

HERACLITUS

The Complete Philosophical Fragments

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First, let me proceed with background material on this amazing thinker, then a translation of all the fragments, and finally the translated text again along with a new, exploratory commentary.

Heraclitus was born at Ephesus of aristocratic parentage around 540 B.C. and lived until 475 B.C. We know almost nothing finite about his life, except that he was early known as difficult of comprehension, hence the nickname "The Dark One" or in Greek skoteinos. There is no absolute evidence for a Book of his philosophical ideas, and the hundred or so "Fragments", which are quoted from later sources, seem to derive from his personal Sayings or Counsels, much in the manner of Pythagoras' Symbola. Strangely many of the cited fragments come from Christian sources, bent on disproving or ridiculing Heraclitus' words, a bad effort which has the good effect of giving us a few more of Heraclitus' precious insights.

In another paper on Pythagoras, I have discussed the Sayings or Counsels which have had almost no recognition in the world of Western scholarship. I aimed to get a better sense of their import by positing a monastic order in Croton perhaps similar in function to the Zen monasteries of the period after the 12th c. A.D., feeling that the Japanese data may shed some indirect light on the 6th c. B.C. Pythagorean school. But in dealing with Heraclitus the situation is entirely different. He had a strong and long-lasting effect on Greek philosophy in the ancient period, and has been commented and discussed fervently in modern times, almost to the point of obscuring the text we are starting with.

Heraclitus has been studied intensively and in true academic fashion has been viewed in his historical position, as a building block in the development of ancient philosophy. This is natural in one sense, but objectionable in another, because we may see him as a link in the chain of Western Thought, rather than as an independent mind. When you take up a book to read, you normally read it for what it is and what it has to say, rather than how it fits into a niche in the history of writing. I am approaching Heraclitus in this latter manner, first because I think we have overloaded the scholarly apparatus regarding his place in history badly, and second because many of his thoughts appeal to "the

Whole" as he says, and have a universal, at times modern, meaning.

My purpose here is to take Heraclitus at his word, when he says "Much learning does not teach understanding, otherwise it would have taught..... (an impressive array of modern critics)". I have worked with Heraclitus for many years in the classroom, and have found many personal insights into his statements, often occurring years apart as my own ways of reasoning developed. So I am going to take the bold step of offering a personal set of commentaries to the fragmentary statements, thinking of Heraclitus' insistence on all things being part of an infinite, regulating Whole, which we often do not perceive at all. At this end of time I too am searching for the Whole, and since it is in the same universe with Heraclitus, I make no apologies for introducing "modern" notions along with the words of a philosopher now some two and a half millennia old.

How can I compare Heraclitus with Einstein? Because both were searching intuitively for "pattern" in the world, and in Greek times intuition was the only possible way. I believe that things true in one age are often true in another, and I am not referring only to matters of law, human dignity, or poetic insight. We are looking around us today in the same world as was always there, we have modified it on the surface a great deal, but the underpinning and the original questions are largely unchanged. In this spirit ---accept my commentary.

I have printed the bare translation first so you can read Heraclitus without interruption, if you wish peruse the same text down below, with interposed running comment.

HERACLEITOS THE PATH OF INVESTIGATION

1. Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet men are unable to understand it -- not only before hearing it, but even after they have heard it for the first time. That is to say, although all things come to pass in accordance with this Logos, men seem to be quite without any experience of it - at least if they are judged in the light of such words and deeds as I am here setting forth.

1a.. (cited as part of the above...) My own method is to distinguish each thing according to its nature, and to specify how it behaves; other men, on the contrary, are as neglectful of what they do when awake as they are when asleep. (1)

2. We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet, although the Logos is common to all, most

men live as if each of them had a private intelligence of his own. (2)

3. Men who love wisdom should acquaint themselves with a great many particulars. (35)

4. Seekers after gold dig up much earth and find little. (22)

5. Let us not make arbitrary conjectures about the greatest matters. (47)

6. Much learning does not teach understanding, otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus. (40)

7. Of those whose discourses I have heard there is not one who attains to the realization that wisdom stands apart from all else. (108)

8. I have searched myself. (101)

9. It pertains to all men to know themselves and to be temperate. (116)

10. To be temperate is the greatest virtue. Wisdom consists in speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things. (112)

11. The things of which there can be sight, hearing, and learning ---- these are what I especially prize. (55)

12. Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears. (101a)

13. Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men having barbarian souls. (107)

14. One should not act or speak as if he were asleep. (73)

15. The waking have one world. in common, whereas each sleeper turns away to a private world of his own. (89)

16. Whatever we see when awake is death; when asleep, dreams. (21)

17. Nature loves to hide itself (123)

18. The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but gives signs. (93)

19. Unless you expect the unexpected you will never find truth, for it is hard to discover and hard to attain. (18)

THE IDEA OF THE CONTINUUM

20. Everything flows and nothing abides;. Everything gives way and nothing stays fixed.

21. You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on. (91, 12)

22. Cool things become warm, the warm grows cool; the moist dries, the parched becomes moist. (126)

23. It is in changing that things find repose. (8~)

24. Time is a child moving counters in a game; the royal power is a child's.(52)

25. War is both father and king of all; some he has shown forth as gods and others as men, some he has made slaves and others free. (53)

26. It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife. (80)

27. Homer was wrong in saying, "Would that strife might perish from amongst gods and men. For if that were to occur, then all things would cease to exist.

ON NATURE

28. There is exchange of all things for fire and of fire for all things, as there is of wares for gold and of gold for wares. (90)

29. This universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or man, but it always has been is, and will be -- an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures. (30)

30. The phases of fire are craving and satiety. (65)

31. It throws apart and then brings together again; it advances and retires. (91)

32. The transformations of fire -- first, sea; and of sea, half becomes earth and half the lightning-flash. (31)

33. When earth has melted into sea, the resultant amount is the same as there had been before sea became hardened into earth. (31,ctd.)

34. Fire lives in the death of earth, air in the death of fire, water in the death of air, and earth in the death of water. (76)

35. The thunderbolt pilots all things. (64)

36 The sun is new each day. (6)

37. The sun is the breadth of a man's foot. (3)

38. If there were no sun, the other stars would not suffice to prevent its being night. (99)

39. The boundary line of evening and morning is the Bear; and opposite the Bear is the boundary of bright Zeus. (120)

40. The fairest universe is but a heap of rubbish piled up at random. (124)

41. Every beast is driven to pasture by a blow (11)

ON THE SPIRITUAL

42. You could not discover the limits of soul, even if you traveled by every path in order to do so; such is the depth of its meaning. (45)

43. Soul is the vaporization out of which everything else is composed; more-over it is the least corporeal of things and is in ceaseless flux, for the moving world can only be known by what is in motion. ()

44. Souls are vaporized from what is moist. (12)

45. Soul has its own inner law of growth. (us)

46. A dry soul is wisest and best. (or) The best and wisest soul is a dry beam of light. (11~)

47. Souls take pleasure in becoming moist. (77)

48. A drunken man has to be led by a boy, whom he follows stumbling and not knowing whither he goes, for his soul is moist. (117)

49. It is death to souls to become water, and it is death to water to become earth. Conversely, water comes into existence out of earth, and souls out of water. (36)

50. Even the sacred barley drink separates when it is not stirred. (125)

51. It is hard to fight against impulsive desire; whatever it wants it will buy at the cost of the soul. (85~)

52. It would not be better if things happened to men just as they wish. (110)

53. Although it is better to hide our ignorance, this is hard to do when we relax over wine. (95)

54. A foolish man is a-flutter at every word. (87)

55. Fools, although they hear, are like the deaf: To them the adage applies that when present they are absent. (34)
56. Bigotry is the sacred disease. (46)
57. Most people do not take heed of the things they encounter, nor do they grasp them even when they have learned about them, although they think they do. (17)
58. If all existing things were smoke, it is by smell that we would distinguish them. (7)
59. In Hades souls perceive by smelling. (98)
60. Corpses are more fit to be thrown out than dung. (96)
ON THE DIVINE
61. Human nature has no real understanding; only the divine nature has it.(78)
62. Man is not rational; there is intelligence only in what encompasses him.
63. What is divine escapes men's notice because of their incredulity. (86)
64. Although intimately connected with the Logos, men keep setting themselves against it. (72)
65. As in the nighttime a man kindles for himself (haptetai) a light, so when a living man lies down in death with his vision extinguished he attaches himself (haptetai) to the state of death; even as one who has been awake lies down with his vision extinguished and attaches himself to the state of Sleep. (26)
66. Immortals become mortals, mortals become immortals; they live in each other's death and die in each other's life. (62)
67. There await men after death such things as they neither expect nor have any conception of. (27)
68. They arise into wakefulness and become guardians of the living and the dead. (63)
69. A man's character is his guardian divinity. (119)
70. Greater dooms win greater destinies. (25)
71. Justice will overtake fabricators of lies and false witnesses. (28)
72. Fire in its advance will catch all things by surprise and judge them. (66)

73. How can anyone hide from that which never sets?
(16)

74. (When visitors unexpectedly found Heraclitus warming himself by the cooking fire) Here, too, are gods.
(~)

75. They pray to images, much as if they were to talk to houses; for they do not know what gods and heroes are.
(5)

76. Night-walkers, magicians, bacchantes, revelers, and participants in the mysteries What are regarded as mysteries among men are unholy rituals.(14)

77. Their processions and their phallic hymns would be disgraceful exhibitions were it not that they are done in honor of Dionysos. But Dionysos in whose honor they rave and hold revels, is the same as Hades.
(15)

78e When defiled they purify themselves with blood, as though one who had stepped into filth were to wash himself with filth. If any of his fellow-men should perceive him acting in such a way, they would regard him as mad. (5,ctd.)

79. The Sibyl with raving mouth utters solemn, unadorned, unlovely words, but she reaches out over a thousand years with her voice because of the god within her. (92)

COUNSELS

80. Thinking is common to all. (113)

81. Men should speak with rational mind and thereby hold strongly to that which is shared in common ---- as a city holds on to its law, and even more strongly. For all human laws are nourished by the one divine law, which prevails as far as it wishes, suffices for all things, and yet is something more than they are (114)

82. The people should fight for their law as for their city wall. (44)

83. Law involves obeying the counsel of one. (33)

84. To me one man is worth ten thousand if he is first-rate. (49)

85. The best of men choose one thing in preference to all else, immortal glory in preference to mortal good; whereas the masses simply glut themselves like cattle.
(29)

86. Gods and men honor those slain in battle. (24)

87. Even those who are most in repute know and maintain only what is reputed. (28)

88. To extinguish hybris is more needed than to extinguish a fire. (43)

89. It is weariness to keep toiling at the same things so that one becomes ruled by them. (84b)

90. Dogs bark at a person whom they do not know. (97)

91. What sort of mind or intelligence have they? They believe popular folk-tales and follow the crowd as their teachers, ignoring the adage that the many are bad, the good are few. (104)

92e Men are deceived in their knowledge of things that are manifest, even as Homer was who was the wisest of all the Greeks. For he was even deceived by boys killing lice when they said to him: What we have seen and grasped, these we leave behind; whereas what we have not seen and grasped, these we carry away." (56)

93. Homer deserves to be thrown out of the contests and flogged and Archilochus too. (42)

94. Hesiod distinguishes good days and evil days, not knowing that every day is like every other. (106)

95. The Ephesians had better go hang themselves, every man of them, and leave their city to be governed by youngsters, for they have banished Hermadorus, the finest man among them, declaring: "Let us not have anyone among us who excels the rest; if there should be such a one, let him go and live else-where." (121)

96. May you have plenty of wealth, you men of Ephesus, in order that you may be punished for your evil ways (125a)

97. After birth men have the wish to live and to accept their dooms; then they leave behind them children to become dooms in their turn. (20)

THIS PARADOXICAL UNIVERSE

98. Opposition brings concord. Out of discord comes the fairest harmony. (8)

99. It is by disease that health is pleasant, by evil that good is pleasant, by hunger satiety, by weariness rest. (111)

100. Men would not have known the name of justice if these things had not occurred. (23)

101. Sea water is at once very pure and very foul: it is drinkable and healthful for fishes, but undrinkable and deadly for men. (61)

102. Donkeys would prefer hay to gold. (9)

103. Pigs wash in mud, and domestic fowls in dust or ashes. (37)

104. The handsomest ape is ugly compared with humankind; the wisest man appears as an ape when compared with a god --- in wisdom, in beauty, and in all other ways. (82, 83)

105. Man is regarded as childish by a spirit (daemon), just as a boy is by a man. (79)

106. To God all things are beautiful, good, and right. Men, on the other hand, deem some things right and others wrong. (102)

107. Doctors cut, burn, and torture the sick, and then demand of them an undeserved fee for such services. (58)

108. The way up and the way down are one and the same. (60)

109. In the circumference of the circle the beginning and the end are common. (103)

110. Into the same rivers we step and do not step. (49a)

III. For wool-carders the straight and the winding way are one and the same. (59)

112. The bones connected by joints are at once a unitary whole and not a unitary whole. To be in agreement is to differ; the concordant is the discordant. From out of all the many particulars comes oneness, and out of oneness comes all the many particulars. (10)

113. It is one and the same thing to be living and dead, awake or asleep, young or old. The former aspect in each case becomes the latter, and the latter becomes the former, by sudden unexpected reversal (88)

114. Hesiod, whom so many accept as their wise teacher, did not even understand the nature of day and night; for they are one. (57)

115. The name of the bow is life, but its work is death. (48)

116. The hidden harmony is better than the obvious. (54)

117. People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the cases of the bow and the lyre. (51)

118. Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to acknowledge that all things are one. (50)

119. Wisdom is one and unique; it is unwilling and yet willing to be called by the name of Zeus. (32)

120. Wisdom is one ---- to know the intelligence by which all things are steered through all things. (41)

121. God is day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety But he undergoes transformations, just as (.....) when mixed with is named according to the particular aroma which it gives off. (67)

122. The sun will not overstep his measures; if he were to do so, the Erinnyes, handmaidens of justice, would seek him out for punishment (94)

123. All things come in their due season. (100)

124.. Even sleepers are workers and collaborators in what goes on in the universe

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