

fixity and inflexibility that they have for us, but they are changeable and in motion. So speaks Jahveh to Israel through the Second Isaiah:

Behold, I will make of you a threshing sledge,  
new, sharp, and having teeth;  
You shall thresh the mountains and crush them,  
and you shall make the hills like chaff;  
You shall winnow them and the wind shall carry them away,  
and the tempest shall scatter them (Isa. 41.15 f.).

Even stone and rock are movable and externally alterable:

But the mountain falls and crumbles away,  
and the rock is removed from its place;  
The water wears away the stones. . . .  
So thou destroyest the hope of man (Job 14.18 f.).

In comparison with Jahveh's immovability, even the fixity of the earth is nothing at all:

Then the earth reeled and rocked;  
The foundations of the mountains trembled and quaked,  
Because he was angry (Ps. 18.7);  
The mountains skipped like rams,  
The hills like lambs (Ps. 114.4);  
The mountains quake before him,  
The hills melt (Nahum 1.5).

Such hyperbolic images cannot be explained by natural phenomena even if it be taken into account that earthquakes occur frequently in Palestine (cf. Amos 1.1). This hyperbole has two familiar roots, the Hebrews' distinctly dynamic-personal kind of thinking and their faith in the omnipotent God:

God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.  
Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved,  
And the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea;  
Though the waters thereof rage and swell,  
And the mountains shake at the tempest of the same.

Jahveh of Hosts is with us,  
The God of Jacob is our fortress (Ps. 46.2 ff.);  
For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed,  
But my steadfast love shall not depart from you,  
And my covenant of peace shall not be removed,  
Says Jahveh, who has compassion on you (Isa. 54.10).

In comparison with the *hayah* of Jahveh and his salvation, the entire universe is nothing:

For the heavens will vanish like smoke,  
The earth will wear out like a garment,—  
But my salvation will *be* for ever,  
And my deliverance will never be ended (Isa. 51.6).

The positive contrast to the image of Jahveh's destructive power over the world is the idea of creation; all *hayah*, even that of the universe, stems from Jahveh the author and creator. This image must be discussed separately. First of all, however, we shall elucidate the Hebraic dynamic-personal conception of the world and of 'being' by comparison with the diametrically opposite Greek conception of 'being', particularly in its Platonic form.

## B. STATIC BEING

### 1. *The Eleatics and Heraclitus*

The Greek interpretation of being does not permit of being established by a linguistic analysis; however, in this case we can use a direct method since all Greek philosophers from the Ionian natural philosophers on have discussed the problem of *being* and *non-being*. We do not intend here to write a history of the problem but only to single out the three decidedly principal types, the Eleatic, the Heraclitean, and the Platonic.

While, as we have seen, the Hebraic kind of thinking was in the main dynamic, the kind of thinking employed by the Eleatic school of philosophers was not only diametrically opposite but contradictorily so. They considered *being* not only as the essential point, but even more, as the only one since they flatly denied the reality of motion and change. Only what is immovable and immutable exists; all becoming and passing away is mere appearance and is equivalent to what is not, about which nothing positive can be said. Our sense-impressions are deceptive. In a sense, the Greek kind of thinking appears here most distinctly and clearly; at the same time, however, when it was carried to absurdity, it denied another characteristic Greek quality: the moderate and prudent, harmony.

Yet in Heraclitus of Ephesus, Greek philosophy had an advocate of the significance of change; his thinking is governed by the impression of the changeableness of all things: 'Everything changes; war is the father of all things, and a man cannot step into the same stream twice' (cf. Plato *Cratylus*, p. 402). This high estimate of change and motion is un-Greek; Heraclitus stands alone among Greek philosophers with his doctrine.

Quite un-Greek as well is the obscurity of his diction; the responsibility for this is not to be placed upon any deficiency in the consistency of his thinking but to a considerable degree belongs to the Greek language which, unlike Hebrew, was not capable of giving adequate expression to such ideas. That Plato was fully conscious of this fact must fill one with astonishment and admiration; in the *Theaetetus* he has Socrates say very trenchantly after an attempt to express the doctrine of the disciples of Heraclitus:

The maintainers of the doctrine have as yet no words in which to express themselves, and must get a new language. I know of no word that will suit them. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this peculiarity in the philosophy of Heraclitus can be traced to an indirect or unconscious oriental influence. As an indication of this judgment it might be mentioned that Heraclitus came from Ephesus and that his doctrine found its followers chiefly in Asia Minor.<sup>2</sup> The interesting and animated description that Plato gives in the *Theaetetus*<sup>3</sup> of the followers of Heraclitus shows, in my opinion, that we have here to do with Orientals or at least with men who think and act in an oriental manner. Their impulsive, passionate, unlogical kind were mentally the contrary of the clear and collected Plato, and he gave up the attempt to establish the teaching of Heraclitus in debate with his followers. Then he himself poses the problem of motion and change, but he examines it as though he were confronted with a geometric problem. The problem becomes even more complicated for Plato because Protagoras and the other Sophists had adopted it, certainly not because they had a dynamic idea of the world but because it allowed them to make everything wavering and doubtful and thus to abolish the clear line between truth and untruth.

Heraclitus' thinking is, however, influenced, and in part, determined by Greek thought-forms and ways of posing problems. He too seeks the eternal law in the flux of all things and the harmony that reconciles all antitheses. Also quite Greek is his image of the circular course of all things which excludes both a creation of the world and a purpose of history. His high estimate of matter is Greek, too, even though he makes

<sup>1</sup> Plato *Theaetetus*, p. 183. Bergson (*Perception du changement*, p. 22) also complains about the intractability of the language to express his ideas; already in the first lines of his doctoral dissertation and at many places throughout the work (Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* [Geneva, 1945], pp. 131, 170 *passim*) he does the same. Cf. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp. 310-12, 320 f. The complaints of Bacon, Locke, and Sir William Hamilton about the defectiveness of language bear in another direction. Bergson complains only about the inability of language to express his ideas. Cf. Max Mueller, *op. cit.*, II, 671 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Plato *Theaetetus*, p. 180.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179 f.

an 'ethereal' material like fire the point of departure for unceasing change. In spite of all this we cannot characterize Heraclitus as a typical Greek thinker, but we must consider him as an exception who still had provocative and fruitful effect upon Greek philosophy.

## 2. Plato

After having sketched the two extreme conceptions of the Eleatics and Heraclitus, we turn to the greatest mind of Greek philosophy, Plato, whose thinking is also oriented toward *being* without the excesses of the Eleatics. A comparison with Plato's philosophy is worthwhile, because the religious spirit inhering in it is most closely associated with the biblical spirit, and the ideas that come to expression through it are best able to be compared with the biblical ideas. It is not accidental that during the first five foundation-laying centuries of the Christian Church, Plato was its philosophical authority, and that the mental decline which clearly sets in at the beginning of the Middle Ages coincides with the rising authority of Aristotle. Even for Philo, the greatest mind of the Jewish Diaspora, Plato was the great teacher, and his attempt, resting on inner conviction, to unite Platonism and Judaism shows that even Jews saw and felt the spiritual kinship of Platonic and biblical ideas. Something rather unique is to be found here: while the external and formal similarity between Hebrew and Greek, in regard for example to etymology, is practically nil, the inner and real relationship is astonishingly great. Even in spite of all persecution, the Jews have sought their home among Europeans.

The object of Plato's thinking is the given, that which *is*, the world with its content; the goal of his thinking is to find what *truly is*. He recognizes two main levels of being which are each in turn divided into two further levels. The first main level is what is immediately given, namely what we can grasp with the senses, the sensible, *ὁρατὸν γένος*: men, animals, plants, things. As sensible things they possess a certain reality, a *being*, but there are too reflected or shadow images of the sensible things which also possess a certain though very limited reality. Visible things and their reflected images together form the first large main level of being—the kingdom of *γένεσις*. Characteristic of this level are *being born* and *passing away*; everything here is mutable and transitory, and nothing is eternal. The sun makes it possible for us to perceive things through light and through sight, which is the most valuable of all senses; but the sun is also first cause and source of all life and sensible being. It is the life-giving and reality-bestowing principle of the visible and transitory world.