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**The Sleep of Reason:
Sleep and the Philosophical Soul in Ancient Greece**

by Victoria Wohl

A.E. Housman (1859–1936)

Born in Worcestershire in 1859, Alfred Edward Housman was a gifted classical scholar and poet. After studying in Oxford, Housman worked for ten years as a clerk, while publishing and writing scholarly articles on Horace, Propertius, Ovid, Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles. He gradually acquired such a high reputation that in 1892 he returned to the academic world as Professor of Classics at University College London (1892–1911) and then as Kennedy Professor of Latin at Trinity College, Cambridge (1911–1936).

Housman Lectures at UCL

The Department of Greek and Latin at University College London organizes regular Housman Lectures, named after its illustrious former colleague (with support from UCL Alumni). Housman Lectures, delivered by a scholar of international distinction, originally took place every second year and now happen every year, alternating between Greek and Roman topics (Greek lectures being funded by the A.G. Leventis Foundation).

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The Sleep of Reason: Sleep and the Philosophical Soul in Ancient Greece

Victoria Wohl

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud tracks the psyche along the paths of sleep, following the “royal road” of dreams. For the ancient Greeks, too, the psyche was revealed at night, not through the semiotics of dreams, but as I will argue, through the peculiar state of sleep itself. As a nightly “rehearsal for death,” sleep confuses the defining Greek binaries of life and death, mortal and immortal. A “privation” of perception, it interrupts our nature as percipient beings.¹ In the space of that interruption emerges an element of ourselves not easily assimilable to waking consciousness, the mysterious entity the Greeks called the *psukhē*. This paper examines Greek thought on sleep and this somnolent *psukhē*. In particular, it considers how ancient philosophers theorized the sleep state; how they staged sleep as a philosophical problem and attempted to reclaim the sleeping soul as part of a productive – waking – philosophical life.

Sleep is a strange condition, and I can attest that it appears increasingly strange the more sleepless nights one spends thinking about it. A great deal has been written both in antiquity and modernity about dreams, sleep’s flashy stage-show, but almost nothing about sleep per se. Freud himself was not much interested in sleep. He dismisses it at the opening of *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a matter of mere physiology, and moves swiftly past it to get to dreams and their significance.² Dreams benefit from a certain semiotic bias: they seem to hold a meaning that we can interpret (hence *The Interpretation of Dreams*). Dreams promise to communicate to us: if the unconscious is structured like a *langue*, as Lacan famously asserted, dreams are its *parole*.³ For the ancient Greeks, too, the

1 Rehearsal for death: Anax. DK59 A34. Privation of perception: Arist. *de Somn.* 453b24-454a11, 454b23-455a3.

2 Freud 1953, 1-87. “I have had little occasion to deal with the problem of sleep, for that is essentially a problem of physiology, even though one of the characteristics of the state of sleep must be that it brings about modifications in the conditions of functioning of the mental apparatus” (Freud 1953, 6). Those modifications are never examined. Cf. Freud 1953, 526, 542, 554-55, 567-68: sleep enables dreams because it relaxes censorship. On sleep in Freud see Rose 2003, 105-24, Farbman 2008, 23-47, Wortham 2013, 41-50.

3 E.g. Lacan 2006.

dream was literally significant: it was a sign (*sēmeion*) to the dreamer from the gods. That sign was often superficially opaque, but its meaning became legible if you knew how to interpret it, and there was a whole industry of hermeneutics designed to help one do so. Once deciphered, dreams predicted what would happen, what one must do or not do. Resolutely non-psychological (much less psychoanalytic) dreams speak prosaically to the waking self.⁴

For the Greeks, then, as for Freud, the appeal of dreams is their significance: they are signs that invite interpretation. Sleep, by contrast, seems to offer nothing to interpret. Compared to dreams' vivid dramas, sleep has no characters and no plot. Nothing happens. Sleep has nothing to say to us, and there seems to be nothing we can say about it. While dreams are, with some translation, accessible to our conscious minds, sleep remains radically opaque to waking life. Who am I when I am asleep? Maurice Blanchot, who has written movingly about sleep, insists on the difference between the "I" of sleep and the "I" of the dream: "The one who dreams turns away from the one who sleeps; the dreamer is not the sleeper ... Between the one who sleeps and the one who is the subject of the dream's plot, there is a fissure, the hint of an interval and a difference of structure."⁵ For Blanchot, it is the dream that is a mystery. He views sleep as a psychic defense against "the eccentricity of the dream." Sleep is the sentinel of the waking self; the dreamer is "a stranger."⁶ But I will propose that for the Greeks, at least, the reverse is true: while the dreamer can be assimilated to the daytime self, the sleeper is the one who is the stranger.

Sleep reveals something within us alien to our rational waking minds. This makes it a challenge to philosophy, as the supreme exercise of the rational waking mind. My paper looks at how three philosophers – Heraclitus, Plato, and Aristotle – responded to this challenge. Each offered a theory of sleep in its relation to death and the life of the individual, the human being, or the cosmos.

4 For the art of dream interpretation see esp. Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* (Harris-McCoy 2012) and Foucault 1986, 3-36 for the role of this *tekhne* in the cultivation of the ethical subject. For Greek views on dreams see Kessels 1978, Harris 2009, Oberhelman 2013; and further references in Van der Eijk 2005, ch. 6, n. 3.

5 Blanchot 1997, 141. Carson 2005 praises sleep as "a glimpse of something *incognito*" (20) and explores the "leaky" boundary between sleep and wakefulness in ancient and modern poetry. See also the sensitive study of Calabi 1984, who likewise stresses the continuity between the two states in Greek thought before Aristotle.

6 Blanchot 1997, 144. Farbman 2008, 48-68 offers a lucid analysis of Blanchot's poetics of sleep. As Nancy 2009, 12 notes, the questions of identity raised by sleep are also dissipated by sleep and can only be asked upon waking: "There is no phenomenology of sleep, for it shows itself only its disappearance" (Nancy 2009, 13). For the practicalities and sociology of sleep, ancient and modern, see, respectively, Strobl 2002 and Williams 2011.

In so doing, each attempted to reclaim sleep for waking existence, to make sleep significant within his specific philosophical system, and to join the sleeping psyche to the waking, philosophical self. But that attempt never fully succeeds. Instead, philosophy consistently posits sleep as its own blindspot. That which cannot be spoken by its *logos*, a blissful oblivion within its well-examined life, sleep appears as a dark after-image in the eternal daylight of reason. The turn to dreams is just one symptom of philosophy's aporia in the face of sleep's opacity. If that turn from sleep to dreams has a legacy in Freud's *Traumdeutung*, then returning to the sleep of the Greeks may allow us to ask what we post-Freudians lose by closing our eyes to sleep.

In devising their theories of sleep the philosophers built on a rich, if not fully articulated, tradition of thought on the topic, one that yoked it insistently to death and the *psukhē*. Hupnos is usually paired with his brother Thanatos in archaic and classical art and literature. Euphronios' famous image of the death of Sarpedon [image 1] makes the two gods (Hupnos on the left and Thanatos on the right) virtually identical.⁷ The brothers are often shown laying out the body of the dead on fifth-century Athenian white-ground lekythoi used in private funerary rituals, a scene presumably designed to console mourners by equating death with the sweet release of sleep.⁸ Myth draws a similar connection in the tale of Endymion, the young hunter to whom the gods granted his wish "to slumber undying and ageless through all time."⁹ Ancient authors were divided, though, on whether this endless slumber was a reward or a punishment. Endymion's sleep is not exactly death, but it is not exactly life either; the slumbering boy is not divine, but no more is he fully mortal, a creature defined by the ineluctable finality of death.¹⁰ Instead he is suspended forever between mortal and immortal, and his ambiguous status exemplifies the peculiar ontological status of sleep itself: are sleepers alive or dead?

7 As Shapiro 1993, 133 notes, this is practically the only type-scene in which Hupnos figures in the archaic period. Euphronios' krater was the model for later versions of the scene (Shapiro 1993, 133-47).

8 Shapiro 1993, 165, Peifer 1989, 220-21, 234, 246, Oakley 2004, 126. On Hupnos on Attic white lekythoi see further Peifer 1989, 235-47, Shapiro 1991, 650, Shapiro 1993, 141-46, Oakley 2004, 125-37. At Soph. *OC* 1578 Thanatos is *ton atēnupnon*. Sleep is depicted as a release from suffering at Soph. *Phil.* 766-79, 826-32, Eur. *Or.* 158-59, 174-81, 211-14. Cf. Fr. Adesp. 929g PMG, where sleep is figured as a mother's loving embrace. Vermeule 1979, 145-78 stresses sleep's connection to death and eros in archaic art and poetry.

9 Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.56. Cf. Hesiod fr. 245, 260 MW: Zeus made him θανάτου τρυφῆς. In Apollodoros Endymion is the lover of Selene (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.56; cf. Fr. Adesp. 119 PMG; Anth. Gk. 5.123, 6.58, 16.337), perhaps by assimilation to the story of Eos and Tithonus. Likymnios of Chios (Athenaeus 13.564) makes him the *erōmenos* of Hupnos himself. The scholiast on Ap. Rhod. 4.57-58 relays various versions of the story.

10 Gods can sleep (Zeus in *Iliad* 14 is the prime example), but do so only exceptionally: Montiglio 2016, 19-31. Plato, as we will see, represents Endymion's condition as an endless death (*Phaedo* 72b7-c2). For Aristotle it is the antithesis of the eternal contemplative life of the gods (*NE* 10.8.7).

Natural philosophers explained sleeping as a minor case of the conditions that cause death, whether that is warming of the chest (for Diogenes), lack of breath and expulsion of heat (for the atomists), or separation of soul from body (for Anaxagoras).¹¹ For these thinkers sleep reveals “the lesser mysteries of death,” as the comic poet Mnesimachus put it (ὕπνος τὰ μικρὰ τοῦ θανάτου μυστήρια, fr. 11 K-A).

As a daily virtual experience of death and rebirth, sleep afforded unique access to the mysterious life-force that the Greeks called the *psukhē*, that vital element within the individual that cannot be reduced to his physical body and is not fully extinguished with his death. In Homer, the *psukhē* (or *eidōlon* as it is also termed) appears as a ghostly double of the dying hero; breathed out with his final breath, it flutters away to the underworld. We get a glimpse of this ethereal creature in an early-fifth century vase by the Diosphos Painter [image 2]. The scene again depicts the death of Sarpedon, but with the novel addition of a little *psukhē* floating above the dead warrior.¹² Hovering between the dead man and the gods, the acrobatic spirit is visually connected to each (the former in his horizontal orientation and naked musculature, the latter in his eye-level placement and striking white shield). That it physically touches Thanatos and the corpse but not Hupnos perhaps indicates a subsidiary role for the latter, as in the Homeric version of the episode.¹³ But the careful framing of the *eidōlon* between the three suggests that, while Thanatos may call forth the *psukhē*, Hupnos is needed to create the visual field in which it can appear and be figured. The artist Parrhesios reportedly remarked that the *psukhē* is impossible to represent because it has no shape or color or visible properties (Xen. *Mem.* 3.10.3-4). But to the extent that the *psukhē* is visible and representable, sleep helps make it so.

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- 11 Diogenes DK64 A29, A34; Leucip. DK67 A34; Democr. DK68 A136; Anax. DK59 A103; cf. Emped. DK31 A85 and Anax. DK59 A34: “there are two rehearsals (*didaskalias*) for death: the time before birth and sleep.” See further Schol. ad *Iliad.* 14.231 for various comparisons of sleep and death.
- 12 This amphora (*ABL* 239; *ABV* 509, 137) is in New York. A similar image on an amphora in the Louvre (*ABL* 238,135) has the *eidōlon* hovering face down, eye-to-eye with the dead hero; it is naked (though armed) like the warrior and winged like Thanatos and Hupnos. On these images, see Peifer 1989, 194-95, 226-34, Shapiro 1993, 136-37. A late-fifth-century red-figure mug in Liverpool showing the same scene depicts Sarpedon’s *eidōlon* not as a warrior but as a nude beardless man, “a figure very similar to some representations of Sleep himself” (Stafford 2003, 80); discussion of this vase can be found in Robertson 1988.
- 13 Although Hera advises Zeus to have “Thanatos and painless Hupnos” carry the warrior back to his homeland for burial when “his *psukhē* and his lifespan have left him” (*Il.* 16.454), the moment of the soul’s departure is the *telos thanatoio* (502), as Sarpedon’s *psukhē* is drawn out of him with Patroclus’ spear-point (505). Cf. 16.671-83, where Hupnos reappears after the extended scum over the body to help Thanatos carry it off.

As a living experience of death, sleep afforded a quotidian imagination of the *psukhē* not just as an extreme near-death phenomenon but as part of the everyday/everynight self.¹⁴ A literary example of this quotidian psychoanalysis comes in a fragment of a *thrēnos*, a funeral lament, by Pindar (fr. 131b S-M):

καὶ σῶμα μὲν πάντων ἔπεται θανάτῳ περισθενεῖ,
ζῶν δ' ἔτι λείπεται αἰῶνος εἶδωλον· τὸ γὰρ ἐστὶ μόνον
ἐκ θεῶν· εὕδει δὲ προσόντων μελέων, ἀτὰρ εὐδόν-
τεςσιν ἐν πολλοῖς ὄνειροις
δείκνυσι τερπνῶν ἐφέροισαν χαλεπῶν τε κρῖσιν.

The body of all men follows powerful death, but it leaves behind a still-living image (*eidōlon*) of its lifetime, for this alone is from the gods. It sleeps when the limbs are active, but when they sleep in many dreams, it reveals the encroaching decision of delights or difficulties.

These lines draw a tight connection between sleep, death, and the *psukhē*, that “still-living *eidōlon* of a lifetime” left behind after the body’s demise. The fragment falls into two halves. The first describes death and opposes the mortal body to the immortal soul, emphasized by the enjambed phrase “from the gods.” The second describes sleep, and sets the sleeping body against the dreaming soul. Contemporary natural philosophers debated whether sleep was a state of the body or the soul.¹⁵ Pindar attributes it to both, but in strict alternation. The soul “sleeps when the limbs are active.” But when they sleep,

14 Scholars who trace the *psukhē*’s evolution from an evanescent life-force of the dying hero (in Homer) to the immortal essence of the living person (in Plato) often locate the pivot between the two in the eschatological theories of Pythagorean mystery cults, with their promise of reincarnation. Not everyone belonged to a mystery cult, though, but everyone sleeps. For this evolutionary narrative see Burnet 1916, Rohde 1925, Snell 1953, Furley 1956, Nussbaum 1972a, Claus 1981, Robb 1986. Holmes 2010, 29-37 offers a critical reassessment of this account.

15 Aetius 5.25 offers a survey of Presocratic views on the question. On the Aetius passage (which is also the source for the citations in note 11 above) see Laks 2015. The Hippocratic *On Regimen* 4.86 imagines body and soul as alternating administrations: when the body is awake, the soul is its servant (ὑπερηρέουσα), attending to its perception and motion, and not “in possession of itself” (οὐ γίγνεται αὐτῇ ἐωυτῆς); but when the body sleeps, the soul awakes and “manages its own household” (διοικεῖ τὸν ἐωυτῆς οἶκον). The alternating agency of body and soul recalls Pindar, while the diction of mastery and household management anticipates Plato.

that *eidōlon* awakes and, true to its divine origins, reveals the future in prophetic dreams.¹⁶ In the process it reveals itself. Pindar does not examine this restless *eidōlon* nor explore its relation to the sleeping self, but he does point the way toward doing so. Between life and death, mortality and divinity, the soul in its difference from the body becomes active and visible in sleep. If we wish to examine the *psukhē*, then sleep is our royal road.

We can start down that road following Pindar's near contemporary Heraclitus, a philosopher who has himself been credited with the "discovery" of the soul.¹⁷ Like Pindar, Heraclitus links sleep closely to death and the *psukhē*; but unlike Pindar, he offers a theoretical account (*logos*) of their connection, an account both physical and metaphysical. Sleep appears in the opening lines of Heraclitus' treatise as a guiding metaphor for ignorance and philosophical dullness:

τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ' ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκούσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασι, πειρώμενοι καὶ ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιοῦτων, ὁκοίων ἐγὼ διηγέυμαι κατὰ φύσιν διαίρεών ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λανθάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὔδοντες ἐπιλανθάνονται.

Of this *logos* which exists always mortals are always uncomprehending, (*axunetoī*) both before they have heard it and when they first have heard it. Though all things come about in accordance with this *logos*, they are like people without experience even when they experience such words and deeds as I expound, distinguishing each thing according to its nature and saying how it is. But other men are not aware of what they do when they are awake, just as they forget what they do when asleep. (Heraclitus DK22 B1)

16 See the discussion in Cannata Fera 1990, 190-94.

17 Snell 1953, 17; cf. Nussbaum 1972a, Nussbaum 1972b, Claus 1981, 125-38, Robb 1986. On Heraclitus on sleep see Mansfeld 1967, Kahn 1979, 213-16, Calabi 1984, 24-25, Laks 2015, 40-45. Text and numbering of the fragments follow Diels and Kranz 2004.

Heraclitus begins with the *logos* that names both the underlying structure of the universe and his own account of it. That he opens his treatise with the word “word” hints at the semiotic nature of his cosmos, which has a logic, order, and significance. The *psukhē* too has a *logos*, one said to be unfathomably deep (B45) and always expanding (B115).¹⁸ This cosmic and psychic *logos* is enigmatic, as is Heraclitus’ *logos* about it. His description of the Delphic oracle (B93) – “it neither speaks (*legei*), nor conceals (*kruptei*), but signifies (*sēmainei*)” – is often taken as a paradigm for Heraclitus’ own dreamlike style. But it also describes his universe, which has a significance and conveys it, obscurely, to us.

What is the place of sleep in this land of *logos*? Sleep is presented in this opening fragment as a mode of *lēthē*, forgetfulness or unawareness. In contrast to Heraclitus’ own philosophical “wokeness,” other men are always uncomprehending of the *logos* that exists always. The adjective Heraclitus uses here, *axunetoi*, alludes via negation to *to xunon*, Heraclitus’ word for the unity of his universe, in which opposites merge and all things are one. In their lethargy, mortals fail to comprehend their connection – *xun* – with the cosmic order. As Heraclitus says in fragment B2, “Although the *logos* is in common (*xunou*), the majority live as if they had their own private thought” (τοῦ λόγου δ’ ἐόντος ξυνού ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔχοντες φρόνησιν). That “as if” is depicted as a waking sleep in fragment B89: “Heraclitus says that the cosmos is one and in common for those who are awake, but each sleeper turns to his own private cosmos” (ὁ Ἡ. φησι τοῖς ἐγρηγορόσιν ἓνα καὶ κοινὸν κόσμον εἶναι, τῶν δὲ κοιμωμένων ἕκαστον εἰς ἴδιον ἀποστρέφεσθαι).¹⁹ The philosopher’s task is to rouse mortals from their torpor, to transform their private “idiotic” thought into a *xunos logos*, a shared awareness that “all things are one” (B50; cf. B32, B41).

18 Kahn 1979, 127-28 sees the *logos* of the soul as ultimately coincidental with the *logos* of the universe.

19 The fragment is quoted by P_s-Plutarch, *On Superstition*. Only the first clause seems to be Heraclitus’ own words; the second is a paraphrase of B2. Laks and Most 2016 (R56) take the whole quotation as paraphrase. In a series of fragments quoted by Marcus Aurelius “to act and speak like sleepers” (B73) is to “forget where the road is leading” (B71); for such men “those they encounter every day seem to them strangers” (B72). Cf. B75 (from the same source and probably spurious): “I think Heraclitus says that sleepers are laborers and collaborators in what comes to be in the universe” (τοὺς καθεύδοντας οἶμαι ὁ Ἡ. ἐργάτας εἶναι λέγει καὶ συνεργούς τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ γινομένων). Sextus Empiricus (A16) explains the “idiocy” of Heraclitus’ sleeper in physical terms, as a temporary separation of the individual’s mind from the surrounding element, which is rational and divine. But his analysis is anachronistic, as Polito 2003 shows. In addition to the Hellenistic sources Polito identifies, he may have been influenced by Plato’s account at *Tim.* 45d-46a of sleep as the cutting off of our inner fire from the external fire of the sun.

One vehicle of this transformation, paradoxically, is sleep itself. On the one hand, sleep is a private world that alienates the sleeper from the unity of the cosmos. On the other hand, sleep affords our most profound experience of that unity and hence of the cosmic *logos*. Fragment B26 reads: “A man kindles a light for himself in the night when his eyes are extinguished. While he is alive, he touches the dead in his sleep; waking, he touches the sleeper” (ἄνθρωπος ἐν εὐφρόνῃ φάος ἅπτεται ἑαυτῷ [ἀποθανόντων] ἀποσβεσθεὶς ὄψεις, ζῶν δὲ ἅπτεται τεθνεώτος εὐδῶν, [ἀποσβεσθεὶς ὄψεις], ἐγρηγορῶς ἅπτεται εὐδοντος).²⁰ The structure of this fragment is similar to that of Pindar’s *thrēnos*. The first clause seems to describe death. That is how Clement, who quotes the fragment, understands it: ἀποθανόντων is his annotation. The second clause describes life (ζῶν) as an alternation of sleeping and waking. But instead of viewing these states as a binary opposition, this fragment posits a continuum between them. The living man “touches” (*haptetai*) the dead, his own dead self. Sleep is the condition of that “touch,” which is then carried over into waking life: waking, he touches the sleeper. The language of the fragment, with its balanced clauses, repetitions, and intricate word order, replicates that continuum, weaving life and death, sleeping and waking into a synthetic state that serves as a virtual definition of *anthrōpos*.

That state also connects man to the cosmos. The language of kindling and quenching in the fragment, as well as the repeated verb *haptetai*, link this fragment to B30: “This cosmos, the same of all, no god nor man created, but it always was and is and will be fire ever-living, kindled (*haptomenon*) in measure and extinguished in measure” (κόσμον τόνδε, τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ’ ἦν αἰεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰείζων, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα). This fragment tells of the elemental cycles of becoming that characterize Heraclitus’ material universe: fire becomes sea, sea becomes earth, then back again in a never-ending revolution. This cycle of transformation is manifested

20 Mansfeld 1967 provides the history of emendation and interpretation of the fragment, which he reads as distinguishing a waking sleep (associated with digestion and evaporation) from dreamless sleep (analogous to death). Cf. Rousseau 1970. Laks 2015, 44 stresses sleep as a simultaneous experience of life and death but reads the fragment as referring to dreams. Likewise Kahn 1979, 214-15, with reference to the Pindar fragment discussed above.

in our own lives in the turning of the seasons (B100), the passing of generations (B20, A19), and the alternation of day and night (B6, 94). Waking and sleeping are a quotidian experience of the underlying dynamics of the physical universe.

But just as the cosmos is always changing yet always “the same of all,” sleeping and waking are not opposite states but really just alternating versions of the same state, as fr. B88 asserts: “The same thing within: the living and the dead, what is awake and what is sleeping, the young and the old. For these, changing, are those and those, changing again, are these” (ταὐτό τ’ ἐνι ζῶν καὶ τεθνηκὸς καὶ [τὸ] ἐγρηγορὸς καὶ καθεῦδον καὶ νέον καὶ γηραιόν· τάδε γὰρ μεταπεσόντα ἐκεῖνά ἐστι κακείνα πάλιν μεταπεσόντα ταῦτα).²¹ In sleeping and waking we experience not just the physical structure of the universe but also its metaphysical consequences: the unity of opposites, the principle that “what differs with itself accords” (διαφερόμενον ἐωυτῷ ὁμολογέει, literally, “speaks the same *logos*,” B51). This is precisely the *logos* that mortals are too drowsy to see, the hidden reality of the cosmos.

Again, that reality is paradoxically grasped most fully in sleep, for only sleep allows us to touch death *and* immortal life. When a man kindles a light for himself in the darkness of death, he joins in the cycle of the fire ever-living and in this way gains immortality. This immortal self is what Heraclitus calls the *psukhē*. Fragment B36 reads: “For souls it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth; from earth water is born, from water soul” (ψυχῆσιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχή). The *psukhē* is that aspect of the self that participates in the cosmic cycle; it is part of the material stuff of the cosmos and undergoes its regular transformations. Cycling perpetually between fire, water, and earth it is as eternal as the cosmic cycle itself.²²

21 The opening, as Diels prints it, is probably corrupt, and scholars are divided on what to do with τ’ ἐνι. Laks and Most 2016 (D68) print γ’ ἐνι and translate “there is the same within”: see Laks 2015, 43.

22 That this immortality is not individual (as it will be for Plato) but elemental is suggested by the shift from the plural *psukhai* at the beginning of the cycle to the singular *psukhē* at the end: the process transforms individual souls into the elemental stuff, “soul.” See Betegh 2013.

It is this ever-living *psukhē* that we touch in sleep. In B26, I have been translating the verb *haptetai* in the first clause as a middle voice: “kindles for himself.” But that usage is unparalleled, and it is equally possible that the verb is passive.²³ That would make man himself the light kindled in the dark. In another fragment Heraclitus describes the *psukhē* as a flash or spark of light (*augē*, B118).²⁴ Lit up by death, man becomes a *psukhē*, a literal flash of the cosmic fire. Sleep lets us grasp that spark, *haptetai* again. By repeating the verb, Heraclitus equates the sleeper’s grasp with the kindled *psukhē*, conveying the latter’s spark to the sleeper, and from there (via another *haptetai*) to the waking self. Far from a lethargy that blinds mortals to the reality of the cosmos, sleep affords them experience of that reality and their own part in it.

Charles Kahn describes this fragment as “the dream experience of the *psukhē*” and reads it as a descent from waking consciousness into the dim light of dream.²⁵ But Heraclitus never mentions dreams in the extant fragments and the repetition of *haptetai* suggests a grasp more haptic than visual or cognitive, a physical binding or joining (the root meaning of *haptō*) of the individual to the universe. That bond never rises to the level of *logos*, as it might if it were conveyed semiotically through a dream. This leaves sleep and its touch in an uncertain relation to the *logos* of Heraclitus’ universe, as well as his own dreamlike *logos* about it. That uncertainty is palpable in fr. B21, one of the most perplexing in the corpus. “Death is whatever we see when awake, whatever we see when sleeping is sleep” (θάνατός ἐστιν ὅκῳσα ἐγερθέντες ὀρέομεν, ὅκῳσα δὲ εὐδόντες ὕπνος). This fragment promises a perfect chiasmus between death and life/waking and sleeping. But in place of the traditional association between death and sleep, the first clause surprisingly associates death with waking. Perhaps this can be chalked up to the coincidence of opposites, another way of saying that life and death are one.

23 In the active *haptō* means to fasten or join, as well as to kindle; in the middle it usually means to touch or to grasp, both physically and (by extension) conceptually, and takes a genitive. The construction here, a middle with the accusative, is thus doubly atypical: see Rousseau 1970. Heidegger and Fink 1993, 127-49 worry at some length over the meaning of *haptetai* in Heraclitus B26.

24 The text of B118 is uncertain. On the fire of the soul see Kahn 1979, 245-54, Betegh 2013.

25 Kahn 1979, 215.

But even if we can explain the first clause, what about the second? The symmetry promised by the fragment's chiasmic structure is broken with the final word, where instead of the expected *bios* as the opposite of *thanatos*, we get *hupnos*. Death is whatever we see when awake, whatever we see when sleeping is ... sleep.²⁶ In sleep we do not see death. Nor do we see life. We don't even see dreams. Sleep promises to let us touch our cosmic souls, but all it finally delivers is sleep. *Hupnos* folds hypnotically back in on itself, an interpretive black hole.

For Heraclitus, then, sleep is simultaneously the private idiocy that separates us from the true nature of the cosmos and the deathlike state that allows us access to it, that lets us grasp that spark of the ever-living fire that is the *psukhē*. But sleep holds tight its secrets. It might "touch" the truth, but will not communicate it even through the ambiguous signification of dreams. Thus Heraclitus' aphorism about the Delphic oracle – "it neither speaks nor conceals but signifies" (B93) – might be extended: sleep does not speak, conceal, or signify. Indeed, in B21 it paralyzes signification, eluding even Heraclitus' paradoxical *logos*. This turns sleep itself into a philosophical paradox: our best hope of living access to the cosmic *logos* but itself inaccessible to *logos*, sleep marks both our connection to the *xunos logos* of the universe and our essential alienation from it.

A similar philosophical impasse surrounds sleep in Plato. For Plato, sleep is largely allegorical: he doesn't analyze the sleep state itself so much as he uses sleep's association with death and the *psukhē* to articulate his vision of an ever-wakeful philosophical soul. For Plato, as for Heraclitus, sleep denotes intellectual dullness. The pair *onar/hupar* – dreaming/waking – appears frequently to denote Plato's distinction between the insubstantial

26 Kahn 1979, 213 "Does Heraclitus mean after all to identify life with the private, half-conscious, phantom experience of the dream world? Apparently not, and that is why the sentence does not end as symmetry would require." Diels emphasizes the asymmetry with his proposed supplement: ὄζόσα δὲ τεθνηκότεζ ζωή; cf. Brown 1986.

world of phenomena and the enduring truth of the Forms. So, he asks in the *Republic*, if a man believes in beautiful things but not in the Beautiful itself, doesn't he seem to live dreaming not waking? "For isn't this what dreaming is, if someone, whether asleep or awake, judges something that resembles something else not to be like it but to be the thing it resembles?" (*Rep.* 476c1-7).²⁷ Most of us sleepwalk through life (*Rep.* 534c6-d1). In fact, we are not even aware that we are asleep. The *Theaetetus* poses the conundrum (which was later to give Descartes sleepless nights) of how we can prove that we are currently awake, not asleep and dreaming we are awake (*Theaet.* 157e-58e). This question is raised to refute the claim that perception (*aisthēsis*) is knowledge (*epistēmē*) and that what appears true to an individual is true for him. When we are asleep, our dreams appear real to us, but are not. Just as dream perceptions are false in relation to waking, so waking perceptions are false in relation to the truth, *alētheia*, of real knowledge (158d). Sleep becomes a paradigm for unreliable perception, idiosyncratic and unstable. We will only be awake and certain that we are awake when we come to know the enduring truth of the Forms.

For the philosopher who equates knowledge with virtue, sleep's epistemological torpor has an inevitably ethical dimension. The *Apology* famously depicts Socrates as a gadfly rousing a *polis* that is "like a great and noble horse made sluggish by its own weight" (*Apol.* 30e). The Athenians are annoyed at him for waking them from their nap (οἱ νυστάζοντες ἐγειρόμενοι, 31a4), but if they kill him, he says, they will sleep away the rest of their lives (τὸν λοιπὸν βίον καθεύδοντες διατελοῖτε ἄν, 31a5-6). "Waking" the Athenians means exhorting them to care for their souls, a project Socrates pursues without rest. Indeed, Socrates himself is renowned for not sleeping: at the end of the *Symposium*, at dawn when all the other guests have long since passed out, he is still up and talking philosophy.

27 Miller 2015, 40-46 stresses the importance of this passage for Platonic metaphysics, but also argues for the instability of its dichotomy between *onar* and *bupar*, given that *bupar* can also mean a sleeping vision (e.g. *Od.* 19.547-50). Gallop 1971 provides a helpful survey of the trope of dreaming vs. waking in Plato: his interpretation of the *Republic* as a prophetic dream deconstructs the dichotomy from the side of dreaming, as Miller does from the side of waking. See also Calabi 1984, 25-26, 33-34, who stresses Plato's ambivalent representation of sleep's relation to cognition.

In his vigilance Socrates exemplifies an ideal Plato presents in the *Laws*.

ὑπνος γὰρ δὴ πολὺς οὔτε τοῖς σώμασιν οὔτε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ἡμῶν οὐδ' αὖ
 ταῖς πράξεσιν ταῖς περὶ ταῦτα πάντα ἀρμόττων ἐστὶν κατὰ φύσιν.
 καθεύδων γὰρ οὐδεὶς οὐδενὸς ἄξιος, οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τοῦ μὴ ζώντος·
 ἀλλ' ὅστις τοῦ ζῆν ἡμῶν καὶ τοῦ φρονεῖν μάλιστα ἐστὶ κηδεμών,
 ἐγρήγορε χρόνον ὡς πλείστον, τὸ πρὸς ὑγίειαν αὐτοῦ μόνον φυλάττων
 χρήσιμον, ἔστιν δὲ οὐ πολὺ, καλῶς εἰς ἔθος ἰόν.

A lot of sleep is not naturally fitting for our bodies or our souls or the practices concerning all these things. For no one who is asleep is worth anything, any more than one who is not alive. And whoever cares most about living and thinking is awake as much as possible, sleeping only as much as is necessary for health, which isn't much, once he's gotten into the habit. (*Laws* 808b3-c2)

Here sleep is moralized as part of a rational and orderly life. Judged by criteria of propriety, utility, and health, sleep is not only the antithesis of a philosophical life (“living and thinking”); it is the antithesis of life itself, “for no one who is asleep is worth anything, any more than one who is not alive.” The sleeper may as well be dead. Accordingly, Plato recommends that masters in the house and rulers in the city sleep as little as possible.

If the *Laws* coopt sleep for a regime of domestic and civic mastery, the *Republic* tries to do the same thing for the psychic economy of the individual. As in the city, so in the soul, sleep poses an essentially managerial problem. If mishandled, it threatens the hegemony of the *logistikón*, the rational, ruling part within Plato's tripartite division of the soul. Presocratic philosophers debated whether sleep was a condition of the body or the soul and Pindar, as we saw, attributes it to both in an alternation that makes somatic and psychic activity mutually exclusive. For Plato in the *Republic*, sleep opens a potential division not just between body and soul but between different parts of the soul. The philosopher must work to overcome that division. Thus, whereas Heraclitus' sleeper grasped his unity with the cosmos, Plato's sleeper aims at internal unity, striving to “reach consensus with himself” (εἰς σύννοιαν αὐτὸς αὐτῷ ἀφικόμενος, 571d8-e1).

Book 9 opens with an etiology of the tyrannical man, who is in waking life what most men are in sleep (574e, 576b). In sleep, while the *logistikon* dozes, the desiderative part of the soul, the *epithumētikon*, wakes and runs wild. Casting off shame and thought along with sleep, it does not shrink from having sex with its mother or killing someone (perhaps its father?) (571c2-d3).²⁸ The Freudian resonances of these Oedipal adventures are striking. Just as for Freud sleep weakens the superego's censorship, giving free play to the id, so too for Plato the dynamic is one of constraint and release. For Plato, as for Freud, this nocturnal drama is natural and universal: sleep merely makes manifest the lawless desire in each of us, even those who seem most circumspect (572b4-6). But, unlike Freud, Plato responds with an injunction to psychic mastery.²⁹ A "healthy and prudent" man will rouse his *logistikon* before he goes to bed and calm his *epithumētikon*, so it will not trouble him in the night. Internal governance of the soul is no different from that of the house and city: proper sleep hygiene requires perpetual vigilance of the *logistikon* over the lower orders.

Thus managed, sleep itself becomes a kind of nocturnal philosophy:

Ὅταν δέ γε οἶμαι ὑγιεινῶς τις ἔχη αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ σωφρόνως, καὶ εἰς τὸν ὕπνον ἢ τὸ λογιστικὸν μὲν ἐγείρας ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐστιάσας λόγων καλῶν καὶ σκέψεων, εἰς σύννοιαν αὐτὸς αὐτῷ ἀφικόμενος, τὸ ἐπιθυμητικὸν δὲ μήτε ἐνδεία δοῦς μήτε πλησμονῆ, ὅπως ἂν κοιμηθῆ καὶ μὴ παρέχη θόρυβον τῷ βελτίστῳ χαίρον ἢ λυπούμενον, ἀλλ' ἐὰ αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μόνον καθαρὸν σκοπεῖν καὶ ὀρέγεσθαι τοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι ὃ μὴ οἶδεν, ἢ τι τῶν γεγονότων ἢ ὄντων ἢ καὶ μελλόντων, ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς πρᾶνας καὶ μὴ τισιν εἰς ὀργὰς ἐλθὼν κεινημένῳ τῷ θυμῷ καθεύδει, ἀλλ' ἡσυχάσας μὲν τῷ δύο εἶδη, τὸ τρίτον δὲ κινήσας ἐν ᾧ τὸ φρονεῖν ἐγγίγνεται, οὕτως ἀναπαύηται, οἶσθ' ὅτι τῆς τ' ἀληθείας ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ μάλιστα ἄπτεται καὶ ἥκιστα παρὰ νόμοι τότε αἱ ὄψεις φαντάζονται τῶν ἐνυπνίων.

28 Plato does not call these activities dreams here, but that he is thinking of dreams becomes clear at 572b1 (αἱ ὄψεις φαντάζονται τῶν ἐνυπνίων); cf. 574d9-e3 (ὄναρ ... ἐν ὕπνῳ; ὄναρ/ὑπάρα), 576b5 (οἶον ὄναρ διήλθομεν).

29 Other points of comparison are noted by Price 1990, 262; cf. Ferrari 2007, 176-78, 188. As Ferrari 2007, 192-93 emphasizes, the desire of the *logistikon* is not merely internal rule but wisdom, and this passage is a key pivot from the former to the latter.

When a healthy and prudent man goes to sleep having roused his *logistikon* and feasted it on noble arguments and speculations, and having reached consensus with himself, he makes sure his *epithumētikon* is neither hungry nor full so that it will sleep the night and not bother the better part with its pleasure or pain, but will allow it, alone and pure in itself, to investigate and reach for the perception of what it does not know, past, present or future; when in the same way he has also calmed the spirited part, so he will not go to bed in anger and with an agitated spirit, but having quieted these two parts and aroused the third, the part that contains thinking, thus he takes his rest, you know that in this state especially he grasps the truth and then the visions of dreams that appear to him are least lawless. (*Rep.* 571d6-572b1)

This somnolent philosophy recalls Heraclitus' sleeping grasp on the cosmic order. Plato uses the same haptic language – the *logistikon* reaches for (ὀρέγεσθαί) perception, the sleeper grasps (ἄπτεται) the truth – and the contemplation of past, present, and future evokes the eternal cycling of Heraclitus' cosmos. But Plato's sleeper, unsurprisingly, practices a markedly Platonic philosophy: αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ is diction Plato uses for the essence or Form of a thing; σκοπεῖν is one of his key terms for the philosophical inquiry of the dialogues.³⁰ More specifically, this sleeping philosophy recalls the emergence of the philosopher from the cave in *Republic* Book 7. *Phantasmata*, used for dreams at the end of this passage, there designate the false appearances of the cave (510a1, 516b5, 532c1); after making the ascent, the philosopher will contemplate the sun not through the *phantasmata* of reflected images, but “itself in itself” (αὐτὸν καθ' αὐτὸν, 516b5).³¹ The philosopher who lives in the sunlight of Truth is said to “dwell in the pure” (οἰκεῖν ἐν τῷ καθαρόν, 520d8). The *alētheia* for which the sleeper reaches, then, is the philosophical truth of this dialogue and Platonic philosophy as a whole.

30 αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ: *Parm.* 130b8 “some form in itself (τι εἶδος αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ) of the just and the beautiful and the good and all such things.” Cf. *Phd.* 100b6. See also *Rep.* 358ab5, d2 (of the treatise's inquiry into justice “in itself”), 476b11 (of the philosophers who can see Beauty in itself). σκοπεῖν is ubiquitous. Gallop 1971, 195 remarks on the “striking affinities between the dreamer and the philosopher” in this passage.

31 *Phantasmata* is also used more generally of *doxa* and *mimēseis* opposed to truth (584a9, 598b3, 594a4). Cf. *Phaedo* 79d, where a similar collocation of terms describes the activity of the soul once freed from the body (Ὅταν δέ γε αὐτὴ καθ' αὐτὴν σκοπῇ, ἐκείσε οἴχεται εἰς τὸ καθαρόν, 79d1; cf. 66a2).

This truth is grasped especially (μάλιστα) in sleep. Plato does not explain how this works, but the final clause of the passage might imply that, with lawless dreams curtailed, truth will come in peaceful dreams. The earlier reference to “the perception of what it does not know, past, present, or future” may allude to prophetic dreams, and Plato may be suggesting that truth comes to the sleeper as a divine message, like the lady in white who appears to the sleeping Socrates at the opening of the *Crito* to tell him the date of his death.³² If so, sleep is not in itself the experience of truth, as it was for Heraclitus. Instead, sleep provides the arena in which struggles for psychic mastery play out and in which, after criminal dreams are crucified, a victorious *logistikón* can enjoy its well-earned rest in peaceful contemplation of the True.

Plato thus appropriates sleep for philosophy by virtually eliminating sleep: like the ideal lawmaker, the philosophical soul barely sleeps. It also barely dies. We read in the *Laws* passage that the sleeper is no better than a corpse. Thanatos is accordingly banned along with Hypnos from the wakeful life of philosophy. In the *Phaedo* Socrates deploys a strained analogy to sleep as an argument for reincarnation of the soul: just as we fall asleep and then wake up, the *psukhē* must die and be reborn (71c-d). This analogy recalls Pindar’s alternating slumber of body and soul, as well as the Heraclitean *psukhē*’s transformations in the elemental cycle of death and generation. But Socrates unbalances those writers’ symmetry and alternation: for him, the body is always dying, but the imperishable soul lives on, ever to be reborn anew. In this sense, the philosophical soul never really dies; for it, sleep is just a prelude to waking and death just a momentary pause in the eternal life of the spirit.

Yet Plato produces this endless daylight of philosophy only by positing a black hole of radical unconsciousness oddly alluring to philosophy itself. One argument for reincarnation is the horrifying alternative, which Socrates poses early in the *Phaedo* only to swiftly reject. What would happen if the living were not born from the *psukhai* of the dead? If that were true, every living soul would end up dead. “It would be as if there were sleeping but no

32 Thus Adams 1929, ad 572a1, who sees in this passage an allusion to “the widespread popular view that the soul during sleep is freed from the trammels of the body, foresees the future, and has access to a region of truth denied, with few exceptions, to the waking mind.” He cites Pindar fr. 131b S-M as a parallel.

corresponding waking-up from sleep to balance it out, so that in the end it would all make Endymion seem like nonsense and he would be unremarkable because everything else would be in the same condition as he, that is, asleep” (ἀλλ’ οἶον εἰ τὸ καταδαρθάνειν μὲν εἴη, τὸ δ’ ἀνεγείρεσθαι μὴ ἀνταποδοιὴ γιγνόμενον ἐκ τοῦ καθεύδοντος, οἶσθ’ ὅτι τελευτώντα πάντ’ ἄν) λήρον τὸν Ἐνδυμίωνα ἀποδείξειεν καὶ οὐδαμοῦ ἄν φαίνοιτο διὰ τὸ καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα ταῦτὸν ἐκεῖνῳ πεπονθέναι, καθεύδειν, 72b7-c2). In place of the soul’s eternal return, Socrates imagines a one-way trip where everything alive ends up irreversibly and eternally dead. This morbid fantasy justifies the conclusion “that things really do come back to life and that the living come from the dead” (72d7-e1), but it does so only by conjuring a nightmare image of global narcosis, sleep without end.

This dark night of the soul recurs in the *Apology*, but now – surprisingly – in the form of a wish-fulfillment dream. That text ends with another analogy of death to sleep. Alongside the traditional mythic imagination of death (which Socrates relishes for the chance to interrogate the wise shades in Hades), Socrates offers an alternative vision of *thanatos*.

καὶ εἴτε δὴ μηδεμία αἴσθησις ἐστὶν ἀλλ’ οἶον ὕπνος ἐπειδὰν τις καθεύδων μὴδ’ ὄναρ μὴδὲν ὄρα, θαυμάσιον κέρδος ἂν εἴη ὁ θάνατος — ἐγὼ γὰρ ἂν οἶμαι, εἴ τινα ἐκλεξάμενον δέοι ταύτην τὴν νύκτα ἐν ἧ οὕτω κατέδαρθεν ὥστε μὴδὲ ὄναρ ἰδεῖν, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμέρας τὰς τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἀντιπαραθέντα ταύτη τῇ νυκτὶ δέοι σκεψάμενον εἰπεῖν πόσας ἄμεινον καὶ ἡδίων ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας ταύτης τῆς νυκτὸς βεβίωκεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ βίῳ, οἶμαι ἂν μὴ ὅτι ἰδιώτην τινά, ἀλλὰ τὸν μέγαν βασιλέα εὐαριθμήτους ἂν εὐρεῖν αὐτὸν ταύτας πρὸς τὰς ἄλλας ἡμέρας καὶ νύκτας — εἰ οὖν τοιοῦτον ὁ θάνατός ἐστιν, κέρδος ἔγωγε λέγω· καὶ γὰρ οὐδὲν πλείων ὁ πᾶς χρόνος φαίνεται οὕτω δὴ εἶναι ἢ μία νύξ.

If it is no perception at all but like sleep when one is sleeping and sees nothing, not even a dream, death would be a marvelous boon. For I think that if someone had to select that night on which he slept (*katedarthen*)

so soundly as to not even see a dream, and setting all the other nights and days of his life against this night he had to say, upon examination, how many days and nights he had lived in his entire life better and more sweetly than this night, I think even the King of Persia himself, to say nothing of some private citizen, would find these days and nights easy to count in comparison to the others. If death is like this, then I say it is a boon, for in this case all time appears to be nothing more than a single night.
(*Ap.* 40c9-34)

In the *Theaetetus* sleep served as the paradigm of false perception and proof that perception (*aisthēsis*) is not knowledge. In the *Republic* sleep allowed the *logistikon* to reach for a perception (*aisthanesthai*) of new knowledge. Here sleep is imagined as a total absence of perception (*mēdemia aisthēsis*).³³ Far from the *Republic's* promise of knowledge past, present, and future – much less the endless cycles of Heraclitus' ever-living fire – here sleep shrinks eternity into a single pitch-black night.³⁴ This anaesthesia is antithetical to philosophy, the negation of both perception and thought. As in Heraclitus B21, the only thing this sleep can see is sleep. Yet this senseless coma is figured not only as the sweetest death but even as the sweetest life. It eclipses not just all other nights but all other days. Upon examination (*skepsamenon*) the best life appears to be the anaesthetic sleep of death.

This is a shocking claim from the philosopher who declared the unexamined life not worth living (*Ap.* 38a5-6). The verb *katadartthanein*, rare in Plato, ties this passage to the *Phaedo's* morbid world of Endymions (72b8).³⁵ Is this endless coma a dream or a nightmare? Plato labors to recuperate sleep for a philosophical life. In so doing he all but erases both sleep and death: the *logistikon* never really sleeps, just as the pure soul never really dies. But there

33 Greek had a word for this kind of anaesthetic state: *kōma*, which Hesychius defines as an “oblivious descent of deep sleep” (ληθώδης καταφορά ὑπνου βαθέος, K4825). But *kōma* seems to have been an exclusively poetic word and is never used by the philosophers. See Wiesmann 1972.

34 In *Physics* 4.11 Aristotle refers to the story of men who fell asleep in the heron in Sardinia, who when they wake do not believe that time has passed because they have not perceived it passing. “On waking, they join the later ‘now’ to the former ‘now’ and make them one, extracting the intervening time on account of lack of perception” (*anaisthēsia*).

35 Apart from *Ap.* 40d3 and *Phaedo* 71d2, 72b8 the verb occurs only at *Symp.* 223c1 and d7 of everyone falling asleep except Socrates. There, too, there is an infernal tenor to the word: Socrates alone ascends to the light of day.

is something in sleep that resists his efforts. Indeed, sleep is posited as the limit of those efforts, the welcome laying down of the burden of philosophical existence. In the *Apology's* dreamless night, the dark release of oblivion appears like a shadow in the eternal sunshine of philosophy's spotless mind. Empty and endless, its sweet lure of unconsciousness beckons even the philosopher.

If the *Apology* imagines the anaesthetic lure of sleep as a negation of the philosophical life, Aristotle will try to reclaim sleep for *aesthēsis*, philosophy, and life. Diogenes Laertius (5.16) reports that Aristotle would lie in bed with a bronze ball in his hand, which would drop into a pot if he dozed off and wake him up. This left him more time to contemplate (among other things) sleep, on which he wrote three short treatises collected in the *Parva Naturalia*. For Aristotle, as we might expect, sleep poses questions of definition and teleology.

πρώτον μὲν οὖν ἐπειδὴ λέγομεν τὴν φύσιν ἔνεκά του ποιεῖν, τοῦτο δὲ ἀγαθόν τι, τὴν δ' ἀνάπαυσιν παντὶ τῷ πεφυκότι κινεῖσθαι, μὴ δυναμένῳ δ' αἰεὶ καὶ συνεχῶς κινεῖσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς, ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι καὶ ὠφέλιμον, τῷ δὲ ὑπνω αὐτῇ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ προσάπτουσι τὴν μεταφορὰν ταύτην ὡς ἀναπαύσει ὄντι — ὥστε σωτηρίας ἔνεκα τῶν ζώων ὑπάρχει. ἢ δ' ἐγρήγορσις τέλος τὸ γὰρ αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν πάσι τέλος οἷς ὑπάρχει θάτερον αὐτῶν. βέλτιστα γὰρ ταῦτα, τὸ δὲ τέλος βέλτιστον. ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον ἐκάστῳ τῶν ζώων ὑπάρχει τὸν ὕπνον.³⁶

First, then, since we say nature acts for the sake of something, and that something is some good, and that rest is necessary and beneficial for everything that moves by nature but is not able to move eternally and continuously with pleasure, and we apply this metaphor to sleep in literal truth, since it is a rest, we conclude that sleep exists for the sake of the preservation of the animal. Waking, by contrast, is the *telos*.

36 Following Gallop 1996's choice of the mss' reading ὥστε ("hence") over ἔτι δὲ ("besides") in 455b26 (the latter printed by Ross 1955). This passage appears to be discontinuous with what precedes and may be part of a prior or later version of the treatise: see Lowe 1978, followed by Gallop 1996, 127, 134; contra, Ross 1955, 260, Woods 1992, 180-81, Everson 2007. One objection to the passage is that it seems to promise to align sleep with Aristotle's four causes, but it is hard to reconcile with that schema. As Gallop 1996, 134 notes, waking is the final cause of sleep but also its opposite and therefore cannot function as its formal cause; cf. Lowe 1978. Its material cause also raises difficulties: Code 2015.

Perceiving and thinking are the *telos* for all animals to which either appertains. For these are best, and the *telos* is what is best. Thus it is necessary that every animal sleep. (*de Somn.* 455b17-26)

No mere metaphor, as it was for Plato, sleep for Aristotle is an affection of the perceptive soul: rocks (which do not have souls) and plants (which do not have perceptive souls) do not sleep. The animal (both human and nonhuman) is defined by perception: waking is thus our natural state. But we cannot be in that state perpetually: the animal needs a rest from perceiving. Sleep is literally that rest.³⁷ Sleep thus exists “for the sake of the preservation of the animal” (455b22; cf. 458a30-32). It serves the *telos* of the waking state of thinking and perceiving and is “necessary and beneficial” for that *telos*. Aristotle breaks from the tradition that associates sleep with death: he examines it as an essential feature of animal life.³⁸

But if sleep serves the *telos* of waking, it does so via an odd negation of that *telos*. Sleep is a pause or cessation (*anapausis*) of the characteristic activities of the animal. It is a negative condition that “preserves” the positive condition of which it is the negation. This negation is built into Aristotle’s basic definition of sleep as “a certain privation (*sterēsis*) of wakefulness” (φαίνεται στέρησις τις ὁ ὕπνος τῆς ἐγρηγόρσεως, 453b26-27).³⁹ More specifically, sleep is a privation of perception, “like a binding or immobility” of the perceptual capacity of the soul.⁴⁰ This makes sleep a peculiar state for creatures defined precisely by perception (454b25-27). It is hard to think of parallels where a privation of a condition is the preservation of that condition and exists for its sake: it would be like saying that blindness exists for the sake of

37 Gallop 1996, ad loc. μεταφορὰν is insecure, and the sense of ἀντὶ τῆ ἀληθεία is uncertain. “The literal truth” is Gallop’s translation.

38 Calabi 1984, 42.

39 See Gallop 1996, 120 ad loc. on the meaning of *sterēsis*. Sleep is usually understood as a primary actuality (it is compared to having knowledge but not using it at *de An.* 412a25-26; cf. *Gen. An.* 735a9-12): e.g. Sprague 1977, Van der Eijk 2005, 177. But the language of privation seems quite distinct from the language of potentiality involved in the primary actuality.

40 οἷον δεσμός τις καὶ ἀκίνησία, 454b11; cf. 454b25-27. Sleep is a binding, in particular, of the “common sense” that coordinates the specific senses and registers qualities (like motion and magnitude) shared by specific sense objects. On the common sense see *de Somn.* 455a4-b13; Wijsenbeek-Wijler 1978, 181-85, Kahn 1966, Modrak 1987, 62-76, 134-44.

vision or deafness for the sake of hearing.⁴¹ The anaesthetic sleep that for Plato figures a dream of death is for Aristotle a functional aspect of animal life, but a perplexing one. It is “necessary and beneficial” to the waking, percipient animal, but not easy to differentiate from malign conditions like unconsciousness, fainting, or epileptic seizures (455b2, 456b12, 457a8, 457b25). And even as it is conducive to health, sleep indicates an internal deficiency in the nature of the animal, its incapacity to be continuously active (*adunamia*, 454a26-32). Sleep thus marks a kind of intermittency in our *phusis*, a literal pause in our being. If the animal is defined by perception, what is a sleeping animal?

Sleep serves and preserves the *telos* of activity and perception, then, but only through the deprivation of activity and perception, a temporary suspension of the immanent teleology of the animal. For the human animal, moreover, sleep would seem to be not just a suspension but in fact a regression. In *de Anima* Aristotle defines the *psukhē* as the actualization of a body that has life in potentiality (*de An.* 412a19-21). The human animal is actualized not just in the nutritive soul (like plants) or the perceptive soul (like animals), but in the rational soul. Our ultimate *telos*, as laid out in that treatise, is not merely *aisthēsis* but knowledge and, at the highest level, *theōria* (contemplation). Aristotle explains this by way of an analogy to sleep. Waking, he says, is like contemplation; sleeping is like having knowledge without exercising it (412a23-26). A life of contemplation would be perfect bliss, a godlike existence Aristotle contrasts to the sleep of Endymion.⁴² As a privation not just of knowledge but even of perception, actual sleep seems to be a move in the wrong direction, a temporary reversion to a lower order: that of the irrational animal or even the insensible plant. Sleep would thus seem to be not just a suspension but a regular reversal of the immanent impulse that drives us to our *telos*, full actualization of the intelligent soul in the activity of contemplation.

41 Cf. Arist. *Meta.* 5.22. As Gallop 1996, 190 notes, the qualification (στέρησις τις) suggests that sleep does not fit neatly into the categories of privation enumerated there.

42 *NE* 10.8.7: *theōretikē energeia* is the most perfect happiness. The gods do not engage in *praxis*, but they are alive and active (*zēn, energein*), “for they do not sleep like Endymion.” Their *energeia* therefore must be theoretical, and theoretical *energeia* must be the most perfect kind. The sleep of Endymion is the opposite not just of the perfect activity but (like sleep in Plato’s *Laws*) of activity and life *tout court*. Cf. *Meta.* 1074b17-18.

Aristotle is not unaware of these aporiai. In fact he raises them explicitly in *On the Generation of Animals* 5.1 in the course of an inquiry into which state comes first in animals, sleeping or waking. The priority of sleep is argued by the fact that “the change from non-existence to existence takes place through the intermediate state” (ἔτι δὲ διὰ τὸ τὴν μετάβασιν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ εἶναι εἰς τὸ εἶναι διὰ τοῦ μεταξὺ γίνεσθαι). Sleep is that intermediate state, “like a borderland between living and not living” (οἶον τοῦ ζῆν καὶ τοῦ μὴ ζῆν μεθόριον). The sleeper, accordingly, “seems to be neither entirely non-existent nor entirely existent, since living pertains in particular to waking on account of perception” (καὶ οὔτε μὴ εἶναι παντελῶς ὁ καθεύδων οὔτ’ εἶναι. τῷ γὰρ ἐγρηγορέναι τὸ ζῆν μάλισθ’ ὑπάρχει διὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν, *de Gen. An.* 778b28-33). If for the animal living is perceiving, as Aristotle argues at length in the *De Anima*, the sleeping animal cannot be said to be fully alive. It is at best only potentially alive, like the embryo that possesses life but does not yet exercise it.⁴³ Not only is it uncertain whether the sleeping animal is alive, it is not even clear that it is an animal. An animal properly becomes an animal only when it acquires sensation; before that time “animals live the life of a plant” (τὰ ζῶα φυτοῦ βίον ζῆν, cf. *EE* 1216a3-8). This vegetative state cannot rightly be called sleep since plants do not sleep, but “it should be considered similar to sleep” (ἀλλ’ ὅμοιον ὕπνω δεῖ νομίζεσθαι, *de Gen An.* 778b33-779a4). From both a developmental and a taxonomic perspective, then, sleep introduces serious ambiguities into the condition of the living animal: asleep, it is neither fully living nor fully animal.

In *On Sleep and Wakefulness* Aristotle does not take up the real perplexity of this borderland condition nor pursue its implications for his larger theorization of the human animal and its soul. The treatise will instead go on to explain the physiology of sleeping (it is the cooling process that follows when heat generated by nutrition rises as far as it can toward the head then flows back downward). Then Aristotle will turn his attention to dreams, which are the subject of the next two treatises, *On Dreams* and *On Divination in Dreams*.

43 Sprague 1977, 231. Likewise, sleep figures the mere potentiality of virtue at *NE* 1095b32-33, 1098b33-99a3, 1102b2-10 (Sprague 1977, 235-38).

Dreams are puzzling because they are “a sort of sense perception” (αἴσθημα τρόπον τινά, *de Insomn.* 456a26) within sleep’s general aesthetic *sterēsis*. The dream thus poses an intriguing contradiction: the perceptions of a state of non-perception.⁴⁴

Aristotle resolves the contradiction by explaining dreams as deferred perceptions, a lingering after-image of daytime sense impressions. It is like when you go from sunlight into darkness, he says, and cannot see the darkness because of the after-image of the light (*de Insomn.* 459b7). During the day these perceptual after-effects are obscured by more vivid thoughts and perceptions, but at night, when there are fewer stimuli, they are more apparent to us (460b28-461a8; cf. *de Div.* 463a7-10). The key passage (*de Insomn.* 461b21-30) is difficult and the text uncertain, but the general gist is clear. We mistake nocturnal sense-remnants for waking sense-perceptions – a dream of Koriskos for the man we saw during the day – because the judging part of our mind (τὸ ἐπικρίνον) is “held in check” (κατέχεται, cf. 461b6), the ruling part (τὸ κύριον) that during the day judges our perceptions and differentiates impressions of objects from the objects themselves (cf. 460b17-18).

Aristotle’s theorization of sleep here approaches Plato’s in *Republic* 9. Dreams arise from a lapse in the vigilance of the judging and ruling part of the mind. Plato, as we saw, stages sleep as a drama of mastery: the *logistikos* must reassert its hegemony over the lawless desires through the practice of nocturnal philosophy. Aristotle deploys the same idiom of power: sleep has a force (*dunamis*) that operates when *to kurion*, the “master-mind,” is restrained (*katekhētai*). But for him the threat to reason’s rule is not bestial desires but a narcosis that makes us forget we are

⁴⁴ Gallop 1996, 20-21: “If dreaming is taken to be a mode of perceptual awareness during sleep, yet sleep is defined as a state of perceptual incapacitation, the very notion of a dream seems threatened by self-contradiction.” Gallop feels that this contradiction is never resolved (Gallop 1996, 25, 28); cf. Woods 1992, 182-84. Van der Eijk 2005, 186, by contrast, thinks Aristotle avoids contradiction by differentiating strictly between the active perception of waking and reactivated perceptions during sleep.

dreaming.⁴⁵ When we're awake "the judging and ruling" part differentiates the real man Koriskos from our impression of him and infers the presence of the former from the latter. But in sleep, we fail to distinguish the thing's impression from the thing itself. "And such is the power of sleep," he concludes, "that it makes us unaware of this" (καὶ τοσαύτη τοῦ ὕπνου ἡ δύναμις ὥστε ποιεῖν τοῦτο λανθάνειν, 461b30). This is a version of the problem Plato broached in the *Theaetetus*, that in sleep our dream images seem so real to us that we question reality itself. Likewise for Aristotle, sleep enshrouds us in a *lēthē* that leaves us unable to differentiate dreams from reality. The sleeper forgets he is asleep. He thinks he is alert and perceiving real objects when he is really just sensing their dreamy after-effect.

This sleeper might well be forgiven for mistaking his sleep for waking, since Aristotle insistently links the two. Dreams are ultimately a version – albeit delayed, degraded, and distorted – of waking mental activity. In fact, in the very next section, right after acknowledging the oblivious force of *hupnos* (461b30-462a8), Aristotle goes on to say that the error can be avoided if one perceives that he is asleep and if "something in him" (τι ἐν αὐτῷ) tells him that what he is seeing appears to be Koriskos but is not actually Koriskos in the flesh (462a4-5). "For often when we are sleeping something in the soul tells us that what is appearing is a dream" (πολλάκις γὰρ καθεύδοντος λέγει τι ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ὅτι ἐνύπνιον τὸ φαινόμενον, 462a5-6). What is this mysterious "something" in the sleeping soul that alerts us that we are asleep and therefore dreaming? It is as if there is something vigilant within sleep, some part of the waking self that remains eternally active – even though we were told that animals cannot be eternally active – and foregoes the necessary and beneficial "rest" of perception so as to impose order on the disordering perceptions of sleep. This psychic "something" perceives and communicates (*legei*): it possesses *logos*, both speech and reason, and conveys them to the sleeper from the wakeful depths of his sleeping soul.

45 As Gallop 1996, 13 observes, Aristotle cannot ultimately subscribe to a psychic division of the sort Plato imagines in *Rep.* 9 because he conceives of sleeping as an affection of the whole organism, not of body or soul alone: see *de Somn.* 453b24-454a11 and Gallop 1996, ad loc.

In fact, despite his insistence that dreams are not affections of perception and thought, then, Aristotle concedes to them a form of both activities, and through them insinuates those waking mental activities back into sleep. Not just residual daytime perceptions, dreams become the conduit of new perceptions even in sleep itself, as Aristotle explains at *de Div.* 463a10-21 (cf. *de Insomn.* 462a15-25): the same stillness and lack of interfering stimuli that allow the sleeper to experience sense-remnants also cause small disturbances to be magnified such that a faint sound in the ear is thought to be thunder or a slight warmth fire. It seems that we do, after all, have some perceptions in sleep, which dreams amplify.⁴⁶ We also seem to have some thoughts, as Aristotle suggests in *De Insomniis*: “sometimes we think about something else alongside (*para*) the dream, just as we do when we are perceiving something while we are awake (ἔτι παρὰ τὸ ἐνύπνιον ἐννοοῦμεν ἄλλο τι, καθάπερ ἐν τῷ ἐγρηγορῆναι αἰσθανόμενοι τι, 458b15-16). Aristotle differentiates this thought from the dream vision *per se*, which he insists is not an affection of the judging or thinking capacity any more than it is of the perceptive capacity (459a8, 462a27-31). Instead, these thoughts – or “true thoughts,” as Aristotle later terms them (ὄσαι δὴ ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ γίνονται ἀληθεῖς ἔννοιαι παρὰ τὰ φαντάσματα, 462a29) – arise alongside the dream vision, prompted by its complex relation to waking perception, as a kind of somnolent cognition.⁴⁷

In conceding to dreams a kind of perception and thought, Aristotle evades the question of what becomes of souls defined by these activities when they are in a state defined by their absence. Sleep, I suggested, poses potential challenges for Aristotle’s teleological understanding of our human *phusis*.

46 See Van der Eijk 2003, 32-39 on the contradiction. This same amplification explains some premonitory dreams: in sleep we are also more sensitive to otherwise imperceptible internal disturbances that mark the onset of disease. Such dreams are “signs” (*sēmeia*, 462b27) which provide useful information to medical practitioners and lay-theorists alike (463a2-7). Cf. Hipp. *On Regimen* 4.86 and Struck 2016, 104-12 on the parallels with Aristotle.

47 Van der Eijk 2005, 176, 186 (- Van der Eijk 2003, 33-34) observes that since Aristotle’s *nous* is incorporeal there is no reason, in theory, why we should not be able to think in sleep; given this, he wonders why Aristotle does not offer a fuller discussion of sleep cognition. He concludes that the subject is not treated because “the role of thought in sleep is apparently not essentially different from that in the waking state” (186). Cf. Wijzenbeek-Wijler 1978, 212-14. Struck 2016, 91-170 discusses the thinking Aristotle attributes to divinatory dreams as an example of “a peculiar cognitive capacity built into the rudiments of the human organism” (104) that he terms “surplus knowledge.”

But instead of addressing these challenges he focuses on dreams as “a sort of perception” (*de Insomn.* 456a26). In this way, he sneaks the waking mind back into the sleeping *psukhē*, recuperating sleep for the waking self. Aristotle ends *On Dreams* by considering intermediary states between sleeping and waking, drawing a continuum between these two opposite states of which one is the negation or privation of the other. He concludes with the possibility that “when either waking or sleeping is present entirely (ἀπλῶς) the other is present in some way (πῆ)” (462a26-27).⁴⁸ Perhaps, as Heraclitus and Plato posited, most of us are a little bit asleep in our waking lives. But we are also a little bit awake in our sleep. Just like when we go from sunlight into darkness (459b7), the faded daylight of dream perceptions blinds us to the darkness of night and its psychic anaesthesia.

For Aristotle, as for Freud after him, it is thus in dreams, not in sleep that we see the characteristic activity of the human soul. Sleep is a physiological matter explained by heat, blood, and nutriments. But dreams are of a different order. They are not divine – Aristotle rejects the notion of dreams as messages from the gods – but they are daemonic, he says, because nature itself is daemonic (δαιμόνια μέντοι ἡ γὰρ φύσις δαιμονία, ἀλλ’ οὐ θεία, *de Div.* 462b12).⁴⁹ For Heraclitus, sleep gave us obscure access to the reality of the cosmos and our place in it. For Aristotle our connection to that reality – *phusis* as a whole – comes not in sleep but in dreams and the peculiar perception they entail. As it happens, Freud quotes this line at the very start of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and cites Aristotle as an early predecessor in what he calls the “psychological study” of dreams.⁵⁰

48 Van der Eijk 2005, 185; thus the antithesis between sleeping and waking is not as absolute as Aristotle posits at the opening of *De Somno*.

49 Struck 2016, 162-63 takes “daemonic” to mean “steered by a divine impulse toward actualizing potential toward the good, beneath our self-conscious awareness” (cf. Struck 2016, 117-22). For Gallop 1996, 43-48 it indicates that dreams seem like the product of an intelligent agency but are not really. Van der Eijk 2005, 191 understands *daimonia* as “beyond human control.”

50 Freud 1953, 2-3. His tendentious gloss there on the “daemonic” nature of dreams assimilates Aristotle’s approach to his own: “Dreams, that is, do not arise from supernatural manifestations but follow the laws of the human spirit, though the latter, it is true, is akin to the divine. Dreams are defined as the mental activity of the sleeper in so far as he is asleep.” He repeats this last phrase in various forms four more times over the course of his career and these passages constitute practically his only references to Aristotle (Freud 1957, 234, Freud 1959, 46 n.1, Freud 1961, 209, Freud 1964, 16).

But what Freud really latches onto in Aristotle is the idea that dreams are the mental activity of sleep and a continuation of waking thought. That sleeping thought is distorted, condensed and displaced. It requires interpretation: hence *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a title Freud justifies in a footnote by reference to Aristotle.⁵¹

We might thus see with Aristotle a split in the royal road: sleep is a physiological process; it is dreams that are interesting, both to the philosopher and, later, the psychoanalyst. For both, dreams mark residual effects of wakefulness within sleep, maintaining our connection to our normal waking selves and world.⁵² My paper has returned to the road not-taken, the path of sleep. I hope to have shown that there is something in sleep that is both philosophically and psychologically interesting, but that something remains inaccessible to both philosophy and psychology. That “something” is not the vigil of the waking self, as Aristotle posited, nor is it Plato’s nocturnal inner philosopher. It does not communicate itself through dreams and is not amenable to *logos*. Instead it appears in each philosopher as a point of opacity: a privation of our natural being, a narcotic lure away from the immortal life of philosophy, a sleep that is only sleep. “Only deep sleep,” writes Blanchot, “lets us escape what there is in the deep of sleep.”⁵³ These philosophers look into the abyss of sleep, even as they work to escape it, and its blackness leaves its mark on their sunlit world. This obscure after-image may serve to remind us that the eternal wakefulness of reason is, in the end, only a philosopher’s dream.

51 “Aristotle’s old definition of the dream as mental life during sleep still holds good. There was a reason for my choosing as the title of my book not *The Dream* but *The Interpretation of Dreams*” (Freud 1959, 46 n. 1). This (unexamined) connection between Aristotle and the hermeneutics of dreams is ironic inasmuch as Aristotle was largely uninterested in the content of dreams, beyond their predicative or diagnostic use (Holowchak 1996). On his theory, dreams no more merit interpretation than does sleep. Moreover, unlike sleep, dreams for Aristotle serve no purpose for the animal, psychological or physical (Gallop 1996, 28-38, Van der Eijk 2005, 204).

52 Farbman 2008, 43-44: for Freud dreams maintain a connection to the world, against the subject’s desire to withdraw completely into the narcissistic closure of sleep; thus the dream “maintains the thread of experience over the radical gap in experience – the interruption in presence to the world – that sleep represents.” Cf. Wortham 2013, 47-48. One might compare the Hippocratic *On Regimen* 4, where dreams are healthy to the precise extent that they mirror waking reality.

53 Blanchot 1982, 264.



Figure 1. Red-figure calyx-krater, signed by Euphronius.
Archaeological Museum of Cerveteri.



Figure 2. Black-figure neck-amphora by the Diosphos painter.
New York 56.171.25.

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