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znanosti/ Slovenian Society for Analytic Philosophy

## **Philosophical Imagination, Thought Experiments and Arguments in Antiquity**

Maribor, 9-10 October 2018

### **Conference Programme & Book of Abstracts**

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Koroška 160, Maribor, Slovenia,  
Room 0.2

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Tuesday, 9 October

09:30-09:40

Opening speeches

09:40-10:25

Nenad Miščević, Central European University, University of Maribor: **From Kallipolis to Utopia**

10:25-11:10

David Merry, Humboldt University: **Philosophical Arguments as Imaginative Exercises in Seneca's *Moral Letters***

11:10-11:20

Coffee break

11:20-12:05

Drago Đurić, University of Belgrade: **Explanatory role of the principle of causal resemblance in early Ionian physics**

12:05-12:50

Matteo Cosci, Ca' Foscari University of Venice: **Aristotle against Actual Infinite Regress**

12:50-15:00

Lunch break

15:00-15:45

Miran Božovič, University of Ljubljana: **Aristotle the Reader of Descartes**

15:45-16:30

15:45-16:30

Danilo Šuster, University of Maribor: **Chrysippus, Cylinder, Causation and Compatibilism**

16:30-16:40

Coffee break

16:40-17:25

Milan M. Čirković, University of Novi Sad: **An Ancient Anthropic Argument against the Infinite Past**

17:25-18:10

Sanja Srečković, University of Belgrade: **Music in the imagination of ancient philosophers**

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Wednesday, 10 October

9:00-9:45

Madeleine Hyde, Stockholm University: **Aristotle on Imagination vs. Perception**

9:45-10:30

Predrag Cicovacki, College of the Holy Cross: **The Relevance of Empedocles and Heraclitus for the Later Development of Western Thought**

10:30-10:40

Coffee break

10:40-11:25

Božidar Kante, University of Maribor: **The same thought experiment in philosophy and fiction: Cervantes and Hume**

11:25-12:10

Boris Vezjak, University of Maribor: **Arguing about thought experiments: the case of Lucretius's flying spear**

# Book of Abstracts

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Nenad Miščević, Central European University, University of Maribor  
**From Kallipolis to Utopia**

Plato's Republic is a thought-experiment. First, this thesis is defended against historicists like McAllister.

Second, the issue of the passage from Kallipolis to various utopias is raised, and the difference between the epistemic motivation of the Platonic thought experiment and the practical-political motivation of the latter is discussed.

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David Merry, Humboldt University  
**Philosophical Arguments as Imaginative Exercises in Seneca's *Moral Letters***

Seneca criticises Zeno heavily for relying on dialectical arguments throughout the Moral Letters, most explicitly in EM 82 and 83. In EM 87, however, Seneca discusses a catalogue of Stoic arguments about the good, which he defends from Peripatetic criticisms. Seneca's discussion of these arguments so closely resembles the discussions of Zeno's arguments, that commentators have been moved to think Seneca's verdict on Zeno's arguments must be similar to his verdict on the arguments in EM 87. The standard view, defended by Malcolm Schofield, Jonathan Barnes and Brad Inwood, is that Seneca saw these arguments as useful for philosophical discussion, but not as sufficiently convincing for addressing a wide public.

In this paper, I argue for a different view, according to which Seneca stands behind (most of) the arguments in EM 87, but rejects Zeno's syllogisms in EM 82 and EM 83 entirely. I argue that we can best make sense of this if we understand Seneca as approaching arguments as templates for imaginative exercises.

I start by revisiting Seneca's criticisms of Zeno's syllogisms in EM 82 and 83, and argue that Schofield and Barnes have missed an important aspect of these criticisms. Seneca claims that these arguments direct the mind away from thinking directly about death and drunkenness. Thinking directly about death, and particularly, honorable deaths is how Seneca suggests we come to know that death is not bad. Leonidas' speech to the Spartans, mentioned by Seneca in EM 82 as a model of how to argue, in fact serves to direct their attention directly to the fact that they will die. Similarly, Seneca suggests that, instead of making clever syllogisms about drunkenness, one should simply outline the effects that drunkenness has on a person's mind. When these are seen clearly, drunkenness will lose its allure.

This suggests that Seneca sees the purpose of philosophical discussion of goods and bads as building a clear picture of things thought to be good or bad, to enable the proper operation of a capacity for recognizing goodness and badness. Zeno's syllogisms are bad philosophical arguments, because they do not contribute to building a clear and accurate picture of drunkenness in the one case, and death in the other, and so do not support this capacity for recognition.

It is plausible, however, that Seneca thought the Stoic argument strategies he discusses in EM 87 are good templates for imaginative exercises that will lead to a fuller understanding of ostensibly good or bad things. In particular, they can be seen as invitations to attend to how indifferents appear when they are interact, in various ways, with vice.

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Drago Đurić, University of Belgrade

### **Explanatory role of the principle of causal resemblance in early Ionian physics**

What is called *the principle of causal resemblance* (Makin) coincides with or overlaps with *the transmission theory of causation* (Lloyd, Mourelatos), or with *the principle of causal synonymy* (Aristotle, Barnes, Hankinson), or with *the principle like causes like* (Marmodoro). Generally speaking, what this principle tells us is that the cause must in some sense resemble its effect. Various formulations of this principle result from the fact that thinkers focused on different aspects of the causal relation. Descartes expressed some of these aspects as follows: 'Now it is already clear by the light of the nature that the complete efficient cause must contain at least as much as the effect of that cause. For where, pray, could the effect get its reality if not from the cause? And how could the cause supply it, without possessing it itself? (*Medit.* 3)'. Descartes speaks only about one of Aristotle's four kinds of causes (material, formal, efficient and teleological), but Aristotle attempts to show that this principle applies to all of them. Even though he provides some examples of the application of this principle to other kinds of causes, it seems that its application to material causes is the most convincing. This seems to be particularly relevant with respect to his consideration of the material cause of early Ionian physicists (Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Heraclitus).

I will defend the thesis that without the assumption of at least implicit respect for what this principle requires, it is difficult to justify or to motivate the materialistic theories of these physicists. I will base my consideration on the following interpretative assumptions: 1) Aristotle's conceptual framework and his interpretive model of material monism (Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus) and material pluralism (Anaximander); 2) the ultimate goal of early Ionian physicists is not to determinate the material content of things of the phenomenal world, but to explain the changes; 3) changes in the phenomenal world are explained by the mechanical motion of parts of the basic substance(s) at the fundamental physical level.

Despite the fact that some interpreters have recognized this principle in the testimonies of Alcmeon's thought (Barnes, Hankinson), I am inclined to believe that a persuasive suggestion for

adhering to this principle can be traced back to Anaxagoras' considerations of the following problem: 'How can hair come from what is no hair or flesh from what is not flesh?' (DK B10). It is a fact that the hair grows from the skin of the head, although the properties of the hair and the properties of the skin are radically different. Yet, this fact would seem inexplicable only if we endorse the assumption that the properties of the material effect must resemble the properties of the material cause. Anaxagoras solves this problem by introducing the principle according to which a *portion of everything is contained in everything*. If we accept this principle, it is not difficult to conclude that everything that is needed for the growth of hair is contained in the skin. In this way, Anaxagoras saves *the principle of causal resemblance* by appealing to the principle according to which a *portion of everything is contained in everything*. But this solution assumes that there is a difference between the fundamental or archeological and phenomenal level of physical reality. At the phenomenal level, the skin and hair differ with respect to their proprieties, whereas they do not differ at the fundamental level.

Anaxagoras comes to his solution regarding the material content of the phenomenal world in an effort to explain the changes in that world. Aristotle's interpretation of early Ionian materialists also suggests that their ultimate goal is to explain changes in the phenomenal world. What satisfies the conditions of being a fundamental substance depends crucially on the theory of change that each of these materialist thinkers endorses. Thus, the changes that occur through the condensation or rarefaction of the fundamental substance are consistent with material *monism* (Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus), while the changes that take place through separation (and coming together) are consistent with material *pluralism* (Anaximander).

Now, the common characteristic of both of these theories of change is that they take place as a mechanical motion of the mutual approximation and removal of the unchangeable parts of the fundamental substance: in material monism there is an approximation and removal of the parts with the same properties, and in the material pluralist the parts with different properties. If a thing  $x$  with a set of properties  $A$  changes to a thing  $y$  with a set of properties  $B$ , then the principle of causal resemblance is violated. However, if  $x$  and  $y$  at the fundamental level consist of one and the same substance (water, air, fire), then this principle is not violated, and the change can be explained. In the view of material pluralists, parts of the fundamental substance participate in the properties of the phenomenal world by bringing in and reliving their various and immutable properties.

The radical implication of Aristotle's interpretation of the teachings of early Ionian thinkers is not that the material cause must resemble the effect, nor that it is, in a sense, greater or equal to it, but rather that it is numerically identical with it. Namely, if a thing consists exactly of the substance that it is made of (and *vice versa*), then the material cause and the material effect must represent one and the same substance.

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Matteo Cosci, Ca' Foscari University of Venice  
**Aristotle against Actual Infinite Regress**

In his works Aristotle made reference to various infinite regress arguments to attack the inconsistencies of alternative contending theories. From his Third Man Argument (*De Ideis*, fr. 4 Ross) to the alleged impossibility of an infinite number of first causes (*Metaph.* II,2), passing through the need to avoid endless circularity in the research of first demonstrative premises (*Post.An.* I,2), Aristotle displayed his great ability in counter-factual reasoning and philosophical imagination, stretching human (in)capacity in figuring out actual infinity regress or showing the ineffectiveness of self-referential justifications. Along these lines, a particular attention deserves the discussion of predecessors' bias of conceiving an infinitely extended cosmos (*Phys.* III, 4-5; *De Caelo* I, 5-9) and some of the so-called "thought experiments" and paradoxes in its reference (Cf. Corcilus 2018), e.g. on the impossibility of traversing an infinite linear distance in a finite time span. My analysis will mainly focus on the epistemological aspects of the vicious infinite regress fallacy, logically and physically intended, and it will try to argue that Aristotle's critic against actual infinite regress is consistent with, but not necessarily dependent on, his framework of a spatially finite universe.

References:

Corcilus, Klaus, «Aristotle and Thought Experiments», in Michael T. Stuart, Yiftach Fehige, James Robert Brown (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Thought Experiments*, Routledge, Oxon - NY, 2018, pp. 58-76.

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Miran Božovič, University of Ljubljana  
**Aristotle the Reader of Descartes**

The paper discusses the role of philosophical imagination in the late seventeenth-century French fiction, in particular in a lesser known novel by Gabriel Daniel, *Voyage du Monde de Descartes* (1690). The novel's apparently simple metaphysical premise – i.e., the Cartesian "real distinction" between mind and body, together with the belief in the immortality of the soul – entails a cascade of theoretically fruitful ramifications, one of which is that all thinkers from Socrates to Descartes – or more precisely, their souls – are still alive at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and continuing their philosophical pursuits.

This premise enables the author to stage imaginary encounters between various illustrious thinkers most of whom could not even have met and confronted their theories in their lifetimes, since the schools to which they belonged are divided by centuries. Furthermore, in the novel, all philosophical schools from Aristotle's Lyceum to the Cartesian sect are still active, existing concurrently, one beside the other; their founders read each other's works, all the while revising and amending their original philosophical systems in the light of criticism from each other or in view of new and inspiring ideas found in later, sometimes even centuries younger thinkers. In conclusion, the paper proposes a thought experiment to reconstruct what Aristotle's philosophy

would be like at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, that is, after two thousand years of growth and development behind it.

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Danilo Šuster, University of Maribor  
**Chrysippus, Cylinder, Causation and Compatibilism**

Chrysippus' metaphor (or thought experiment?) of the rolling cylinder has elicited countless interpretations, mainly about Stoic physics and theory of causation. I am mainly interested in understanding the cylinder and cone analogy within the contemporary discussion on compatibilism in the free will debate. Fatalism or "elbow" room (Dennett)?

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Milan M. Ćirković, University of Novi Sad  
**An Ancient Anthropic Argument against the Infinite Past**

Ancient origins of a modern anthropic argument against cosmologies involving infinite series of past events are considered. It is shown that this argument—which in modern times has been put forward by distinguished cosmologists like Paul C. W. Davies and Frank J. Tipler—originates in pre-Socratic times and is implicitly present in the cyclical cosmology of Empedocles and Lucretius. There are traces of the same line of reasoning throughout the ancient history of ideas, and the case of a provocative statement of Thucydides is briefly analyzed. This is not purely of historical significance but presents an important topic for the philosophy of cosmology, provided some of the contemporary inflationary models, particularly Linde's chaotic inflation, turn out to be correct.

In addition, this ancient argument offers another perspective on Copernicanism (or the principle of typicality), which plays a key role in many scientific and philosophical contexts, from the search for extraterrestrial intelligence to philosophy of risk to bioethics. In a universe of finite age, we do not expect that we have evolved exceptionally early or exceptionally late in the interval within which the evolution of intelligence is physically possible. In other words: the timescale for the evolution of intelligence on Earth is close to the median of the distribution of physically possible timescales for evolution of intelligence anywhere in the universe.

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Sanja Srečković, University of Belgrade  
**Music in the imagination of ancient philosophers**

The presentation focuses on two traditions of the philosophical investigation of music developed in Ancient Greece. One is tied to the name of Aristoxenus, a student of Aristotle, who is now thought of as the predecessor of musicology. The other is tied to the Pythagoreans and their mathematical perspective on music. The aim of the presentation is to demonstrate how the way of imagining an object of investigation can impact, or even constitute the properties we are able to discover on that same object. The presentation tracks the way from two different worldviews and the images these Ancient philosophers had of music to two different sets of results they arrived at the end of their investigation.

There are several factors that determined the starting point of Aristoxenus' research. Being Aristotle's student, he embraced the empirical method of investigation. He based his research on experience, especially musical experience: the experience of listening, and also of performing music. He proclaimed the subject of his inquiry to be „music as we hear it“. He paid attention to what kind of melodies were usually played, and how the musicians themselves described musical phenomena. His empiricism was related to other tenets of his enterprise. One of them was the underlying belief that there was certain lawfulness in music, an order in the realm of music itself, expressed as the “laws of musicality”. These laws, which described the essence of musicality, were the main object of his research. Aristoxenus believed that these laws should be reached inductively, by examining the musical practice, and generalizing the insights gained from many specific cases. Another methodological principle he held on to was that all the musical elements and relations should be defined, described, and explained using autonomously musical terms, which were the ones used by the practicing musicians of his time. Thus, because the musicians themselves had used a spatial, or geometrical metaphor for musical elements and their relations, Aristoxenus adopted this metaphor as well. He defined musical notes as dimensionless points on a tonal continuum, and the intervals as the distances between these points. This metaphor was his way to imagine an abstract phenomenon such as music. It had a significant impact on Aristoxenus' further investigation, and determined the results he reached at the end. Along with his metaphysical views concerning the orderliness of music, and his empirical principles, this metaphor significantly influenced his construction of the tonal system, which differed from the tonal system the Pythagoreans postulated.

The Pythagoreans had a notably different starting point in their enterprise. Their metaphysical belief was that the laws manifested in music were only a subset of general cosmic laws governing everything in the world. They believed that all musical phenomena and properties were explainable not in the realm of music, as Aristoxenus thought, but rather in the more abstract realm of numbers. The metaphysical belief underlying their investigation was that the properties of all phenomena, including music, were based on numeric relations, i.e. proportions of numbers. This was connected to their epistemological principle that knowledge was possible only through numbers, that is, via the knowledge of the numerical relations in the foundation of the phenomenon we wish to get to know. The fact that the elegant proportions such as 2:1, 3:2, and 4:3 were in the basis of the most concordant intervals perfectly fitted the Pythagoreans' belief that musical properties were a perceptual manifestation of the numerical properties in their foundation. These general beliefs determined how the Pythagoreans defined basic musical

elements. Notes were not understood as dimensionless points, as opposed to Aristoxenus' image, but rather as objects with magnitudes, and these magnitudes manifested themselves as pitches. Intervals between notes were not imagined as spatial distances, but instead as the relations of notes, expressible as proportions of numbers. This arithmetical metaphor further determined Pythagorean construction of the tonal system. Two different metaphors at the basis of these two approaches to music lead to different ways of calculating certain parameters within the tonal system, which further brought about two different sets of results. Namely, since the Pythagorean image of music consisted in ratios of numbers, no irrational numbers were allowed to exist in the foundation of any interval. In contrast, Aristoxenus' system defined the relations between the intervals spatially, in such a way that many irrational numbers would be underlying those intervals (even though Aristoxenus would not even describe the intervals by numbers). These differences lead to different constraints on which intervals could exist in the respective systems, how the intervals could be added or subtracted, which intervals could be divided, and which could not, etc. Overall, the differences stemming from different images of music resulted in two differently *tuned* tonal systems. In other words, music was *sounded* differently according to these two traditions. In turn, differently tuned systems provided differing aesthetic possibilities, since the tuning determined how pleasing the intervals and the musical sequences could sound.

Finally, this means that the two traditions did not only offer two different descriptions of the same phenomena. Rather, the object of investigation itself - the way the music sounded - was constituted by their calculations and their ways of imagining music. What makes this issue even more interesting is the fact that there was no universal tuning in Ancient Greek musical practice. Thus, the dissent between these two traditions could not be resolved in an easy way by simply disproving one of the tonal systems as 'badly tuned'. Furthermore, both systems are not only usable, but still in use in today's musical practice.

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Walter Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Harvard University Press, 1972.)

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Madeleine Hyde, Stockholm University  
**Aristotle on Imagination vs. Perception**

In *De Anima* iii.3, Aristotle characterises the imagination as a *sui generis* state by comparing it with and then distinguishing it from sensory perception, opinion and knowledge. Focusing on his comparison between imagination and perception: Aristotle notes that any similarity between the character of episodes of perception and imagination – we can take this as regarding what these states are like from a first-person perspective - will derive from the fact that what we can imagine is the same as ‘what can be perceived’ (*De Anima* iii 3, 429a1–4) i.e. mental imagery.

On the Aristotelian view, mental imagery – which can be understood as the forms of objects without matter – makes up both perceptions and imaginations. Aristotle insists that only animals with sensory capacities can imagine – although not all of them will, given that imagining also involves a higher level of thinking that generally comes hand in hand with the capacity for rationality.

Thinking of episodes of the imagination as necessarily involving mental imagery is controversial by modern lights. In the contemporary literature, some kinds of imagining such as ‘propositional’ imagining are supposed to operate without any associated mental imagery<sup>1</sup> (Garcia-Carpintero, forthcoming) (Stock, 2017). For example, one can seemingly imagine that Hilary Clinton won the US Presidency without necessarily picturing her stood outside the White House, or however.

The Aristotelian view presented so far would push against calling this kind of state imagining at all. We would have to say that it is something like *supposition*, perhaps *qua* a species of belief. This looks fine so far, but we would then have to explain why we ordinarily lump such cases in with imagining i.e. why our folk-psychological concept of imagining seems to include states which lack mental imagery.

Many in the contemporary literature on the philosophy of imagination are willing to admit that our folk-psychological concept of the imagination is confused. We speak about ‘picturing’, ‘envisioning’ and ‘supposing’ as if they all describe slightly different states of mind. Some have then gone to to argue that we should distinguish different *kinds* of imagination, rather than considering it as a single, unified mental state (Kind, 2013) (Stock, 2017).

There is room to argue on such a picture that some kinds of imagination lack mental imagery, but Aristotle would not count these as imaginary *proper*. The Aristotelian notion of imagination clearly does not map onto the folk-psychological concept we now try to address: it looks much broader. For instance, Aristotle’s understanding of the imagination seems to include what we would now call states like memories and dreams, too (Shields, 2016). Furthermore, Aristotle saw mental imagery as key to not just these states, but to thinking *in general*. From the way he describes in *De Anima* (iii 8, 432a8-9 and 431a16–17) how “whenever one contemplates, one

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<sup>1</sup> That is not to say that an imaginative episode cannot include both mental imagery and propositional content.

necessarily at the same time contemplates in images”, it looks as if, on the Aristotelian picture, there are few cognitive states which do not at least come with some associated mental imagery.

That said, Aristotle was not completely off-track, by modern lights. Although we commonly separate out states like dreaming and imagining nowadays, we nonetheless draw strong parallels between them, as Aristotle did, based on the way in which they are composed of mental imagery. We can then look to other reasons for separating out these imagistic mental states. For example, Aristotle notes an important *epistemic* distinction between perception and imagination, in terms of what we can learn about the world from the images those states present us with: as far as the images in sensory perceptions are always true, whilst episodes of the imagination are mostly false (*De Anima* iii 3, 428a5–16).

Perception is a success term for Aristotle: it is the alteration that occurs when our sensory organs are affected by external objects (*De Anima* ii 5, 416b33–34). When we have a perception, we receive mental images of the objects we come into perceptual contact with. When we imagine, on the other hand, we simply recall the form of previously perceived objects by reusing such images. So in the imaginary case, we lose that connection to the external world as grounding why we have form *x* over form *y* in our mind. The imagination can be used to fantasize away from reality i.e. to depict what is untrue.

This last point maps better onto contemporary ideas of what divides perception from imagination as far as in perception we *normally* (or always, if you agree with Aristotle that perception is factive) get a true depiction of how things are in the world. The imagination, by contrast, lacks that privileged access to reality. Thus, Aristotle’s comparison of perception and imagination can be made sense of in a contemporary context, even if his notion of what kind of state counts as imaginary is broader than most would nowadays permit.

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Predrag Cicovacki, College of the Holy Cross

## **The Relevance of Empedocles and Heraclitus for the Later Development of Western Thought**

As I grow older, I am increasingly fascinated by the philosophical imagination and thought experiments of two pre-Socratic philosophers: Empedocles and Heraclitus. In my paper I will argue that we have not sufficiently recognized either the merit of their views or their impact on the further development of Western thought (and culture as a whole). Their impact, however, was more negative than positive, for the later development of the Western thought occurred in terms of the negative reaction to and the clear distancing from their views. In our opposition to their profound views we may have done ourselves more damage than good, and the time may be to come to reconsider our attitudes toward Empedocles and Heraclitus and redirect ourselves toward follow their footprints.

Unlike religion, which interprets the origin and the meaning of existence by introducing some divine force, Greek philosophers explained the same phenomena by immanent means. While the very first among them, like Thales and Anaximander, were looking for a natural substance out of which the world was built, and some later, like Democritus and Leucippus, searched for the indivisible atoms, Empedocles and Heraclitus believed that the world's origin and workings were due to the laws that turn it from chaos into cosmos and prevent it from slipping back into disarray. (Expressed in a modern way, not fully adequate but properly illustrative, they understood the world in terms of energy rather than matter.)

Empedocles brilliantly postulated that there are two governing principles of the cosmos: love and strife (φιλία and νεῖκος; an attractive and creative force, and a repulsive and destructive force). For Empedocles, they were not reducible to good and evil; they were conflicting yet complimenting. Because of these two clashing forces, the universe had to be understood in dynamic rather than in static terms: as eternally becoming, rather than as complete and frozen in its being. According to Empedocles, the cosmos was equally “a unity in plurality and a plurality in unity.”

Heraclitus developed these imaginative and prophetic insights by speaking about the eternally burning fire and the logos which governs the universe in such a way that “no one can step in the same river twice.” I believe that, although most of his fragments spoke about the cosmic order, Heraclitus was actually more interested in the human condition, in the soul as our true self. Heraclitus came to believe that the pattern of cosmic order and the pattern of human life was one and the same; the cosmic fire burns in us as well, as we ourselves are also an illustration of the paradoxical plurality in unity and unity in plurality. I am in awe of such views. They not only open a way for a dynamic conception of reality, but also for what is later called “perennial philosophy.” These insights belong, I am convinced, among the deepest insights reached in Western civilization.

The more we think about these views, however, the more we realize that the main course of the subsequent intellectual history failed to develop these insights. It is even more accurate to say that it has consisted in an attempt to run away from these perplexing insights of Empedocles and Heraclitus. What is so fundamentally unsettling in their dynamic view of reality is that it does

not promise any closure. We want a meaning of life as something predetermined, woven into the fabric of reality. We hope for a life that is so well-structured that it can approach perfection. We long for a love that would be so perfect that its only proper ending could be that “they lived happily ever after.” Despite our stubborn insistence, we cannot achieve any such closure. Life offers no such promises, no protection against the sudden turns of fortune, no position that can freeze into a never-changing and forever-valid stance. Nor can social institutions, entrenched by their laws and threats of punishment, ever lead to life—or love, or health—secured once-and-forever.

Interestingly enough, the explicit criticisms of Empedocles and Heraclitus did not directly mention our pathological fear of life without closure. Although such concerns always lurked in the background, the criticisms went after two related but distinguishable targets. The first was complaining about the lack of any final purpose in the universe in the views of Empedocles and Heraclitus. There had to be some divinely preordained goal to it, some ultimate design that would justify its existence. Is not the universe, and our lives in it, guided by an irrevocable destiny?

Such criticisms came from both the later Greeks and Christian sources. Among the Greek philosophers, it was possible to find a few who maintained just the opposite view—that the cosmos had no inherent meaning whatsoever. Such voices were initially marginalized. It was only centuries later, when the religious way of thinking fell into disrepute and Modernity started slipping toward nihilism, that the view asserting that the world had no meaning or purpose became accepted as the mainstream.

Empedocles and Heraclitus’s way of thinking allows, however, for a third and not sufficiently explored possibility: the world has no meaning predetermined for it from the outside, but this does not imply that the world has no meaning whatsoever. The denial of the preexisting external meaning leaves enough room for its meaning to be introduced from the inside, in the course of its dynamic process. (As Heraclitus expressed it, “Our character is our destiny.”) This meaning is not final and static but has to be changing and adjusting from within. This is the right approach, the one we should be hoping to develop further.

The second point of attack was concentrated on the view that offended the logic of our rational thinking by postulating that the world embodied unity in plurality, and plurality in unity. The criticism was that this simply could not be the case, for it would destroy the internal coherence of our rational thinking (as well as the coherence of our legal and moral “systems”). In order for us to conceive of the world in a rational way, it has to be either unity, or plurality. There is no third option.

Wallace Stevens poetically caricatured this logic of either-or as the “click-clack of reason.” This logic lacks not only any trace of humor, but it is also detached from the flow of real life, which is full of paradoxes, antinomies, and miracles which the click-clack of reason cannot explain. What to our reason may look like incompatible alternatives, the flow of life presents as mere alterations. Nevertheless, this click-clack approach has become so pervasive that it has affected virtually all aspects of life, including health and healing. One way of thinking about health and healing is in terms of self-regulation of our immune system, the other in terms of forceful

intervention from the outside. The first way is ancient and natural; the system is never completely pure, nor does it require a sterilized disease-free environment. In natural circumstances we are often exposed to bacteria and viruses of different kinds, and our organism is resourceful enough in defending itself by not allowing them to overtake and infect the entire system. The balance of a healthy organism is that of water in a river, as it is always flowing. Sometimes, it is true, a flooding occurs. Given enough time, the water and surrounding environment will regulate themselves.

We live in a world that has neither patience nor trust to allow our organism to handle its own disturbances. We believe in direct interventions needed to eliminate harmful elements. The most extreme procedure, symbolic of this way of thinking, is surgery—a forceful incision in the body and removal of the infected tissues.

We have adapted this model of forceful intervention in many other aspects of life. There are special institutions to separate mentally ill patients from “normal” adults. There are nursing homes to free career-oriented people from taking care of their parents. There are prisons to segregate criminals from decent citizens. Then there are “humanitarian interventions,” “preventive wars,” and “regime changes” needed to improve the lot of suffering and struggling humanity. We are all for freedom, peace, and love, and in order to establish or maintain these things, we use force and torture, killing and war.

In the remaining part of my paper, I would like to discuss the concept of “perennial philosophy” and also why I think that a turn back toward its fundamental principles may provide the right cure for our disoriented age. Put differently, we should return to our roots and revitalize the deepest impulses of our nature, some of which were magnificently captured and poetically expressed through the thought experiments of Empedocles and Heraclitus.

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### **The same thought experiment in philosophy and fiction: Cervantes and Hume**

Our responses to fictional works reveal a greater amount of ingenuity and wit, which seems to be due to the fact that they are fictional works of telling stories and that they are not obliged to defend an argument or a single theory. When we are in touch with a narrative, many things affect us: what is the predecessor of the story, the expectations we have of the characters involved, what are the sophisticated features of the story, the style in which the story is written, etc. Taking into account the cumulative impact of these factors, it is difficult to say that this is a process driven by the usual requirements for the application of concepts (which applies to thought experiments). Let's look at the illustration of this on a concrete case.

Hume in the famous section *Of the Standard of Taste* sums up a story from Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. The story is Sancho Panza's account of two of his kinsmen who were invited to taste wine from a particular cask; one detected in it a taste of leather, the other a taste of iron; and they

were both laughed at until the cask was emptied and found to have at the bottom an iron key with a leather thong attached to it. According to Hume the mental taste greatly resembles the bodily taste that is the subject of Sancho Panza's story. Sweet and bitter are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the external sensations of the taster; it is even more certain that beauty and ugliness are not qualities in objects, but belong entirely to the internal sentiments or feelings of readers, viewers, or hearers.

Since fiction is not bound by argumentation, it allows a story to capture a whole series of phenomena with a relative lack of responsibility to explain them in a uniform way. The story is not forced to settle the question of how to explain these phenomena. In any case, if fiction works do not have theoretical and argumentative goals, then their content may be more difficult than the efforts of a committed theoretician. I will show this in the case of treating beauty in the context of Cervantes and Hume's work in connection with a thought experiment in a story with a key with leather in wine.

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### **Arguing about thought experiments: the case of Lucretius's flying spear**

In one of the most notorious examples of thought experimenting taken from ancient philosophy, Lucretius is attempting to show why the space is infinite: if there is a boundary to the universe, the spear either flies through it or bounces back (De Rerum Natura 1.951–987). If it goes through the boundary, there is some kind of continuum or »other side« of the universe. And if it bounces back, the boundary itself implies the space beyond.

The archer from Lucretius's poem seems to be a victorious case for different authors arguing about the very nature of thought experiments, sometimes described as a sort of »picturesque arguments« (Norton), »intuition pumps« (Dennett) or even »windows to the world of the Platonic Forms« (Brown). The paper will follow various interpretations of De Rerum Natura's known example, focusing primarily on the question what enables us to think of it as thought experiment »ante litteram«.

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