

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

Borderlands of Psyche and Logos in Heraclitus: A Psychoanalytic Reading

By

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Heraclitus is the first philosopher to focus on the psyche, but he also raises language to a cosmological principle, thereby giving his enigmatic statements a unique status. They are not intended to describe cosmos as much as to evoke it, making his cosmology a psychology. The true subject of his work is the psychological process it initiates. Attempts by commentators to attribute a doctrine to Heraclitus or to impose an order upon his fragments have therefore always misrepresented him, since his ‘method’ is to frustrate any method that would project itself upon him. Attempts to resolve the apparent contradictions of the fragments miss the point of his technique, which is to reflect the psyche back onto itself in order to discover the repressed contradictions there. This is why Heraclitus has a strange affinity with psychoanalysis, because both attempt to reveal invisible or hidden structures of the psyche. His logic is associative and mythological, as his poetic medium suggests, and his *logos* must be understood in this context: as a language of the soul. Heraclitus’ prevalent theme of the conflict of opposites and the dynamic tension they produce also appears very conspicuously in the theoretical constructs of psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalysis is the modern analogue of mythology insofar as both reveal the structures of the psyche using symbol, image, and metaphor. This dissertation consists of four sections; the first is a study of Heraclitus’ controversial use of *logos* and an examination of his use of language in this context. The following section is a study of Parmenides’ poem and the historical development of *eidolon*, as it is advanced by Plato, particularly in the *Sophist*. The third section examines the archaic uses of *psyche* alongside Heraclitus’ fragments, with special attention to the conflict of opposites and cosmology. The last section explores the theme of “psychical blindness”, the peculiar oblivious state of human beings that is so ubiquitous in Heraclitus’ fragments.

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