

The Dynamic Conception of Being in the First Philosophers and the Notion of φύσις

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According to Aristotle, the "object" of study of the first philosophers was the φύσις. Even though the term appears for the first time in Heraclitus, the early answers to the question "what is the 'being' of τὰ ὄντα" present already it as a source of active and dynamic life, according to the etymology of φύσις. This is the meaning in Homer (*Od.* X.303), and this is also the case of water (Thales), air (Anaximenes), and the γόνιμα contained in the φύσις ἄπειρον (Anaximander, *apud* Ps.-Plutarch). The φύσις of Heraclitus inherits this meaning, because, for him, reality, "changing, is at rest" (fr. 84a).

One hundred percent Greek invention, the philosophy was constituted on categories of thought typical of the Greek people.¹ The reality that the philosophers tried to explain was the same reality in which the Greek people lived since the night of time; the only thing that changed was the *way of observing* this reality. And for this reason, which we call "reality" (a word of Latin origin, *ergo*, unsuitable for the era in question), the first philosophers used the term "φύσις", whose meaning, as we will analyse, is not exactly reproduced in its classical translation by "nature". Given that "reality" is eternal (the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* is incomprehensible to the Greek mentality, even before the invention of philosophy), she possesses in herself the vital force that organizes them, which keeps her "safe"², and innumerable are the myths that allude to the fecundity of the earth, the power of the divine thunderbolt, the "breathing" of the cosmos, etc.

¹ On this subject, see Benveniste, E., "Catégories de pensée, catégories de langue", *Problèmes de linguistique générale*, I, (Paris.1966).

² This adjective refers to the φύσις that we will find already in Aristotle (*Met.* A.III.983b9).

When philosophy is set in motion, the new perspective tries to "X-ray" (let's be worthy of the anachronism) the "reality" in order to detect its essential components, its foundation, the reasons that explain its rhythm, all that which today we call "the being" of something, in this case, of all things. This is how all the responses of those who set out to explain the reality of things conceived "being" as something dynamic, living, palpitating. Centuries later, when philosophizing followed other paths (that is, when people philosophized according to other mental categories), reality was faced in a different way, and static essences replaced the dynamic existence of the first philosophers, which, in our opinion, ends with the *tsunami* of Sophistic.

This paper, which only refers to "those who first philosophized" -according to Aristotle's classical formula³- will end with Heraclitus, in whom the term φύσις appears for the first time in a philosophical text (which does not prevent it from having already been present in lost works), but we do not hesitate to affirm that this dynamic perspective on reality was shared by all the "Greek" philosophers, as we believe we have demonstrated in our book cited in Note 1.

The "object" of study of the early philosophers

Ever since this new way of looking at reality, which was later called "philosophy", was set in motion at the end of VIIth century B.C., those who practiced it for the first time progressively clarified the object that the new gaze faced, as well as the different ways of capturing this object. Other type of knowledge (or, if you prefer, techniques or "sciences") already elaborated, or in the process of elaboration, already possessed a precise object of search or reflection. Numbers, stars, musical notes, human health, are domains already studied even in other civilizations, and wise Greeks took up again the investigations and collaborated to the progress and sometimes to the establishment of astronomy, mathematics, music, medicine.

But the case of philosophy is special, unique. It is impossible to resort to other civilizations to detect its object of study, since in other civilizations *there was no*

³ *Met.* A.III.983b6.

philosophy. As a specifically Greek invention, only those who invented it knew what they intended to study, to decipher, to discover.

(a) *The presentation by Aristotle*

Let us try to deduce the object of study of the first philosophers from the one who dealt with them on several occasions, Aristotle (which does not mean that we will follow his interpretation, which all researchers consider unilateral. We will only follow those data that can be considered "objective"). From his assertion that the majority (οἱ πλεῖστοι) of the first philosophers thought that the first "causes" were presented in the form of matter, and that "the initiator (ἀρχηγός) of this type of philosophy" was Thales (of Miletus), it can be retained as a concrete fact that the name of Thales is a good candidate to head the series of philosophers (because he was the initiator of a current in which the first philosophers are inscribed).

Aristotle says nothing about possible successors, but much later, Simplicius (VIth century A.D.), apparently based on Theophrastus (Aristotle's disciple), affirmed that Anaximander was a disciple of Thales (*Phys.* 24.13) and that, in turn, Anaximenes was a disciple of Anaximander (*Phys.* 24.26). From this trilogy the historians of philosophy built a "school of Miletus", which, like most of the *clichés* used in manuals, has only pedagogical value (if any).

What information can we extract directly from these authors mentioned by Aristotle, about their object of study? Nothing concrete; but this is due to the almost total absence of textual quotations. Nothing remains of Thales; of Anaximander, we have only some isolated words⁴ and four lines (which scholars periodically reduce), quoted by Theophrastus and collected by Simplicius⁵; and, of Anaximenes, remains a word found in Plutarch⁶, another word quoted by Aetius⁷, and two lines transcribed also by Aetius.⁸ However, in spite of this almost total absence of authentic texts, two words found in the four lines of Anaximander's text allow us to pronounce already on the "object" of study

⁴ One of which, ἀγήρω, quoted by Hippolytus, *Ref.* I, 6, 1, will be of special interest to us.

⁵ *In Phys.*, 24.13.

⁶ *De prim.frig.* 7.947 F

⁷ II.22.1.

⁸ I.3, 4.

of its author. The two words are τὰ ὄντα (in the text, in dative, τοῖς οὄσι), literally, "the entities", "the things that exist", "the beings". And since Anaximander's quotation does not restrict their meaning, we can deduce that he intends to propose an explanation of cosmic rhythm in general. In fact, as they have no restrictions, τὰ ὄντα can be interpreted as πάντα τὰ ὄντα, in the sense of "all that exists". But already the formula, in Greek, considering its general character and its etymology (τὰ ὄντα is the present participle of "to be"), suggests that all that exists is considered exclusively as entities characterized by their existence, and not particular cases, in the sense of "this" or "that", for instance, human beings, stars, gods. "Everything" that exists is necessarily subject to the type of cohabitation detailed in the part of the text that, for the moment, does not interest us.

The same can be deduced from the two authentic lines of Anaximenes (known as "fragment 2", transmitted by Aetius: see supra, Note 8 and 9), which refer to the totality of the universe. In them, after affirming that in our case (that is, in living beings) it is the ψυχή (that is, at that time, the vital principle, which is breathing) that sustains us, in the case of the "entire universe (ὅλον τὸν κόσμον)", those who sustain it are the vital breath (πνηϋμα) and the air (ἀήρ). As in the case of Anaximander, Anaximenes' phrase concerns "everything"⁹, from the human being, taken as an example, to the totality of things, represented by the "whole universe".

Our brief review of the textual quotations from the pre-heraclitean authors is limited to these three citizens of Miletus. Nothing remains of the Pythagoreans of the first epoch and nothing relevant (with respect to our object of study of the first philosophers) is found in Xenophanes, in spite of the forty-one authentic quotations that reached us.

The conclusion that we allow ourselves to draw from these very scarce materials must now be submitted to the analysis of those who commented on these texts which, although they are fragmentary for us, were known in full versions, or almost, by authors of antiquity. The method we will follow from now on is not without risk, since the commentators we will see are already separated by several decades and sometimes by more than a century from the first philosophers, and there is always the risk of studying the past with the glasses of the present; but it can also be argued that a perspective far from the events perceives them better. We will try to place ourselves in the middle.

⁹ According to Kirk, G.S.-Raven, J.E.-Schofield, K., *The Presocratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 159, it is unlikely that Anaximenes has used the term κόσμος. The meaning of the phrase is "τὰ πάντα", all things".

When Aristotle deals with a particular subject, he usually refers to the attempts made by previous philosophers before proposing their own solutions, and we have already seen that, thanks to this custom, we find Thales as the initiator of a certain type of philosophy, which, moreover, was the philosophy practiced by those who first philosophized. But Aristotle also seems to be the inventor of a systematization that brings together not only these first philosophers but also explicitly reaches Empedocles and Democritus¹⁰ and in which he tries, without much success, to place Parmenides¹¹ as well. According to this systematization, the philosophers, from Thales to the Atomists, are researchers of the φύσις. And in order to characterize them, Aristotle uses the expression "οἱ φυσικοί", "the physicists", and especially a formula that apparently is a creation of his, οἱ φυσιολόγοι, literally, "the physiologists" (noun that alludes to people who φυσιολογεῖν, literally, that "physiologizes").¹² The lost book (and partly recovered by H. Diels¹³) of Theophrastus, disciple of Aristotle, had apparently as title *Φυσικῶν δοξῶν*, *About the opinions of the 'physicists'*, and in the autobiography that Plato puts in mouth of Socrates this one says that in his youth he felt attracted by that form of wisdom (σοφία) that is called "description" or "information" (ἱστορίαν) on the φύσις (περὶ φύσεων)" (*Phaedo*, 96a).

Consider some Aristotelian examples of the use of both terms. According to Aristotle, the thesis of Protagoras, "for some, comes from the φυσιολόγων" (*Met.* XI.6.1062b11); "as Anaximander and most of the φυσιολόγοι say..." (*Phys.* III.4.203b15); "except if an infinite exists in act, as the φυσιολόγοι think" (*Phys.* III.6.206b23); "it would be convenient to consider that, more than a poet, Empedocles is a φυσιολόγον" (*Poetica*, I.1447b19); "as Leucippus, Democritus, and many others of the φυσιολόγοι maintain..." (*Phys.* IV.6.213b1); "...or, as the φυσικοί, for whom everything is united, say..." (*Met.* XII.6.1071b27); If there are no other bodies apart from the sensible ones, there will always be a *principium principii*, "as in the case of the theologians and the φυσικοί" (*Met.* XII.10.1075b27).¹⁴

¹⁰ See *Phys.* II.2.194a20.

¹¹ See *Met.* I.5.986b21

¹² This formula had a long life, since it is found in the Hellenistic period in Epicurus, *Sent. Vat.* 16: "I prefer to speak clearly, like the φυσιολόγοι"

¹³ In his work *Doxographi Graeci* (Berlin, 1879).

¹⁴ Let's see other examples. Aristotle says that since the principles of the Pythagoreans are not sensitive, they differ from those of "the other φυσιολόγοι" (*Met.* I.8.989b30); "the great and the

There is no doubt that for Aristotle the philosophers that today we call "Presocratics" (*grosso modo*, from Thales to Democritus), who are the first to philosophize (πρώτων φιλοσοφησάντων), are also "the first to physiologize" (οἱ πρώτοι φυσιολογήσαντες) (*De Caelo*, III.1.298b29). The meaning of both the noun φυσιολόγος and the verb φυσιολογεῖν is clear and obvious: a φυσιολόγος is someone who possesses a knowledge and elaborates a discourse, a λόγος (oral or written) about the φύσις; and, consequently, φυσιολογεῖν consists in systematically dealing (by means of λόγος, neither intuitively nor mythically) with the φύσις, and in exposing in words (that is, in a discourse, another of the meanings of λόγος) his investigations. In *The Parts of Animals* Aristotle speaks directly about "the ancient and the first ones who philosophized (φιλοσοφησάντων) about the φύσις..." (640b4). The task that these philosophers developed supposes the setting in motion of an unprecedented way of observing the φύσις which is neither mythical nor scientific, and which arises at a certain moment (due to historical-economic-social circumstances, which is not the case of studying on this occasion¹⁵) and which forms part of the essence of the human being, since "all men, by nature, wish to know".¹⁶

(b) *The significance of φύσις in the early philosophers*

If we take up again the Aristotelian terminology, we see that both the terms *physiologists* and *physicists* assume that there is a certain reasoning and also a discourse (two meanings of λόγος) about an object, φύσις. Do not believe that this statement solves our problem and fulfils our desires; on the contrary, it is now that the real problems begin. Since there is no doubt that the first philosophers dealt with φύσις, we should ask ourselves what does φύσις mean, either when Aristotle attributes its study to the first philosophers, or for themselves, if they really used the notion.

small correspond to that which the φυσιολόγοι" call the rare and the dense" (*Met.* I.9.992b4); "from which it is deduced that when the φυσιολόγοι" affirm that everything sensible is in movement, they are mistaken" (*Phys.* VIII.8.265a3); "if the earth was born, as some of the φυσιολόγοι" say..." (*De Caelo*, II.14.297a13).

¹⁵ See details in Cordero, N.L., *La invención de la filosofía* (Buenos Aires, 3rd. ed. 2019), chapter I.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Met.* I.1.980a1.

As our starting point was Aristotle, let us see what meaning has φύσις not in his own philosophy, in which it is omnipresent (he consecrates chapter 4 of Book V of *Metaphysics*, and chapter 1 of Book II of *Physics* to φύσις¹⁷), but in the passages of his writings in which he refers exclusively to the first philosophers¹⁸. In these contexts, φύσις seems to allude, on the one hand, (a) to the totality of things in general, that is, to "being", as we read in *Met.* IV.3.1005a31: "Only the φυσικοί did it, and not without reason, since they thought they were the only ones who reasoned about φύσις in its totality (περὶ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως) and about being (καὶ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος)"; and on the other hand, (b) to the "being" proper to each thing, which, in the first philosophers, and for Aristotle, is synonymous of "element": "all those who dealt with the φύσις suppose, for the infinite, a φύσις [different from that of Plato], like water, air or something intermediate" (*Phys.* III.4 203a15). For the "physicists", like Empedocles, for example, "the φύσις is the substance of the natural beings" (*Met.* V.4.1014b37). (which, in the case of Empedocles, is a synthesis of four elements).

But it is interesting to note that in all these cases the notion of φύσις is connected with change, with certain dynamics, with movement: "All those who deal with φύσις say that the movement exists", because all of them deal with generation and corruption, which would not exist if the movement did not exist (*Phys.* VIII.1.250b16). And then, as a conclusion, Aristotle says: "From what has been said it can be deduced that φύσις, in its first and main sense, is the substance (οὐσία) of that which has in itself the principle of the movement" (*Met.* V.4.1015a13).

Although the Aristotelian interpretation of the pre-Socratic philosophy was the object of more or less severe criticism¹⁹, or directly destructive, as in the case of H. Cherniss²⁰, a superficial analysis of the substance or entity that each philosopher privileged as a starting point of τὰ ὄντα (whether or not they called it "principle", ἀρχή is not important) coincides with what Aristotle, with his terminology, calls "element" (since

¹⁷ It arises from these chapters that the meanings of φύσις are multiple. H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (Graz, 1870), p. 835, had already written: "φύσις, ποσαχῶς λέγεται".

¹⁸ Although we can never be sure that he does not "contaminate" them with his own ideas.

¹⁹ Guthrie, W.K.C., *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, I, 1962), p. 43, recognizes its value but confesses that his approach to the thinkers of Miletus is partial. Burnet, J., *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, 1892), p. 31, wrote that Aristotle "always discusses the facts from his own system".

²⁰ Cherniss, H., *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* (Baltimore, 1935), *passim*

the term just appears in Plato²¹; it is not found in the pre-Socratics). Nothing remains as written by Thales (in case he has written), but the fact of putting life, an essential characteristic of the real (we will insist on this point again), in relation to water or humidity, which is one of the classic four elements, and which is fundamental to life, justifies Aristotle's interpretation. The same can be said of Anaximander's τὸ ἄπειρον, from which πάντα τὰ ὄντα emerges, although it is an undefined element. And we know that Anaximenes explained reality as a consequence of the condensation and rarefaction of an element (although he did not call it that), air. The same is true of Empedocles, whose four "roots" are the four traditional elements.

But since for Aristotle the first philosophers dealt with φύσις, he is forced to identify, in them, φύσις and "element". In the oft-quoted passage from the beginning of *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle characterizes the object of study of the early philosophers (although he interprets in a restricted way the value of what he calls "the beginning", as Burnet pointed out in his critique, see *supra*, note 20), Aristotle carries out this assimilation. After affirming that for the first philosophers there is "a substance that subsists, although its accidents [=all things] change", he adds that "this is the element and principle of all things, and from this they think that neither generation nor corruption exists, since this *phúsis* is always conserved safe (σωζομένης)" (*Met.* I.3 .983b18). This is so because "there must always exist a certain *phúsis* (one, or more than one) from which all the rest arises, while she is preserved safe (σωζομένης). And for Thales this φύσις was water, for "all seeds have a wet φύσις, and water is the source of the wet" (b25).

From the Aristotelian description of the type of research carried out by the first philosophers we can extract the following specific data: (a) the object of study was the φύσις; (b) the φύσις is the element primordial from which all things emerge, which are in perpetual evolution as they inherit the principle of movement from the φύσις; (c) the φύσις is "conserved safe and sound, grazing" (in the sense of the verb σώζω, participle, σωζομένη); (d) the φύσις is the οὐσία of natural beings, which are characterised by change, and, in this sense, (e) to reason about φύσις in general is to reason about "being"

²¹ *Crat.* 426d3, *Theaet.* 203c1, etc.

(as it arose, before Aristotle, from the title of Melissus' treatise²²) interpreted as the always active source of a dynamic process.

Curiously, already in the remote Indo-European origins, the root of the term φύσις was related to some forms of the verb "to be". This root is *-bhu*, whose meaning is "to grow", "to sprout", but from a reduplication of the same root arise "either complementary (*supplétives*) forms or a complete substitute for the verb to be"²³, which, already in Latin, serves as a theme for "*fu-turus*" and for the past, "*fu-i*". And from Latin, this root passed as a complement of "being" not only to derived Latin languages but even to the English "be" and the German "wesen". That φύσις and being are synonymous is then a reality.

The meaning of φύσις

Now, why did the first philosophers call this dynamic being of reality " φύσις"? Does the word "φύσις" have this meaning, which allows us to apply it to this way of conceiving the totality of things? In the philosophical texts that have been preserved, the word appears first in Heraclitus, but when we look at this philosopher we see that the familiarity with which the author uses the term suggests that he was already part of the philosophical arsenal (although Heraclitus will give it a new nuance). Unfortunately, there are no previous philosophical texts to justify this hypothesis, but we know that the word φύσις was already present in Homer (?) (although only once) before the invention of philosophy. Heraclitus, or some unknown person before him, took the term from the current language, as all Greek philosophers usually do, who very exceptionally invent some word.²⁴ As in all other cases (e.g., εἶδος, οὐσία, πνεῦμα, σῆμα etc.), the philosopher's insight finds in everyday speech a word that can perhaps be used metaphorically in another context, and he does not hesitate to use it. Very probably some of the first philosophers, even before Heraclitus, approached things in such a way that they saw in the word φύσις a suitable term to express how the reality of τὰ ὄντα could be

²² Περὶ φύσεως or Περὶ τοῦ ὄντος. The following observation of Simplicius is more than enlightening: "If Melissus used this title [...] it is because he thought that the φύσις was being (τὸ ὄν)" (*In De Caelo*, 557.10). Applied to all Presocratics, this sentence could be a summary of our work.

²³ Burger, A. *Les mots de la famille de "phúô" en grec ancien* (Paris, 1925), p. 1.

²⁴ We have already seen the case of φυσιολόγος, apparently invented by Aristotle. Previously Plato would have been the creator of the word ποιότης in the *Theaetetus* (182a8). See Chantraine, P., *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris, 1974, vol. III), p. 921).

conceived. Nevertheless, it is true that φύσις was not a word in common use, since, as we shall see, its meaning, contrary to what is usually said, goes beyond visual perception, and perhaps for this reason it appears only once in Homeric poems.²⁵

(a) Φύσις in *Homer*

Let's look at this one case. In Song X of Homer's (?) *Odyssey* he tells how Hermes decided to offer Ulysses a medicinal herb (φάρμακον) that would enable him to resist the spells of Circe and thus escape the tragic fate of his companions, who were transformed into little pigs. To this end, Hermes "plucked from the earth a φάρμακον, whose (αὐτοῦ) φύσις he revealed [or "showed": ἔδειξε] to me: the root is black and its flower white as milk. The gods call it *môlu*. For mortal men, it is difficult to pluck, but the gods can pluck anything" (302-306).

Before analysing the meaning of φύσις that can be extracted from this text, we must look at two details: the φύσις belongs to something, the herb in question. In other words, the φάρμακον "has", "possesses" (αὐτοῦ) a φύσις. The second observation concerns the verb which Hermes uses to describe the φύσις φύσις in question, ἔδειξε, from the verb δείκνυμι, which literally means "to teach", with the double meaning of "to instruct" and "to show": (a) to teach about something (for example, "he taught me good habits") and (b) to show (for example, "he showed me the way"). Given our interpretation of the meaning of φύσις in this passage, we prefer the meaning (a), with the value of "reveal", "inform" and even "define".

Now, Hermes, after plucking and, we suppose, offering Ulysses the φάρμακον, ἔδειξε her φύσις. We can ask ourselves: why does Hermes do this? The only answer we can think of is the following: in the event that Ulysses needs to procure this antidote to the bewitching power of Circe once again, he must know how to find the φάρμακον in question, and for that he must know how to recognize it. For this reason, it is not enough to know that it has white flowers and a black root (because perhaps other herbs share this description) but he must know that it is called μῶλυ (which will allow him to ask some local inhabitant "Do you know where there is a μῶλυ?"), and that, once he has found an herb that seems to answer this description, he must check whether it is difficult to pluck.

²⁵ Another term that will have a decisive importance among philosophers, λόγος, is also found only twice in Homer, and in plural (*Il.* XV.398 and *Od.* I.55).

That's why we don't hesitate to consider that everything Hermes says about the φύσις of the φάρμακον is a true *definition* of it, that includes "visible" elements, that are part of its aspect (the colour of the flowers), but also non-visible components, like its root (that is not seen before plucking it), its name and the difficulty to pluck it. All these reasons invite us to maintain that the φύσις of the φάρμακον goes beyond its aspect and that it approaches that which today we call a definition, and a definition is not shown, but is learned, when someone teaches us what it consists of. There are several examples in Homer of the use of δείκνυμι in this sense.²⁶

It occurs to us that this is the only reason that could have led a poet, who is not a philosopher, to use a word that, although it was already part of the language, was a "rare" word, φύσις (let us remember that this term appears only once in Homeric poems, which occurs with very few words). If φύσις had referred to the aspect of the φάρμακον, as most scholars believe²⁷ (in which case the translation of ἔδειξε by "showed" would have been justified), the poet could have used other terms common in Homer, for example, μορφή²⁸ or, more probably εἶδος.²⁹ G. Naddaf notes that these terms are inappropriate because "they do not designate the process by which a thing became what it is, a process inherent in the notion of φύσις".³⁰ The choice of φύσις can be explained only by the desire to give to Hermes' words the meaning of a true definition (and not only a description, from which the name and the difficulty of removing it would be absent, and, before removing it, the colour of the root!). The φύσις defined by Hermes is valid not only for the φάρμακον just plucked, but for all similar φάρμακα. That is why we do not hesitate to assimilate the

²⁶ Il. XIX.332, where Achilles asks to be informed (δείξειας) in detail of his goods to his son Neptolemos, and Od. XII.25, where it is a matter of teaching (δείξω) with words a way. Some time later Aeschylus will say that it is necessary to explain (ἔδειξα) what the sunrise and sunset consists of (*Prom.* 458).

²⁷ For example, Beardslee jr., J.W, *The use of physis in fifth-century greek literature* (Chicago,1918), p. 6, shares the interpretation of Galen, for whom φύσις means "the visible character of the μῶλο"; for Heinemann, F., *Nomos und Physis* (Basel, 1945), p. 92, *phúsis* here means "appearance", "stature"; for Clay, J., "The Planktai and Moly: divine naming and knowledge in Homer", *Hermes* 100 (1972), p. 130, , "*phúsis* here denotes visible form of appearance". Based on this restricted interpretation, this author does not explain the rest of Hermes' speech, which, for her, is "a non sequitur".

²⁸ See Il. VIII.170, where it is spoken of the μορφή of the discourse.

²⁹ See Od. XVII.308, where a reference is made to the aspect of a dog.

³⁰ Naddaf, G., *L'origine et l'évolution du concept grec de phúsis*, (Ontario/N.York, 1992), p.16.

φύσις of the μῶλυ to its own being, to its essence, valid for all other μῶλυ that Ulysses would have to seek if Circe persisted in his desire to bewitch it.

(b) Φύσις *and life*

A new stage of our search begins now. We saw that φύσις in this passage, is a property of φάρμακον: it is the μῶλυ that *has* a φύσις, that is to say, according to our interpretation, a definition that specifies its own being. But the μῶλυ is a plant. Does this mean that only vegetables, or perhaps by extension only living beings, possess a φύσις, at least in Homer's time? Seemingly so, given the etymology of the word. Let us see this point in detail. Φύσις derives from the verb φύω, which, according to its root, means "to grow", to sprout". And since there is nothing more natural for a plant than to sprout (growth is part of its "plantness", of its plant being), it is normal that Hermes defines a φάρμακον as something that grows, that sprouts. But the term φύσις faces this growth as an activity that is being produced, denoted by the suffix -σις (equivalent of the English "-tion", which is difficult to reproduce in translations, with rare exceptions: ποιη-σις is the "produc-tion", νόησις is the "intellelec-tion"; κάθαρ-σις is the "purifica-tion", etc.).

But, as we know, language, when it determines with precision the concept of something dynamic, is obliged to fix a process, like a snapshot that stops the becoming, for an instant, of a reality in movement. This is how the φύσις of something dynamic reproduces the current state of a becoming, of a growth. The description of the φύσις of the μῶλυ developed by Hermes will not be valid when the μῶλυ has flowers no longer, because in that case it will surely not be useful to make an efficient brew. As we read in E. Benveniste, φύσις φύσις means "'the achievement of a 'becoming' and, therefore, the 'nature' as long as it is accomplished, with all its properties".³¹ Given these characteristics, it seems that only φύσις have (let us not forget that in the Homeric example φύσις φύσις is "φύσις of...") entities capable of growing, sprouting, developing, all of which presupposes movement and life. This is the fundamental difference between

³¹ Benveniste, E. (1948), p. 78.

the "Greek" way of observing reality (because language is a reflection of thought) and the "Roman" way, since "nature" does not reproduce the dynamic character of φύσις. E. Benveniste states that the Greek equivalent of "natura" is not φύσις but the term not attested φντύς.³²

More than two centuries after the first philosophers, Aristotle will write that "the φύσις primordial, in the proper sense, is the οὐσία [= substance, essence] of things that possess in themselves the principle of movement as such" (*Met.* V.4.1015a13). And the movement supposes life: the association of the movement with life is a certainty for the Greek way of conceiving the reality, even before the invention of the philosophy, which explains that in Homer the only use of φύσις refers to a plant, which is something living that grows, and that the corresponding verb, φύω, is used exclusively for living beings, trees and plants almost always, but sometimes also human beings.³³ In figurative form, the verb φύω is also used to signify "to arise" [a need, a desire]: "And, on seeing me, they [desire] (ἔφον) to take me by the hand" (*Od.* X.397).³⁴

In other words, from the pre-philosophical use of φύσις we can deduce that the term alludes to the essence (the set of all the characteristics that belong to it) of a living being, *ergo*, dynamic, in the moment in which it is defined. Besides, teaching the φύσις of something allows to (re) know it, as in the Homeric example, i.e. to grasp what it is.

(c) *Why did the first philosophers call the being of entities "φύσις"?*

At this point, we need to explain why this pre-philosophical meaning of φύσις led the first philosophers to adopt³⁵ the term to characterize the "object" to which they devoted their research³⁶: the element or principle or substance that explains the reality of things in general and, in a second stage, of each thing in particular.

³² Benveniste, E. (1948), p. 79.

³³ *Il.* VII.149: "The man is generated (φύεν)"; *Il.* XIV.347: "From the earth is born (φύεν) a tender grass"; *Il.* IV.483: "As a grown poplar growth (πεφύκει) in a swamp"; *Od.* V.63: "A thick forest had grown (πεφύκει)".

³⁴ Burger, A. (1925), p. 3, explains this nuance as follows: "he planted his hand in my hand".

³⁵ As we have already said in several occasions, although the term appears for the first time in Heraclitus, it is probable that it was already part of the philosophical vocabulary before.

³⁶ Naddaf, G., (1992), p. 28, says that between Homer and the first philosophers there is, regarding the term *phúsis*, "truly a semantic continuity".

It occurs to us that, as will be the case later with philosophical terminology in general, some of the "first philosophers" (as we said, surely before Heraclitus, who uses φύσις already with a fluency that assumes that it is not his invention) made an analogy. The same did, some time later, Aristotle, when he looked for a term to reproduce the "wealth" of an entity, that which makes it be, and found in the current economic language the term οὐσία, which, analogically, he will apply to an ontological field. Something similar could have happened with φύσις, although its introduction in philosophical terminology has an unexpected, exceptional consequence for the researcher, which is the following:

If the term φύσις was adopted to allude to the being of things, it is because the first philosophers conceived that the being of something was the eternal active source of a dynamic process. Later we will test this affirmation, which for the moment may seem dogmatic, but the intimate relationship between φύσις and movement (which was consecrated by Aristotle in a formula we transcribed above) and especially with life, will be constant in the first philosophers, and will continue later when the term φύσις is eclipsed in favour of a more rigorous terminology.

The philosophical look that sees in the being of things a dynamic power (a formula that is redundant in Greek, since both terms are meanings of δύναμις) that unfolds in the "entities" seems to have already been characteristic of Thales (we do not have previous testimonies). In fact, regarding the principle (ἀρχή, probably an Aristotelian term), Thales said that it is water, "which is the principle of the φύσις of everything that is humid" (*Met.* A.3.983b27). Aristotle, with extreme prudence, says that "perhaps Thales arrived at this assumption (ὑπόλεψιν) by observing that the food of all things is moist, and that the same heat is born from it and lives in it" (b23); and then adds that because of this he could have concluded that "the seeds (σπέρματα) of all things have a moist φύσις " (b26). In other words: since things exist thanks to humidity, water is the φύσις primordial; it gives them life and it "is preserved safe (σωζομένεες) always" (b18).

On the other hand, we suppose that, faithful to a way of thinking that precedes philosophy and that is already detected in Homer, Thales admitted that life (whose source is the φύσις) was guaranteed by the vital breath, by the ψυχή, and that it is through the ψυχή that the φύσις transmits the capacity to move, which was always associated with it.

We saw, however, that in Homer both φύσις and the verb φύω only apply to living beings, and the same could be supposed in the case of Thales, since only they have "seeds"; but this is not so: in the sentence in which he speaks of these "seeds", Aristotle uses the plural genitive πάντων, "of *all* things". A doxographical commentary cautiously collected (ἔοικε, "it seems...") by Aristotle, would seem to confirm this hypothesis, since Thales would have stated that also the magnetic stone has a ψυχή, since it is capable of moving iron (and only ψυχή is the principle of movement) (*De anima*, I.2.404a19). Diogenes Laertius takes up this opinion about Thales and attributes it not only to Aristotle but also to Hippias, according to whom Thales "granted a ψυχή also to inanimate [things], leaning as witnesses on the magnetic stone and on amber" (I.24). It should also be remembered that Aristotle had written that, for Thales, "everything is full of gods (θεῶν)" (*De anima* I.5.411a7) and that some time later Diogenes Laertius would repeat the formula (with the substitution of θεῶν for δαιμόνων) and would attribute it to the fact that, for the philosopher, "the universe (κόσμον) was animated" (ἐμψυχον) (I.27).

Based on all that is said about Thales, we do not hesitate to affirm that his conception of the principle or first element, as well as of everything that arises from it, has a dynamic character, even where it is least perceived, in a mineral (magnetic rock, amber), and it would not be strange if he himself had already used the term φύσις both to refer to the principle and to the particular being of each thing. Let us remember that Aristotle commented that the first philosophers "reasoned about nature in its totality (περὶ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως) and about being (καὶ περὶ τοῦ ὄντος)" (*Met.* IV.3.1005a31). As we read in G. Naddaf, in the first philosophers "the word φύσις, used in the context of a research περί φύσεως, means the origin and the growth of the universe conceived as a whole".³⁷ The concrete examples we will see below will show us that, moreover, this whole is conceived as something dynamic, even living.

In the case of Anaximander we already have a text, very brief, but authentic, quoted by Theophrastus and transmitted by Simplicius in his *Commentary on the "Physics" of Aristotle* (p. 24.13). The importance of these few lines is invaluable, among other things because in the first known philosophical text appears already the "object" of study of the new perspective that characterizes the nascent philosophy: τὰ ὄντα. Evidently, in spite of its importance, this brief quotation is insufficient to understand

³⁷ Naddaf, G. (1992), p. 10.

Anaximander's philosophy, but the abundant and detailed comments made by doxographers and other philosophers of antiquity allow us to place the authentic passage in its context and thus understand his words, with little margin of error.

The quotation, conventionally called "fragment 1", seems to describe a stage subsequent to the moment in which everything emerged from the principle, element or substance proposed by Anaximander, who, unlike other pre-Socratics, would postulate, as we read in Simplicius, "a certain φύσις ἄπειρον" ("undefined") (*Phys.* 24.16). This undefined element, according to all ancient testimonies (Simplicius, *loc. cit.*; Hippolytus, *Ref.* I.6.1; Hermias, *Satire of the Pagan Philosophers*, 10), is subject to an eternal movement (κινούμενον), and according to this movement, fertilized germs (γόνιμα, see Pseudo-Plutarch, *Stromata*, 2) of opposites are separated, and they will constitute everything that exists. These germs are the equivalent of the "seeds" that Aristotle had placed in relation to the humidity of Thales, and they suppose that Anaximander's φύσις ἄπειρον is a source of life and that necessarily the fruit of his germs, πάντα τὰ ὄντα (as was the apparently inanimate world of Thales), also possesses life.

A last precision, which confirms that Anaximander, like Thales and the other so-called pre-Socratic thinkers, faced the original φύσις as something dynamic and living, is found in the so-called "fragment 2", which consists of a single word quoted by Hippolytus in *Ref.*: the principle or element preferred by Anaximander is eternal, is always in motion, and "doesn't get old", is ἀγήρω. Only if a reality is faced as something living can be applied the property of not aging, unimaginable in the case of a φύσις not animated, ergo, not living.³⁸ In short, the second citizen of Miletus confirms, like the first, that the first philosophers conceived the primary reality (which we do not know if they called φύσις, but we believe, without being able to prove it, that they did) as dynamic and living.

And, finally, this sort of reality anthropomorphic detectable in Anaximander, whose primordial element is a generator and does not age, is also found in Anaximenes, who, as we saw, states that, like the human being, the cosmos is sustained by the vital breath (πνεῦμα) and the air (ἀέρ), which are equivalent to the ψυχή (Aetius, I.3.4). And, if the cosmos breathes, it is because it is alive.

³⁸ Something similar will happen some time later in Melissus, who will say that being "does not experience any pain, nor does he worry" (fr. 7 DK).

We have seen so far that the notion of φύσις coincides, etymologically and conceptually, with the characteristics that the first philosophers discovered in the "X-ray" of reality that emerged from the new perspective (neither mythical nor poetic) from which they faced πάντα τὰ ὄντα.

Whether or not they used the term φύσις (before Heraclitus, whom we will deal with as a conclusion of our work), the principle, element or substance that gives rise to the whole, and which then forms part of each thing, responds to the meaning of the notion of φύσις. Like the Homeric μῶλυ, "reality" has its own being characterized by a vital, dynamic force that unfolds in everything that exists, even if it is not evident (as in the rock of Thales, which also possesses a vital principle). Both the humidity of Thales and the air of Anaximenes are essential elements for life (only where there is no humidity and where one does not breathe, as in a painting, one can speak of a "dead nature"). As W.A. Heidel observed, for the Greek mentality, "natural growth is the foundation of their way of thinking. And growth means life, and life means movement".³⁹ In short, φύσις must be understood in a dynamic way, as the 'true constitution'⁴⁰ of a thing according to the way it is realized from the beginning to the end of its existence, with all its properties.⁴¹

The interpretation we propose is neither new nor revolutionary. Eminent scholars (in recent years, especially G. Naddaf) have held something similar. We simply base our thesis in a somewhat different way, which consists in privileging the notion of life implicit in the notion of φύσις φύσις. Already in 1957 W.K.C. Guthrie had written that "Thales and his Ionian companions supposed that the world had emerged from a homogeneous mass that was in perpetual motion [...] In more direct terms, they thought that primordial matter was something living (was alive)".⁴² To illustrate this position, the unfortunate⁴³ term "hylozoism", literally "living matter", was forged at one point⁴⁴, derived from a superficial interpretation of Aristotle's comment that the early philosophers faced reality

³⁹ Heidel, W.A. (1910), p. 98.

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, in the English word "constitution" we do not perceive the active and dynamic sense of other terms with the suffix -tion, of which we already spoke. "Constitu-tion" would refer to the moment when something is being constituted.

⁴¹ Naddaf, G. (1992), p. 12.

⁴² Guthrie, W. K. C., *In the beginning* (Ithaca, 1957), p. 47.

⁴³ "Rather forbidding" according to Guthrie, *loc. cit.*. Years later Guthrie himself was less severe and said that "the most important thing is to avoid the term materialists", (1962), I, p. 64)

⁴⁴ The invention is attributed to R.Cudworth in the 17th century.

"in the form of matter (in ὅλης εἶδει)". (*Met.* I.3.983b7). In fact, Aristotle himself would have had a hard time demonstrating that his notion of matter can be applied, for example, to Anaximander's φύσις ἄπειρον⁴⁵ (can he imagine an undefined "matter"?). As if he had wanted to confirm in advance the sentence of Heraclitus (fr. 123 DK), the word φύσις was pleased to remain hidden, at least for us, for several centuries, starting from Homer. Surely he had examples in lost writings, philosophical or not, but it is not useful to practice philology-fiction. What is certain is that he will show himself, and with great detail, in Heraclitus, which will be the conclusion of this work.

Φύσις in Heraclitus

In the introduction to a book devoted to the Latin notion of "natura", A. Pellicer wrote that "the history of Φύσις is first of all that of a series of conquests leading to the construction of a general term".⁴⁶ It must be recognized that a decisive stage in this series of conquests is found in Heraclitus. Until today, in the textual quotations from Heraclitus that have been able to be recovered, the word φύσις appears on four occasions (fr. 1, 106, 112 and 123 DK). Since it is the first time that the term appears in a philosophical text (almost at the same time it will also appear in Pindar), four examples in the same author are more than enough to understand the meaning of the word a century after its possible use by the first philosophers, especially when Heraclitus seems to introduce an important novelty.

The novelty that we will find in Heraclitus in the conception of φύσις is a consequence of the radical change that the philosopher of Ephesus introduces in the field of philosophy. As we will try to demonstrate briefly⁴⁷, the perspective from which Heraclitus faces reality (πάντα τὰ ὄντα) is different from the approach taken by his predecessors (the same will occur with Parmenides). According to the quotations (= "fragments") that could be recovered from his lost book, Heraclitus does not seem to have

⁴⁵ The same happens to Aetius: Anaximander "is wrong when he does not say if τὸ ἄπειρον is air, water, earth or another body like that" (I.3.3). And also Anaxímenes is wrong when he proposes the air as a principle, because "it is impossible that the matter is the only principle of the things" (I.3). *Contra*, see Heidegger, W.A. (1910), p. 101, "there is no reason to doubt that the Presocratics used φύσις in this sense [i.e., in the sense of "material cause"], as Aristotle said".

⁴⁶ Pellicer, A., *Natura. Étude sémantique et historique du mot latin*, (Paris, 1966), p. 18.

⁴⁷ See more details in Cordero, N.L., *Heráclito: uno es todo, todo es uno* (Buenos Aires, 2018), *passim*.

been interested, as the previous philosophers, in the principle, element or primary and eternal substance, which would represent "the being" of πάντα τὰ ὄντα, which would be their particularizations. He keeps, as his predecessors, the notion of φύσις (this time in an explicit way, as we said), but he enriches it with a new nuance that will justify from now on that a treatise περὶ φύσεως is a treatise περὶ τοῦ ὄντος, as we saw in the case of Melissus. This phrase deserves an explanation.

In order for philosophy to devote itself to the study of πάντα τὰ ὄντα, as was the case until Heraclitus or Parmenides⁴⁸, reality cannot be chaotic, but must be accommodated to a certain rhythm, to a certain regularity, that is to say, it must respect an order (and that is why we speak of κόσμος, whose original meaning is precisely "order"). Already in Anaximander's few preserved lines, both the reparation of injustices with a penalty⁴⁹ and the process that describes the emergence and then the destruction of the "germs" and its products in τὸ ἄπειρον, which is where they have been originated, presuppose an "ordered" universe. But both, Aristotle and the commentators, privilege in the first philosophers, as we saw, the search for the first substance (οὐσία), which would justify -eventually- an "ordered" reality, on which they do not seem to have interested themselves. And, as we try to demonstrate, they would have called φύσις or "the being" that always active source of a dynamic and ordered process.

Heraclitus conserves the term φύσις as a synonym for the foundation of reality, but, for him, reality is not such because it was originated from an original source, but because it is constituted by *an ordered multiplicity*. Heraclitus devotes his philosophy to explain the cause of this harmonious order, which makes of multiplicity a unity, without which reality would not exist. *Ergo*, this order, as a cause, is the being of reality, and this cause receives, as it was the case of his predecessors, the name of φύσις. And, faithful to the original meaning of φύσις, Heraclitus emphasizes the fact that reality is fundamentally dynamic, to such an extent that, if something is not in activity, it decomposes and dies.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The two philosophers would be contemporary. Diogenes Laertius, *apud* Apollodorus, places the *akmé* of both of them in the 69th Olympiad (years 504-1) The chronology on Parmenides proposed by Plato in the first pages of the *Parmenides* is a literary resource that does not resist a rigorous analysis.

⁴⁹ "They [= the things, τὰ ὄντα] surrender to each other justice and reparation of injustice according to the disposition of time" (Anaximander, fr. 1).

⁵⁰ Heraclitus will illustrate this conception with what happens with a strange concoction, the "ciceon" (fr. 125). Even today, to ingest certain medicines, the formula is prescribed: "Shake before use".

Heraclitus does not share -and even violently criticizes- the position of those who pretend to explain reality only by "describing it". In this case, only an excess of partial knowledge is obtained⁵¹, which does not explain why, despite the multiplicity that is proper to πάντα τὰ ὄντα, these can constitute an "order" (κόσμος) and, therefore, be susceptible of possessing a unique *phúsis*, valid in general and for each component of the "whole" in particular. In other words: the task of the "wise man" (Heraclitus prefers this term to "philosopher"⁵²) is not to find the principle from which reality is derived, but the reason or criterion that holds it together and makes it really a reality. This is "the wise".⁵³

To explain this unity of multiplicity Heraclitus relies on an ancient conception according to which everything has certain characteristics that in reality are "possibilities" or "powers" (δυνάμεις) that characterize it.⁵⁴ The originality of Heraclitus consists in supposing that, in each thing, these δυνάμεις are opposed, contrary, but that they have had to be harmonized to guarantee the existence of the object that possesses them. Without the harmony of opposing tensions there would be no concrete reality. If there were not a wooden rod twisted in spite of itself by a piece of string that presses it by its ends (piece of string that, in turn, is forced to press) there would not be a bow (fr. 51 DK). At first sight, one does not perceive that this harmony (visible) is the result of a struggle (not-visible). This harmony balances the opposing forces and tensions, and it becomes evident when, by using the bow, the tensions increase, and, as the being of the bow consists of throwing arrows, it is at that moment that the bow is a bow.

The tension of opposing forces is the being of the bow... and that is what its φύσις φύσις consists of, which -and this is the novelty of Heraclitus- is not evident.⁵⁵ As we read in fr. 123 (the most quoted of Heraclitus): "The φύσις prefers⁵⁶ to hide herself

⁵¹ Pythagoras, for example, "elaborated a wisdom (σοφία) for himself; the excess of knowledge (πολυμαθία) is a bad technique" (κακοτεχνία) (fr. 129 DK).

⁵² The "philo-sopher" loves wisdom; the wise possess it.

⁵³ "The wise (τὸ σόφον) is one thing only: to know the notion (γνώμη) that conducts through everything" (fr. 41).

⁵⁴ In the *Sophista* (247e) Plato resorts to this notion to propose the new status of the Form.

⁵⁵ "The un-manifest harmony is stronger than the manifest one" (fr. 54). Nor is it evident that the being of the water is H₂O; only the gaze of the specialist is capable of "seeing" it.

⁵⁶ There is no verb in English that exactly recovers the value of "φιλέω", related to "φιλία", "friendship". The current translation for "to love" is exaggerated, since "to love" in Greek is "ἐρωτάω". One would have to invent the verb "to friendship" and say that "the φύσις 'friendships' to hide herself".

(κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ)" (fr. 123 DK).⁵⁷ This very short text is also fundamental to the history of φύσις because the term appears in isolation. It is no longer φύσις "of", but φύσις φύσις herself, which will give its being to everything that exists and then one can speak of "φύσις of this" or "of that".

But even hidden, the φύσις expresses herself, and it does so by means of a "discourse" (λόγος). That is, for Heraclitus, the φύσις has a λόγος, and, consequently, one can speak of "the λόγος of the φύσις" and know it. In this will consist "the wise": in a single knowledge worth "ten thousand", the knowledge of the λόγος. The λόγος, in Heraclitus, is a sort of formula that enunciates a law: "Listening not to me, but to the λόγος, it is wise (σοφόν) to agree in order to know (εἰδέναι) that one <is> everything" (fr. 50 DK).⁵⁸

No exceptions are allowed in a law. As the λόγος, as a formula of the φύσις φύσις, assures the cohesion of the κόσμος, if something were to fall outside the norm it represents, it would fall into chaos, characterized by excess, but "excess must be extinguished more than a fire" (fr. 43 DK). Ignorant people do not realize that, although they do not know it, they are governed by the λόγος which is found in everything (individual, society, κόσμος): "those who, having heard [the λόγος]⁵⁹, remain without intelligence, are deaf. They are a proof of the saying: 'present, they are absent'" (fr. 34 DK). This intellectual deafness has tragic consequences: "[Those who do not know how to listen] differ from the λόγος, with which they are permanently in contact, and it seems strange (ξένα, "foreigner") to them what they find every day" (fr. 72 DK). Today we would say that they live in alienation.

⁵⁷ Giorgio Colli is the author of a book whose title is *Phúsis krúptesthai phileî*, Milan, 1948.

⁵⁸ We translate literally the text transmitted by the manuscript tradition. Miller, a philologist and editor of the source of the fragment, Hippolytus, proposed in the 19th century to change εἰδέναι for εἶναι ("is"), in which he was inexplicably followed by most scholars. The conjecture is unjustifiable, at least for two reasons: (a) a term which appears in the totality of the manuscripts should never be suppressed, unless it is incongruous, which is not the case, not even remotely, in this case; (b) with εἰδέναι the phrase means "to know (εἰδέναι) that one <is> everything", which is coherent with the multiple calls of Heraclitus to "know" the λόγος. If we replace εἰδέναι by εἶναι the phrase would then say that "it is wise to agree that one *is* everything", with the verb "is" (in the text, εἶναι) explicit, with a copulative sense, which is impossible in Heraclitus. Heraclitus said only "one, all".

⁵⁹ In this text the proximity of "listening" and "without intelligence", reminds fr. 1 DK: "Although this λόγος always exists, men are always ignorant (=without intelligence), both before they have heard it and after they have heard it for the first time". It is clear then that even in fr. 34 it is a matter of listening to the λόγος.

This way of conceiving the φύσις supposes a dynamic conception of reality. The harmony is carried out between tensions or opposite powers, which supposes a palpitating reality, which, if it is stabilized, decomposes, like the concoction that Heraclitus uses as an image of the dynamic character of πάντα τὰ ὄντα, the ciceon (κυκεόν): "the ciceon disintegrates if it is not agitated" (fr. 125 DK). According to the Homeric recipe (*Iliad*, XI, 623-643), Hecamede grated goat's cheese on the wine contained in a jug, added white flour and then, as in a cocktail, stirred the components and only then the ciceon appeared, which is the unit from the multiplicity of the components. Before stirring, there is only wine, cheese and flour. The φύσις of the ciceon is the harmonization of the different components that come together to create an entity. Without palpitation, there is no reality.

We said that the word φύσις appears four times in the texts recovered from Heraclitus. We have already dealt, albeit briefly, with fr. 123 DK. In fr. 1 Heraclitus puts in relation φύσις with the knowledge, by means of the λόγος, which becomes almost synonymous of φύσις: "[...] Although everything takes place according (κατά) to this λόγος [...] I distinguish each thing according to (κατά) the φύσις and I say how it is". It could not be clearer: in order to know what a thing is, it must be studied according to the φύσις, which is present as a harmonic union of opposites, in each thing.

Fr. 112 DK alludes once again to the fact of "listening" to the φύσις, which would seem to be taken as a model of action: "To think as one should (σωφρονεῖν) is the supreme perfection, and wisdom [consists in] saying true things and acting according to the φύσις, listening" (we suppose: listening at the λόγος, which is "the voice of the φύσις"). Finally, in fr. 106 Heraclitus reproaches the "ignorant" people for not knowing that "the daily φύσις is one". The meaning of the text seems obvious to us (although it has been much discussed): the events that happen daily can change, but this does not modify its φύσις of a journey, which is a harmonious union of day and night, in which each part occupies the duration that corresponds to it.

This symptomatic example of the union of the opposites (day and night) (= multiplicity), which allows for "one" journey (= unity), is the most adequate to understand the dynamic conception of being in the first Presocratic thinker in which we find the word "φύσις".

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