of the idea that a unity is formed by two opposites arguing that if the opposite characteristics existed prior to being separated out, then they were not a true unity. On the other hand, if they did not exist prior to being separated out, then how could they possibly come into existence?
\textsuperscript{18} Cf., Parmenides’ idea that there is a way which is and a way which is not.
the connection of the existent in the non-existent”. Here the paradox explicitly states that although contradictory qualities, they are also connected. Logic and common perception are unable to apprehend this, but inspired poets with fantasy and inspiration could feel this otherworldly bond in their hearts.

However, each pair of stanzas (1-2 and 3-4) corresponds to a different ontological moment in the relation of sat with asat as it is also indicated by the third stanza (the thing became being). In the first two they form a unity, a monad while in the two latter they are separated. Creation is the result of their separation because when the creation of the world occurs, automatically the world starts to exist and the inexistence inevitably disappears. Still, there is a difference because in Heraclitus the time does not seem to be distinguished between pre- and post-creation, and he speculates on what happens and what characterizes this world and its creatures. Instead, the hymn describes this unity as something that happened only before the creation of the world. Actually, the two ontological states of ekam correspond to the Heracletean and Parmenidean philosophy respectively. While during the pre-creation time ekam is a unity formed by duality, when creation takes place, the inexistence vanishes and only an existing being remains, which creates the world. Ekam changes and creation is the result of this change.

Kramrisch (1962, 146) interprets the temporal windows of this temporal division differently, recognizing three positions: a) the pre-creation time of ‘neither-nor’, b) the dawn of the world when the two forms an indistinguishable whole, ‘both and none’, c) the period when both of them are separated, ‘as well as’. Nevertheless, she admits that the Upanisads reject this division and stress the non-duality in the beginning, saying that “existence alone was this, in the beginning, one only without a second” which supports the previous interpretation.

The proximity of Heraclitus’ ideas regarding the unity of opposites to the Hindu hymn of Creation compels us to delve deeper into Eastern thought. It necessitates a brief consideration of Chinese philosophy as well, where the concept of yin and yang takes center stage, emphasizing the relationship between opposites. Composed of different and contrasting yet non-competing forces, yin yang are perceived to be the two complementary, mutually supportive and supplementary halves that form the whole. They coexist in harmonious equilibrium, interconnected through a cyclical process of change, never entirely replacing one another.

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19 Chandogya Up. 6.2.1, 2.2.1, 1.4.1, 5.2.1
20 The yin-yang concept appeared very early in the Chinese philosophy, becoming one of its keystones. The earliest mention of Yin Yang is recorded in the Guo Yu, compiled in the fourth or third century B.C., though its precise inception is a topic of ongoing debate. It may have existed even in Neolithic China before the rise of high civilization. However, in the Guo Yu, yin and yang were regarded as two natural forces and not as the origin of all things.
21 Regarding the complementarity and the harmonious balance of opposites in the yin yang see Allinson 1998, 505-517 and Mou 2022, 111-144.
22 See Neels 2018: his views on transformation can be stated as a thesis which states that “certain opposing stuffs transform into one another in such a way that they are transformationally equivalent and therefore unified” (428).
When comparing *ekam* to *yin yang*, it is essential to distinguish between pre-creation and post-creation *ekam*. As mentioned earlier, pre-creation *ekam* consists of both existence and nonexistence. However, in my interpretation, creation begins when *ekam* is transformed into pure existence through the power of heat. Consequently, the only valid comparison is with pre-creation *ekam*, which reveals two notable similarities:

1. Both embody opposing yet seemingly harmonious forces, or energies, coexisting in equilibrium during the pre-creation era as a unified whole.
2. This notion of balance is found already in the first stanza, which poses the question “What moved back and forth”. This periodic change may align with the *yin yang* rotation.

However, apart from similarities, there are also differences. The first difference pertains to the nature of the relationship between the two distinct qualities. In the concept of *yin yang*, the opposing halves that constitute the whole, though never completely separate, can be easily distinguished. Conversely, in the case of *ekam*, these qualities not only form a unified whole but are so intertwined that they become indistinguishable. *Ekam* appears to align more closely with the Heraclean cycle or road, where it becomes impossible to discern the end from the beginning or whether the road ascends or descends because they coincide seamlessly. The second distinction lies in the fact that, in the Hymn of Creation, this indistinguishable unity pertains to the pre-creation era, while the *yin yang* concept seeks to elucidate the relationship between opposites in real-time.

Concerning Heraclitus, it is indeed true that among Greek philosophers, the Ephesian’s view most closely resembled Chinese *yin yang* philosophy. However, a comparison between them is more complicated because, as aforementioned, Heraclitus speculated extensively on the issue and examined various pairs of opposites and their interrelations, which in some cases is complementary and in others identical. Some fragments, such as D67 (B126): τά ψυχρά θέρεται, θερμῶν ψύχεται, ψυχρῶν θερεται, καρπῶν νοτίζεται [Cold things warm up, hot things cool off, wet things become dry, dry things become moist] or the D48 (B67), appear to reflect ideas comparable with the *yin yang* concept because they defend:

1. the idea of complementarity of the opposites suggesting that each thing in the universe consists of opposites and there is nothing that is absolutely one-sided; (2) the rotation of the opposites, wherein one gradually supplants the other temporarily, while the initially replaced one regains ascendancy over time. However, his observations led him to conclude that some opposites, such as the road and the circle, can coexist without interchangeability. The

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23 The Vedic hymn that better expresses the *yin yang* concept is “The hymn to the dawn”, *Rig Veda* 1,113: “The Fair, the Bright is come with her white offspring; to her the Dark One hath resigned her dwelling. Akin, immortal, following each other, changing their colors both the heavens move onward. Common, unending is the Sisters’ pathway; taught by the Gods, alternately they travel. Fair-formed, of different hues and yet one-minded, Night and Dawn clash not, neither do they travel.” (Transl. R. T.H. Griffith).
24 On the subject see also Jiang (2018).
25 This fragment is preserved in Tzetzes (1110–1180 A.D.). Even though the source is very late (i.e 1500 years after Heraclitus), its authenticity could be considered as certain since it contains the word ἀὐαίνεται, a word not seen after Theophrastus.
26 See note 19.
perception of opposing qualities in these instances depends on the subject rather than the object.\textsuperscript{27}

His beliefs on complementarity and the cyclical nature of change in the wholeness of the opposites align partly with the Chinese concept. Moreover, both philosophies, in sharp contrast with pre-creation \textit{ekam}, speculate on the opposing forces at play in this world. Yet, there is a fundamental difference: While in Chinese philosophy the interplay of these forces propels the process of everything's becoming, Heraclitus introduces a third force that incites - just as in the Hymn of Creation - and governs transformation: fire.

### 2.2 Fire as the Universal Principle

Further down, the third stanza of the hymn offers an explanation of how “that One” was created. The passage provides us the following information: (1) there was darkness, but two levels or forms of darkness were distinguished (Brereton 1999, 253). The scholars interpret this as a clue of an egg liked core darkness, hidden by the covering darkness. The world egg motif is found in the creation myth of many civilizations\textsuperscript{28} including Hinduism. In the Brahmanda Purana, there is a story of the primordial maternal waters that desired to been reproduced. They become so hot they created a golden egg, from which the creator god Prajapati emerged. Moreover, an egg carries the promise of further change and a future transformation; (2) all this was a featureless ocean without any form. Maurer believes, correctly I think, that the passage does not need to be taken absolutely literally. Rather it is used to describe a world without distinguishing features, much like a featureless sea,\textsuperscript{29} (3) a thing became being\textsuperscript{30} with the power of heat. Heat is introduced, without previous mention, as the causative factor of the transformation of the \textit{ekam} triggering the creation of the world.

\textsuperscript{27} Fragment (B61) θάλασσα, δόξος καθαρώτατον και μισθώτατον, ἵρθος μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτηρίαν, ἀνθρώπων δὲ ᾱπόστον καὶ ὀλίθρον [The sea, the purest and the foulest: for fish it is drinkable and life-giving, but for humnas undrinkable and deadly] is a very eloquent example about the role of the subject in understanding opposing forces.

\textsuperscript{28} In the Pelasgian myth, the world was created by an egg that Erynome, the goddess of earth, put on the water and the cosmic snake hatched it. The Greek Orphic myth about a cosmic egg warmed again by a snake is similar. Interestingly, in the later Orphic cult, the cosmic egg was hatched by an androgynous being containing the semen of creation, an entity that unifies two opposites natures. In Zoroastrianism, the powerful god Ohrmazd created an egg from the chaos and then from it he shaped the world. A Slavic myth narrates a similar story, that the supreme being Rod created a divine egg from the void which contained Svarog, the god of fire. Primal eggs also feature in Egyptian and Chinese mythology.

\textsuperscript{29} There is also the rhetorical question of the first stanza “Did water exist, a deep depth?”, which could be considered as a piece of evidence of the form of that odd undefinable thing. It may resemble the very deep waters: murky and dark liquid that it is neither alive nor dead because “death did not exist nor deathlessness” but “breathes without wind through by its independent will”.

\textsuperscript{30} The translation hides an interpretative problem already stressed by Gonda (1996, 683): the translation of \textit{ājāyata} is “was born”. How it is possible for something that already existed to be born? Therefore, he preferred to use the expression “it realized itself, acquired its own independent existence”. To understand the oxymoron better, we should read at the third stanza where either the semen (according to Maurer’s translation) or the thing (according to Brereton’s translation) becomes being.
An egg needs an external heat source to hatch it but the hymn leaves the provenance of the heat undefined. It asserts that there was nothing else except “that One breathed without wind through by its independent will”. However, somewhere, must have been a source of thermal energy that caused the heat. If we take hymn’s assertion that “nothing else existed” literally, we should consider that heat was inherent in the One and reject the idea of an external heat source that hatched the egg-like One. If we assume that the phrase “nothing else existed” refers to touchable or at least visible things, then a heating source outside the One could have provoked an egg-like birth. However, although Maurer emphasizes that the Sanskrit term ātāpas was essential in the Hindu thought, since very early on he admits the difficulty of finding an accurate equivalent in English for a term that literally means “heat” but applied in various ways to the internal heat of deep concentration through which immensely great powers could be attained. If Maurer is right and the heat is internal, then the egg is hatched by itself, by its inherent power, just as he breathed. Blair, commenting on this passage, suggests that ātāpas has become not only a complete abstract entity, but also a creative, primeval power (Blair 1962).

Therefore, “that One” owns its birth to a power with four qualities: a) primordial; whether inherent in “One” or external, indicating its existence before the birth of “One”; b) creative; the “One” became existing (was born) because of this power, c) transformative; “One’s” birth is its transformation from “something” to an individual existence, d) hot. All these qualities align with the Heraclean theory of fire and they are recapitulated in the fragment D85 (B30).

κόσμον τόνδε, τόν αὐτόν ἀπάντων, ὁ στὶς θεῶν ὁ στὶς άνθρώπων ἐκόσμησεν, ἀλλ’ ἐν ἁ ὁμώ καὶ
ἐστιν καὶ ἐσται, παρ’ ἁμείνον, ἀπόμονον μέταρα καὶ ἀπομορφούμενον μέτρα.

The world order, the same for all, none of the gods or humans made it, but it always was and is and will be: fire ever-living, kindled in measures and extinguished in measures.

Fire plays an essential role in Heraclitus’ philosophy, as he perceived it as the underlying principle or pattern of everything. He viewed fire not merely as a constructive element, but rather as a creative, transformative force that governs the world. Fire incites the flux of the cosmos while also maintaining balance and order by regulating the forces that keep the Earth in constant orbit. In contrast to his philosophical contemporaries who regularly sought to reduce the world to substance, he avoided the material explanation for the state of the things and he sought to find their unifying element that interconnects the polymorphic reality and the apparent plurality of the world, maintaining and ensuring its stability. For him, fire is the ultimate principle that motivates the change and regulates the cosmic flux.

The question that arises whether we can consider ‘heat’ as a metonym of the fire. Undoubtedly, the element invokes the image of fire, which is central to the

31 Regarding the breathing of the One, it is important to stress that the term ‘Atman’ originally meant breathing. See Garbe 1894, 176-193.
32 Maurer (1975, 225) states “Perhaps ‘brooding thought’ is the most suitable rendition, as it combines the notions of concentrated thought and heat”.

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Zoroastrianism and the Vedic religion. In Rig-Veda, *Agni* (fire) symbolizes the pure and primordial energy of the universe created in the first moment. It is the supreme deity and it is conceived as immortal (Agrawala 1960, 28-32). There is also an element supporting the argument for recognizing of *Agni* as the power behind the heat source mentioned in the text, even if it is not explicitly named: the strong overtone of the presence of sea and water in the hymn. In the Vedic tradition, there was a belief that *Agni* arises from water or dwells in it. Hymn 10.121.7 also states “What time the mighty waters came, containing the universal germ, producing Agni, thence sprang the God’s one spirit into being”. This verse could be read as complementary to our hymn, which remain silent about the origin of the heat, since it explains its provenance.

Whether or not *Agni*, heat in the hymn text is the protocosmic energy that separates the monadic wholeness of the opposites and the leading force of the cosmic drama that engendering mind and desire provokes spontaneous self-generation. The Rig Veda and Heraclitus share the notion that fire is not the primary element of the world but rather the principal cause of all things. The force that ignites the change and creates the cosmos.

3. THE HYMN 8.58.2 AND THE MULTIPLICITY OF THE ONE

The second hymn chosen for analysis is part of the eighth mandala of the Rig Veda, which comprises 103 hymns. This hymn is less renowned than the previous one and the available bibliography is quite limited, if not scarce. It consists of only one stanza with four verses and it reads more like a philosophical statement than a typical hymn.

Eka evagnir bahudha samiddha /ekah suryo visnam anu prabhutah/ ekainosah sarvam idam vibhaty/ ekam vaidam vi babhuva sarvam.

One fire burns in many ways; one sun illuminates the world; one dawn dispels the darkness of night; All that exists is one and it has taken all these various forms.

The hymn can be divided into the first three verses, wherein observations are made about the natural sources associated with heat and light, and the fourth verse, which synthetizes the previous observation into an axiomatic value. The initial verse describes the versatility of fire, which, despite its unique nature, can burn in various ways. The second verse praises the sun’s capacity to illuminate the entire world, while the third verse underscores the dawn’s power to disperse the night with just a few sunbeams. The persistent repetition of the “One” that captures our attention stands in marked contrast with the “various forms” at the end of the hymn, as the text approaches one of the oldest and most enduring ontological questions, that of the relationship between the

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33 In 2.35.2 *Agni* is also called son of the waters. Fire and water are again two opposites where one emerges from the other. This idea is very similar to that described in the previous part of the article and further supports the assumption that in Vedic literature the opposites were seen as a unity or at least could co-exist.

34 “When the high waters came, pregnant with the embryo that is everything, bringing forth fire, he arose from that as the one life’s breath of the gods” translated in Doninger 1981.
One and the Many, the age-old problem of finding the unifying aspect behind everythi ngh in the universe. Greek philosophers also were seeking to determine whether reality is ultimately unified or multi-layered.

Heraclitus, as aforementioned, was seen as the thinker of multiplicity and movement, in stark contrast to Parmenides, who championed the concept of One and immobility. However, this view has been challenged, starting with Heidegger, and is now widely re-evaluated. In different ways, both philosophers struggled to save the ‘eternal being’ and their divergence lies in their approach of the change: Parmenides tries to reject the change, considering the true being as changeless, timeless, eternal and motionless, while Heraclitus accepts that the change occurs, admitting however that this not only does not affect the one principle, common to everything in the world that remains undisturbed by the flux but that change is incited and regulated by this one stable principle. This unity, rather than excluding difference, opposition and change, actually depends on them, since the universe is in a continuous state of their dynamic equilibrium. The universe remains stable even as its elements undergo a constant transformation. This paradoxical phenomenon of differentiation in unity is central to Heraclitus’ philosophical system. In the fragments D46 (B50) and D47(B10), respectively, we have his affirmation about the equiprimordiality of the unity and the difference.

When one listens, not to me but to the logos, it is wise to agree [homologein] that all things are one.

Conjoinings: wholes and not wholes, converging and diverging, harmonious dissonant; and out of all things one, and out of one all things.

The similarity of the Greek fragment with the last verse of the Vedic hymn is impressive. “All that exists is one” and “all things are one” are quite identical. Both passages maintain that polymorphic reality relies on one principle. Despite the apparent multiplicity of the cosmos or its phenomena its essence is one and the same and finally there is a profound unity connecting everything. It is also noteworthy that in the Vedic hymn the element used to describe the oneness of the world is fire and its manifestations (sun and dawn), Heraclitus’ primal element. The affirmation that everything is one is also treated in Rig Veda 1.164.46.

They call it Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni as well as Garutman of heavenly plumage. That which exists is One, sages call it by various names.

Logos is Heraclitus’ key word and, in this fragment but I am not going to enter in a further analysis and discussion because it does not affect my argument.
However, this fragment diverges from the previous in two points. Firstly, the multiplicity does not refer to natural elements such as fire and the sun but to major Gods associated with cosmic forces. Second, the One is not submitted to change and does not assume various forms but is simply denoted by different names. In linguistic terms, there is one signified with multiples signifiers. Eliminating the phrase “various forms” the passage becomes more Parmenidean and perhaps something more: the substitution of natural forces with divinities, together with the claim that this is a question of name and not of essence which is the same in everything links the philosophic monism with monotheism.

4. CONCLUSIONS

First, the Vedic hymns address both cosmological and ontological concerns, much like in ancient Greek philosophy. The hymn of creation goes beyond a simple cosmogonic mythological story. The beginning of the hymn introduces philosophical concepts such as existence and inexistence and being and no-being, which require a higher level of thought and the coinage of new linguistic terms (Bernabé 2019; Rusza 2002). Moreover, the creator/s of the hymn strived to define the ‘existential’ characteristics of that One in each of its phases.36

Second, despite the evident differences, there are remarkable similarities between the Heracletean cosmic vision and some Vedic verses. Antithetical qualities (existence/nonexistence, back/forth, death/deathless, day/night, airy space/heaven, thing/being, thought/desire) are structural features of the hymn. Whether the hymn describes a relation of unity, interdependency or co-existence among them or not, it is undeniable that the opposites have a definitory value in the text, as they do in Heraclitus: each pair defines a concrete state otherwise indescribable.37 Heraclitus is the first Greek philosopher and the only one who speculated in such depth on the relation of the antitheses, synchronic or diachronic, in the same thing, developing an ontological philosophical system on this.

Moreover, considering that most Greek philosophers were averse to the concept of change, Heraclitus, who stands as an exception within Greek philosophy, warrants a comparative study with the ideas prevalent in the Eastern world, particularly in China during the same period.38 Exploring the notable similarities could serve as a promising foundation for deeper analysis and constructive comparisons between the Eastern

36 Although Brereton (1999, 249) classifies it as a cosmogony or as an anticosmogony because he rules out the possibility of constructing a final description of the origins of the world, the philosophical value of the hymn is highlighted by Maurer (1975, 219).
37 On the description of the reality with antithetical terms in Heraclitus, see Bernabé 2009.
38 While there is no irrefutable evidence of direct contacts between the two worlds before Alexander the Great, it is conceivable that Chinese ideas may have made their way to the Middle East via India. Ferenc Rusza (2002) proposed that Parmenides was not only influenced by Eastern ideas but, based on certain linguistic and philosophical similarities, also suggested that the Eleatic philosopher might have traveled to India, acquired knowledge of the language, studied certain philosophical texts, and subsequently introduced them to Greece.

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Greek and Eastern Chinese philosophies, offering valuable insights into their interaction.

Third, the Ephesian’s choice of fire as the primordial element appears to have some connection with Zoroastrianism or even Vedism that place the sacred fire at the center of their rituals and creeds as a creative power. In fact, if Heraclitus was indeed influenced in formulating this theory, this influence appears to have come from the East of Ephesus and not from the West.

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