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PSYCHĒ, PNEUMA, AND AIR: LEVINAS AND ANAXIMENES IN PROXIMITY

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“Are not we Westerners, from California to the Urals, nourished by the Bible as much as by the Presocratics?” Levinas asks in “No Identity” (1987b: 148). Others, more knowledgeable in this area than myself, have already explored some of the ways in which Levinas’s philosophy is sustained by the Biblical inspiration. And Levinas himself is willing to recognize, at various points in his essays, the presence of the Socratic, Platonic, and even Aristotelian legacy (to stay with some major Greek, post-Socratic thinkers) within his own thought. Is Levinas also nourished by the Presocratics, however, as his statement suggests? And what would a Levinasian reading of the Presocratics reveal? Would different possibilities of philosophical thinking open up, within the very origins of Greek philosophy, if one were to let the Levinasian inspiration breathe through such an originary thinking? These are the questions I would like to take up by focusing specifically on the presence in Levinas of a rather minor, but thus even more significant Presocratic thinker, namely, Anaximenes and his “theory” that air is the *archē* of all things.

AĒR, PSYCHE, PNEUMA IN ANAXIMENES

We know very little, almost nothing certain about Anaximenes' life and activities. Certainly in the eyes of the contemporary reader, often trained in the shadow of Nietzsche and Heidegger, among the three Milesians Anaximander appears more prominent than his "associate" Anaximenes.¹ However, according to Diogenes Laertius, Theophrastus (Aristotle's pupil) wrote an entire monograph on Anaximenes,² which signals the recognition Anaximenes enjoyed in the ancient world, and thus the possibly widespread influence of his thinking.³ Although the theory of *pneuma* – pneumatology – occupies an important place in the theories of the medical schools as they developed in the fifth century b.c.e., and received its most complete and significant form in the doctrines of the Stoics, it is in Anaximenes that its first philosophical mention occurs according to a long-standing tradition in the West.⁴ Therefore, it is to him that I turn regardless of the only alleged authenticity of the fragment in which such a theory appears (some alterations and rewording might in fact have occurred, but this would not radically change the general sense of the quotation).

As handed down to the tradition by Aetius, the words commonly accepted as a direct quotation from Anaximenes are as such: "Just as,' he says, 'our soul [*psychē*], being air [*aēr*], holds us together, so do breath [*pneuma*] and air [*aēr*] encompass the whole world.'" And, Aetius adds, air [*aēr*] and breath [*pneuma*] are synonymous here.⁵ The *psychē* is *aēr*, *aēr* and *pneuma* are synonyms, therefore the *psychē* is also *pneuma*.

First of all, a brief semantic observation. It is questionable what Anaximenes exactly meant by *aēr*, whether atmospheric air (invisible) or, as in Homer, mist and vapor (visible). There is no doubt, however, that for Anaximenes air is something substantial, and indeed the basic form of substance. Whether such substantiality retains material or spiritual features or neither is part of what I would like to address here. In the fragment reproduced above, even more radical than the association between air and breath (breath is, after all, in a merely physiological sense, warm air) is the suggestion that our soul – the *psychē* – is not only air but also, and at the same time, *pneuma*. In other words, the soul is indeed assimilated to a natural, physical principle (*aēr*) that is seen at work in the entire universe (thus also suggesting, but it is not our interest here, an analogy if not a structural coincidence between micro-

¹ The word is Theophrastus', see Theoph., *Phys. Op.*, fr. 2.

² Diogenes Laertius V, 42.

³ Burnet insists on this point (Burnet 1957: 78).

⁴ This is not to say that such a theory did not have a previous origin in the popular tradition, or that it was not formulated in previous authors, such as, for example, Homer.

⁵ Aetius I, 3, 4.

cosm and macrocosm). By itself, this move would amount to understanding the soul in terms of its physical make-up, of what has later been named “matter,” and would subject it to obedience to the deterministic, mechanistic laws that are seen at work in the universe of physicality. What would derive would be a philosophical vision in which the psychic dimension otherwise known as spirituality would be reduced to its natural, physical, material component. However, there is something else going on in Anaximenes’ fragment.

Moreover and more notably, through Aetius’ clarification that air and breath are synonymous, the soul is also associated with another term, *pneuma*, a word indicating a component that, besides physically making it up, enlivens the soul, makes it mobile, pulsating, active, verbal and not substantive, and in this sense subtracts it from immediate association with the pure materiality of air and renders it certainly forceful, vital, organic, and, with a terminology which will appear only later, almost spiritual, although perhaps of a peculiar spirit. In fact, there is no *pneuma*, no breath (substantive) except than in breathing (verbal), and breathing is a pulmonary activity (and not a status) of taking in and letting out, of inspiration and expiration. It is breathing, not simple air that individualizes the human being, that gives him or her subjectivity, and that ultimately constitutes his or her soul. Such an activity of breathing provides physiological as well as psychological, physical as well as spiritual life, and in this sense, more than a material element (as air is) *pneuma* is a force, a life-force. If it is a life-force, it is certainly natural, but is it still truly material? Even, is it truly physical, or is it already also something else?⁶

Yet *pneuma*, we are told in Aetius’ remark, is nothing else than air, material, physical, natural element that, present at the cosmic level – that is to say, outside – is internalized and externalized by the soul so as to nourish, sustain, even make possible the life of the *psychē*, which itself then *is* air. This is why the soul is in fact air: because the soul is the air-breathing that by bringing the air from outside inside and back gives the soul its subsistence. The soul is itself this movement of the air, this inhaling and exhaling, this folding itself in and turning itself out, this pulsating lung in which the inside (properly, the soul) is always already the outside (the air) and vice versa. Without air there is no breathing, without breathing there is no soul, without air there is no soul. To exhale the last breath is to stop breathing, to die. But the lack of air certainly brings about the last breath, and all dying is, in a way, a gasping for air, for more air, a suffocating. Is air itself, then, the life-force expressed by the term *pneuma*? Is the natural, physical element already pervaded by a spiritual

⁶ In conformity with their physical theories, the Stoic doctrine reads *pneuma* in entirely materialistic terms, and because of this it will be rejected by the later Christian thought, which, through a peculiar, Neoplatonist interpretation of the Platonic legacy, will consign such a rejection to medieval and modern philosophy. In this essay I wonder, however, about the reduction of *pneuma* to a purely material dimension.

dimension, so as to justify the classical description of the first philosophers as hylozoists, that is, as those who see matter (*hylē*) as in itself provided by a principle of animation (*zōon*)? And is this animation the spiritual?

What is ultimately going on in Anaximenes' association of *psychē*, *aēr*, and *pneuma*? Is Anaximenes simply reducing the psychological, what the tradition has later understood as the spiritual aspect of human beings to its natural, physical, material make-up? This is indeed the sense in which the Stoics understood *pneuma*. But the Stoics also wrote after Plato's theorization of the division between the soul and the body; thus, in a way, they were forced to operate a choice between the materiality and immateriality of *pneuma* (and they opted for the former). Or is Anaximenes spiritualizing nature, physicality, and materiality? The spiritual dimension shadowed in the term *pneuma* was not lost to the Septuagints, who generally translated the Hebrew form *ruah* (wind, breath, but also the spirit of God) with *pneuma*, and also used *pneuma* in a context where pagan Greek would have used *thymos* or *psychē*.⁷ What are the nature and status of the *psyche*, this peculiar entity which seems to be at once material (*aēr*) and nonmaterial (*pneuma*) except that the apparently nonmaterial aspect, the *pneuma*, is then allegedly solved back into its material dimension as *aēr*?

Some suggestions as how to cast some light on these questions surprisingly come from Hegel. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, commenting on Anaximenes' fragment, Hegel translates Anaximenes' *pneuma* with *Geist*, spirit,⁸ and writes that "Anaximenes shows very clearly the nature of his essence in the soul, and he thus points out what may be called the transition of natural philosophy into the philosophy of consciousness" (Hegel 1974: 190). Certainly Hegel's understanding of the history of philosophy is oriented by his attempt at reading all moments of such a history as transitional to the full manifestation of spirit accomplished in nineteenth century German philosophy. With respect to Anaximenes, however, even if one does not subscribe to Hegel's general historiography, one thing becomes clear through his remark: by marking the transition from nature to consciousness Anaximenes in fact situates himself at the turning point of that transition, as the one who perhaps renders the transition possible but possibly without himself being completely part of it. That is, in Anaximenes the split between nature and consciousness, body and mind, matter and spirit, as well as that between microcosm and macrocosm, which will become evident in Platonic philosophy (although there too it is only by taking care of bodily needs in a certain way that the life of the mind or spirit can develop), is not yet fully at work. *Psychē*,

⁷ The cultural history of the term *pneuma*, as well as that of "spirit," is complex indeed. For such a history, see for example Gerard Verbeke (1987), and Marie Isaacs (1976).

⁸ See G.W.F. Hegel (1974: 190).

aēr, and *pneuma* remain in the ambiguity that enables the transition to occur: they interact and feed on one another in such a manner that each nourishes the other, so that nature, or what will later appear as corporeality, physicality, or materiality, is in fact the source, origin, and aliment of spirituality. In other words, nature is itself spiritual while remaining nature, and vice versa. And all this emerges through the somewhat ambiguous notion of *pneuma* in its correlation with *aēr* and *psychē*. As Irigaray states in a different context (and remarking on the concept of breathing in terms that however speak the language of the tradition of the split), in breathing “nature becomes spirit while remaining nature” (Irigaray 1996: 123).

This very attitude of thought, which situates itself before or beyond the split defining and characterizing so much of Western philosophy between materiality and spirituality with all the conceptual corollaries attached, is present also in Levinas, who explicitly discusses the notion of psychism both in *Totality and Infinity* and in *Otherwise than Being*. In a sense that I will try to elucidate, the two descriptions resemble Anaximenes’ double association of the *psychē* with *aēr* and *pneuma* respectively, while at the same time they contribute to let emerge and disclose the meaning of the ambiguity contained in Anaximenes’ own account.

PSYCHISM AND AIR IN *TOTALITY AND INFINITY*

In *Totality and Infinity* Levinas generally does not speak of the *psychē* or soul but of psychism or psychic life, and understands it as “an *event* in being” (1969: 54), “a dimension in being, a dimension of non-essence, beyond the possible and impossible” (1969: 56). As such psychism belongs to the movement of separation through which the I constitutes itself on the background of the *il y a*, but also on the background of all forms of totalization aimed at encompassing the self. Psychism is what constitutes the I in its individuality; “it is the feat of radical separation” (Levinas 1969: 54). In this sense, psychism is not a purely theoretical moment, but rather an existential one: “it is already *a way of being*, resistance to the totality” (Levinas 1969: 54), and thus act of freedom with respect both to one’s own origin and to the universality of history. The tradition has tried to express the irreducibility of the psychism of the I to the common, totalizing time of history through the notion of “the eternity of the soul” (Levinas 1969: 57). But the concept of eternity as “perenniality” does not mark a separation that is radical with respect to common history. Rather, the separation is radical only if “each being has its own time, that is, its *interiority*” that interrupts historical time – that is, only if each being is born and dies. Thus, birth and death are inherent components of psychism, which makes both possible. Psychism means not existence as eternity, but disconti-

nity in historical time, for Levinas. The life of the soul is made of birth and death, physical appearance and disappearance. It is human life.

The way in which psychism defines itself is through enjoyment which, according to the description in the section of *Totality and Infinity* devoted to “Interiority and Economy,” is grounded on corporeity, sensibility, affectivity, bodily needs that want to be satisfied, happiness. Enjoyment neither relates to the things of the world through an instrumental, “utilitarian schematism” (Levinas 1969: 110) that makes the I see them as tools, implements, fuels, or, in general, means, nor do they appear as goals. Rather, enjoyment provides us with an immersion in the fullness of life which, in itself, is “*love of life*” (Levinas 1969: 112) – not life in abstract but life in its very contents, which are thus lived, and “the act of living these contents is *ipso facto* a content of life” (Levinas 1969: 111). In enjoyment, the reliance, the dependency on the contents of life, the “living from...” such contents turns the I into an autonomous, independent subject, into an egoism, or, precisely, into a psychism.

As already noticed, it is such a psychism, specified as sensibility, “and not matter that provides a principle of individuation” (1969: 59), Levinas remarks. That is to say, in Levinas what we would otherwise call spiritual life, what he terms “psychism” is not separated from bodily life, sensibility, and corporeality. The body for Levinas is not “an object among other objects, but [rather ...] the very regime in which separation holds sway, ... the ‘how’ of this separation and so to speak ... an adverb rather than ... a substantive” (1969: 163). Life is a body, and the body is “the presence of [an] equivocation” (Levinas 1969: 164) between “on the one hand *to stand* [*se tenir*], to be master of oneself, and, on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the *other*, and thus to be encumbered by one’s body” (Levinas 1969: 164). The two aspects are not distinct and in succession; rather, “their simultaneity constitutes the body” (Levinas 1969: 165), which also means that there is “no *duality* – lived body and physical body – which would have to be reconciled” (Levinas 1969: 165). The psychism situates itself before or beyond the distinction into body and soul, body and mind, and thus, unlike much philosophical thinking of Platonic (or Platonist, I will not address the difference here) descent, beyond the need for their reconciliation. With a clear reference to Plato’s myths of the soul as recounted at various places in his philosophy, Levinas states that “consciousness does not fall into a body – is not incarnated; it is a disincarnation – or, more precisely, a postponing of the corporeity of the body” (1969: 165-166). That is, consciousness, which Levinas characterizes as a being “related to the element in which one is settled as to what is not yet there” (1969: 166), is intertwined with the body, has its origin in the body, arises out of the body as a taking time, a taking distance “with respect to the element to which the I is given over” (1969: 166).

Moreover, sensibility, or rather, this “incarnate thought” (Levinas 1969: 164), this psychism, is not made to coincide either with matter or with nature. As sensibility, the body, “a sector of an elemental reality” (Levinas 1969: 165), immerses itself in the elementality of matter, elementality which, as we have seen, can be natural as well as artificial or technological. But sensibility is already separation, already psychism, whereas matter, or the elemental, is pure quality in which no separation is possible, since “as qualities, the differences still relate to the community of a genus” (Levinas 1969: 59), that is to say, to a totality. On the other hand, the body is not immediately nature because the body exists as already animated by its psychism, the body is its psychism, or better, psychism is “sensible self-reference” (Levinas 1969: 59), whereas for Levinas nature is not animated, is not separate, does not possess an interiority of its own. Nevertheless, matter as well as the elemental (both natural and technological) for Levinas can only and always be approached from the perspective of the psychism of the I, through the “sensible self-reference” that in enjoyment bathes itself in such dimensions, and that through dwelling, possession, labor, and consciousness gains a stable hold on such dimensions. In other words, it is not only the body but also matter and the elemental that are already spiritual, inscribed in the economy through which the I attains its own individuality and separation – or matter, the elemental, the body are already cultural because in fact they are before and beyond the distinction between nature and culture as a specific dimension of humankind. As Levinas writes against a whole tradition that has rather mainly equated bodily pleasures with animality, “to enjoy without utility, in pure loss, gratuitously, without referring to anything else, in pure expenditure – this is the human” (1969: 133). As in Anaximenes, psychism is air, being steeped in the elemental as the source of one’s independence and happiness, sensible enjoyment, nourishment.

The love of life that Levinas displays in these pages of *Totality and Infinity* is the feeling of innocent, sinless, guilt free *eudaimonia* with which the Presocratic philosophers were generally capable of approaching the universe; of being completely present to it while representing its *genesis*, its *archē* to themselves; of being in harmony with it. The injustice of which Anaximander speaks has precisely to do, according to Levinas’s reading of Heidegger’s interpretation in “The Anaximander Fragment,” with a “put[ting] into question [of] the ego’s natural position as subject, its perseverance – the perseverance of its good conscience – in its being. It puts into question its *conatus essendi*, the stubbornness of its being” (Levinas 1987a: 108). If it puts such “an indiscreet – or ‘unjust’ – presence” into question, however, this does not mean the uprooting or elimination of such a “positive moment” of separation (Levinas 1969: 53), since “the plurality required for conversation [and, one could add, for the ethical relation] results

from the interiority with which each term is ‘endowed,’ the psychism, its egoist and sensible self-reference” (Levinas 1969: 59).

In *Totality and Infinity*, the psychism is characterized as an egoism that actually enables the I to separate itself from the anonymity of the *il y a*, of pure being. As such, it represents an ontological moment in the activity of self-constitution of the I – it is a moment through which the I establishes *its own being*, its having its own beginning and end, its own birth and death, in short, its own time. What animates such a moment, however? As Anaximenes indicates, the *psychē* is *aēr*, substantive presence, substantiality, that is, in Levinas’s language, persistence in one’s own being; but it is also *pneuma*, verblivity, vital force, breathing. What gives the psychism its life, its animation, its *pneuma*, according to Levinas? What is “the very *pneuma* of the *psychē*” (Levinas 1981: 69, 141)?

THE PNEUMA OF PSYCHISM IN *OTHERWISE THAN BEING*

In *Otherwise than Being*, the psychism of the I (which Lingis’ translation renders as *psyche*) is discussed once again in relation to concepts, already associated to it in *Totality and Infinity*, such as sensibility, enjoyment, the body. But here psychism undergoes a “coring out [*dénucléation*]” for which “the nucleus of the ego is cored out” (Levinas 1981: 64). Thus, psychism is no longer described as egoism, as separatedness of the I, but rather as “the form of a peculiar dephasing, a loosening up or unclamping of identity: the same prevented from coinciding with itself” (1981: 68). This emptying-out, which does not entail “an abdication of the same” but rather “an abnegation of oneself fully responsible for the other” (1981: 68-69) is brought about, through the notions of responsibility, substitution, the one-for-the-other, by the presence of the Other, who then constitutes the very *pneuma* of psychism, its animation. As Levinas defines it, psychism now signifies “the other in me, a malady of identity, both accused and *self*; the same for the other, the same by the other. Qui pro quo, it is a substitution” (1981: 69). From substantive identity, like the air-like psychism of *Totality and Infinity*, the I now turns into verblivity, movement, breathing through which the other penetrates the I and, through a “traumatic hold” (Levinas 1981: 141), a claim and a command placed on the same, destabilizes the substantive identity of the I and renders it verbal, responsive, responsible, for-the-other rather than for-itself, active of an activity that is, in fact, a passivity, a receptivity, a welcoming, and, ultimately, a donation – the donation of hospitality. “An openness of the self to the other...breathing is transcendence in the form of opening up,” Levinas writes in the concluding pages of *Otherwise than Being* (1981: 181). Psychism is then a deep inspiration (1981: 141) – an inspiring, breathing the other in

as well as a being inspired, animated by the other who thus constitutes the I in its very substantial identity as a destabilized self. Yet, “this pneumatism is not nonbeing; it is disinterestedness, excluded middle of essence, besides being and nonbeing” (Levinas 1981: 181). As for Anaximenes, *aēr* and *pneuma* are synonyms, and the *psyche* is both. It is the breathing, the verbality, the animation by the other that ultimately gives the soul its identity, its nonsubstantive substance, its being – its *aēr*.

Such an animation does not occur at the level of cognition, theory, or intentionality, claims Levinas. Rather, it is only possible at the level of the body, through an incarnation. “The animation, the very *pneuma* of the *psychē*, alterity in identity, is the identity of a body exposed to the other, becoming ‘for the other,’ the possibility of giving” (Levinas 1981: 69). The other lays claim on the I, inspires the I as an other who is hungry, thirsty, naked, in need of protection, of a home. Thus, the counterpart of such an inspiration, the movement of expiration through which the breath makes itself breathing, what Levinas will call elsewhere in *Otherwise than Being* testimony or “witness,” can only unfold itself through the donation of bodily, corporeal, material goods. Once again, as in *Totality and Infinity*, psychism, which the tradition has understood as nonmaterial, spiritual being, is described and defined through the body, corporeal donation, giving one’s body, one’s breath as nourishment, as source of life – “psychism in the form of a hand that gives even the bread taken from its mouth” (Levinas 1981: 67). The body thus is retrieved from its confinement in that Cartesian (but, even before, Platonic) order of materiality for which the body and the soul “have no common space where they can touch” (1981: 70). Rather, the body is already an “animated body or an incarnate identity” (1981: 71), and psychism is defined as “the way in which a relationship between uneven terms, without any common time, arrives at relationship” (1981: 70). That is to say, psychism is neither spiritual nor material, is “an accord, a chord, which is possible only as an arpeggio” (1981: 70). As for Anaximenes, the *psychē* is *aēr* and *pneuma*, or the proximity of both, and psychism results into a subject “of flesh and blood,” an individual “that is hungry and eats, entrails in a skin, and thus capable of giving the bread out of his [or her] mouth, or giving his [or her] skin” (Levinas 1981: 77). Ultimately, Levinas identifies psychism with “the maternal body” (1981: 67), the only one for which even the activity of breathing for itself, the in-taking of the air that gives the I its substantiality, becomes a breathing for the other, “a further deep breathing even in the breath cut short by the wind of alterity” (1981: 180). In turn, the subject is defined as “a lung at the bottom of his substance” (Levinas 1981: 180).

To say that psychism is an animated body, a lung does not imply, however, a return to or a lapsing into animality. Animality (or the organic body) and

the animated body are not the same thing. An animal is driven by its *conatus essendi*, it is entirely caught in the sphere of ontological self-assertion; the animal lives in being, and the signification of sensibility as signifyingness for-the-other completely escapes it. Conversely, the incarnate body may certainly give in to its own *conatus essendi*, since “there is an insurmountable ambiguity there: the incarnate body ... can lose its signification” (Levinas 1981: 79), and the human subject ends up engaging in an animalistic life style, which is what ontology ultimately is. But the incarnate body, psychism can also live what we may call the “spirituality” of the elemental, that is, sensibility as ethical signification. Rather than a deficiency, the ambiguity is then “the condition of vulnerability itself, that is, of sensibility as signification” (Levinas 1981: 80). As Levinas phrases it, “perhaps animality is only the soul’s still being too short of breath” (1981: 181), that is, the soul’s inability to engage in the movement of inspiration by the other “that is already expiration” (1981: 182). This movement “is the longest breath there is, spirit,” Levinas remarks, asking: “Is man not the living being capable of the longest breath in inspiration, without a stopping point, and in expiration, without return?” (1981: 182).

This also means that it is not the body in itself that belongs to animality, or to ontology, since the body is already possibility of being for-the-other. Ethical subjectivity is distinct from animals’ life but not thereby from nature, since nature is alien to the distinction between body and mind, matter and spirit or soul. By engaging in an ethical life, by inspiring the air of the Other as the *pneuma* of one’s own breathing, psychism does not relinquish its natural status, does not distance itself from its own nature; if anything, it separates itself from animals and *their* way of being within nature. Ethics is not unnatural for the psychism; in this sense, for Levinas as well as for Anaximenes *pneuma* is *aër*; the vital principle is proximity with and not distance from the natural element, since the natural element is alien to – it is before or beyond – all dichotomies.

The *pneuma* of psychism, its inspiration and animation, is the appeal by the other so that the elemental that the I enjoys becomes a gift and a donation for the other. Without the elemental, which is not pure being (*il y a*) but already a way of being, ethical subjectivity, the breathing subject, a subject inspired by and responsive to the other would not be possible. Matter, the elemental (whether natural or technological) and its transformation through labor and work, in which the ontological I bathes so as to constitute itself in its substantiality, are already potentially spiritual in the sense that they are already open to the dimension that properly constitutes the psychism in its breathing aspect – or rather, they are beyond such a distinction between materiality and spirituality. As Levinas very clearly puts it, “matter is the very locus of the for-the-other” (1981: 77), that is to say, matter and the elemen-

tal are the place of the ethical not only because they are instrumental to the ethical, but also because they are already open to it, they are what makes the ethical responsiveness concrete and actual. As Levinas has it, in order to be ethical, in order to be able to give the very bread one eats, “one has first to enjoy one’s bread, not to have the merit of giving it, but in order to give it with one’s heart, to give oneself in giving it” (1981: 72). Nature belongs not to pure being, toward which the ontological movement of the hypostasis is necessary for the constitution of an identity, but rather to a pre-ontological way of being that, precisely because it is pre-ontological, allows for a beyond being, for hospitality. Thus, *aēr* is *pneuma* also in the sense that physical, natural elements contain within themselves, rather, are the possibility for the welcoming of the other.

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

Once again, let us ask the question Levinas asks: “Are not we Westerners, from California to the Urals, nourished by the Bible as much as by the Presocratics?” Is Levinas influenced by Anaximenes as much as he is by the Bible in his understanding of psychism as egoism of the self, enjoyment, sensibility, incarnate body, subject of flesh and blood, maternal body? Very likely the answer to the question is “No,” and an analysis of the Biblical concept of *ruah* would probably show the Jewish ground of Levinas’s understanding of psychism. My point in this essay, however, is not that of retracing the roots of Levinas’s thought as much as showing the proximity between the Jewish inspiration and the Greek tradition of the origins on the notion of psychism. Such a proximity becomes possible precisely through Levinas’s own understanding of psychism. Within that psychism that Western philosophy has understood mainly as a spiritual and immaterial principle, Levinas retrieves the naturalistic, material element, and thus situates himself, with Anaximenes, before or rather beyond the split between materiality and immateriality, body and soul, nature and spirit that Anaximenes itself has contributed to originate while remaining at its threshold, at least according to Hegel’s interpretation quoted earlier in this essay. There is no doubt that such a Greek understanding of psychism is obliterated throughout much of the rest of the history of Western philosophy, covered up and bent in a more immaterial, spiritualistic direction by a certain interpretation of Plato known as Platonism, and further elided by Christian metaphysics. But what would it mean, for Western philosophy, to reread its own origin, its own history, its own conceptualizations in light of such a different, and yet not foreign understanding of psychism, the breath of which can be perceived through the inspiration of Levinas? What would it mean, for philosophy, to read itself against the grain of its own interpretative tradi-

tion, inspired by the presence of the other that the Jewish, religious tradition represents? If led by such an inspiration, could it find within itself those very themes to which the inspiration has opened it up? Could the breath become its air, so that the inspiration would not suffocate philosophy by changing its nature – from philosophy to religion, or theology, or religious thinking? So that, rather, it would only redirect, deflect or inflect the movement and direction of its breathing: not toward itself, but for-the-other, “wisdom of love” rather than love of wisdom, as Levinas has had occasion to say (1981: 162)? Would this not be the only possible sense of proximity, of a “contact across a distance” (Levinas 1969: 172) between the two traditions, a contact in which the other manifests itself in “a mastery that does not conquer but teaches” (Levinas 1969: 171)? “In Greek philosophy one can ... discern traces of the ethical breaking through the ontological,” Levinas remarks (Levinas, Kearney 1986: 25). Not only one can, but rather one does indeed, I would argue.

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Silvia Benso

PSYCHĒ, PNEUMA IR ORAS: LEVINAS IR ANAKSIMENAS GRETA

SANTRAUKA

“Ar mes vakariečiai, nuo Kalifornijos iki Uralo, nesame išmaitinti tiek Biblijos, tiek ikisokratikų?” – retoriškai klausia Levinas. Šiame straipsnyje kaip tik ir tyrinėjama, ar Levino filosofijoje galima aptikti esatį šio nepagrindinio, tačiau dėl to netgi reikšmingesnio ikisokratikų mąstytojo, būtent – Anaksimeno, ir jo “teorijos”, esą oras yra visų daiktų *archē*. Straipsnyje siekiama parodyti žydiško įkvėpimo, veikiančio Levino filosofijoje, ir graikiškos pradų tradicijos artimumą psichizmo sampratos klausimu. Tame psichizme, kurį Vakarų filosofija suprato didžia dalimi kaip dvasinį ir nematerialų principą, Levinas vėl atranda gamtinį, materialų elementą ir taip pats atsiduria, su Anaksimenu, iki arba veikiau anapus materialumo ir nematerialumo, kūno ir sielos, gamtos ir dvasios skilimo, prie kurio Anaksimenas prisidėjo, nors pats ir liko ties to skilimo slenksčiu.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI : *psychē*, psichizmas, oras, Anaksimenas, Levinas.