The purpose of this paper is to discuss the relationship between opposites which Heraclitus appears to describe in terms of identity or unity. In particular an attempt will be made to determine firstly what Heraclitus means when he says that opposites are τὸ αὐτὸ or ἕν, and secondly, how far it is correct to interpret this relationship in terms of other elements in Heraclitus’ philosophical outlook.

The identity of opposites as such was not influential on the subsequent history of Greek philosophy. Parmenides, in emphasizing the separateness of opposites (albeit as the ‘opinion of mortals’), explicitly rejected any idea of their identity and incidentally foreshadowed the separation of opposites in formal logic, from which such notions as the identity of opposites were, by definition, excluded. Anaxagoras based his assertion of the inseparability and, in a sense, the identity of opposites, upon a belief in the infinite divisibility of matter; no piece of matter containing one opposite would entirely exclude others. What Heraclitus appeared to represent as a contradiction was shown by Anaxagoras to be literally true, but, at the same time, explicable on the basis of an original theory of matter. At Theaetetus 152 c-e, Plato considered the doctrine that objects simultaneously possess opposite attributes, and linked this doctrine very closely with the doctrine of flux; if everything is always in a process of change.

* I would like to express my gratitude to Professor N. Gulley for valuable criticism of an earlier draft of this paper.

1 DK 28 B 8, 55-58. Discussion of the controversy over the identity of the ἑξής εἰς ἑξής φιλέτη in B 6, 4ff. is not necessary here, except to note that even if the passage does not refer to Heraclitus, he would undoubtedly have been included in the condemnation.

2 DK 59 B 8. Anaxagoras is associated with Heraclitus on this point by Aristotle at Metaph. K 1063 b 24, where they both earn his disapproval.

an object may with equal validity be described as large and small or heavy and light.

Aristotle believed that Heraclitus, if his doctrine of the identity of opposites was to be taken seriously, had violated a basic law of logic, namely the law of contradiction. The result of this violation, as Aristotle saw it, was that Heraclitus appeared to be stating that the same thing is and is not, that contrary attributes are predicable of the same subject, or that contradictory statements can be true of the same subject. Aristotle said little concerning the unity, as opposed to the identity, of opposites in Heraclitus. This formulation occurred in a number of fragments of Heraclitus, but often associated closely with identity. It is clear that Aristotle had no objection in principle to the idea that opposites could, in certain circumstances, unite, or be called 'one'; at *Metaph.* Δ6, 1015 b 36 ff. he distinguished four senses in which objects might be called 'one', at least one of which might have seemed to Aristotle to be applicable to Heraclitus, namely 'one' through continuity. However, we may note Aristotle's tendency to see identity as a species of unity, reflecting normal Greek usage as far back as Homer. It seems likely that, whatever Heraclitus actually meant, Aristotle assumed that, in asserting the unity of opposites, Heraclitus was actually asserting their identity. Aristotle concludes that one need not assume that Heraclitus was saying what he really believed, or alternatively that he could perhaps have been shown his errors, since he adopted his position in ignorance of what it really implied.

Recent commentators have been more sympathetic. On the one

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4 *Metaph.* Γ 1005 b 17-20.
5 *Ib.* b 24-25. Heraclitus did not, as far as we know, make an existential judgment of this kind unless we accept the validity of the second part of DK 22 B 49a, (εἰμέν τε καὶ όξ εἰμέν) with e.g. Vlastos, On Heraclitus, *A.J.P.* 76 (1955) 343; but see O. Gigon, *Untersuchungen zu Heraclit*, 106 ff. and G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (hereafter HCF), 373.
6 *E.g.* at *Metaph.* K 1063 b 24.
7 *Ib.* 1062 a 34.
8 *E.g.* at B 59 and 60.
9 This reflects a normal fifth century usage, e.g. Hdt. I, 202, 4, where the Atlantic and Erythraean sea are said to be μία, as opposed to the Caspian, which is ἐπὶ ἑωρηθέν.
10 *E.g.* at *Top.* 103 a 6 ff.
11 *E.g.* *Iliad* 3, 238 ... τῷ μοι μία γείνασθαι μήτηρ.
13 *Ib.* K 1062 a 31 ff.